Images in Use

Edited by Matteo Stocchetti and Karin Kukkonen

Discourse Approaches to Politics, Society and Culture

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Images in Use
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Volume 44

Images in Use. Towards the critical analysis of visual communication
Edited by Matteo Stocchetti and Karin Kukkonen
Images in Use
Towards the critical analysis of visual communication

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Introduction

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Analysts of our mediated society today like to stress the idea that we live in a visual age, that our primary mode of communication are images or visually organised digital texts (see Kress 2003), that the emotional and imaginative involvements of images are typical of late capitalism (see Jameson 1998: 93–135) and that teaching visual analysis facilitates media literacy (Elkins 2003; Seppänen 2006). The contemporary dominance of the visual has a decidedly social and political dimension, and the present volume is part of a larger project to draw attention to this social and political dimension of visual communication. We believe that it is necessary to reconsider the way we think about images and their relation to our society, and this volume is an invitation to engage critically with the practices of visual communication and with our analytical approaches to images.

We believe – to continue our critical credo – that rooting visual communication in society is imperative for at least two reasons: because the visual is pervasive in both our public and private worlds, and because the prominent approach to image analysis is largely contemplative. Even though visual communication is at work throughout our traditional and contemporary social media, and even though this visual communication informs our social construction of reality, the uses of images in society, and its negotiation of power, are rarely discussed for their impact on politics, i.e. the competition for the distribution of values in society. Visual analysis seems primarily interested in a cultural and aesthetic form of criticism which fundamentally neglects or marginalises societal questions. Our volume complements the discourse on visual communication with a perspective on the social and political uses of images.

This volume therefore assembles a number of articles which engage critically with the analysis of images and relocate images in their social contexts by investigating how they are put to use in the social negotiation of values that is the struggle for power in society. We choose to discard the idea that images are powerful in and of themselves, as well as the idea that the dominance of images is a natural phenomenon bursting forth because it is now technically possible. Rooting
Matteo Stocchetti and Karin Kukkonen

images in their social uses means that they remain ‘mere’ tools and that they are almost always connected to other forms of communication (such as texts, verbal language, non-verbal communication, graphs, layout, typography, gestures, etc.). As communicative tools, images can be used more or less effectively, carefully and responsibly. This is our point of departure for a critical reconsideration of visual communication in today’s society.

Our critical credo is not a question of iconophilia or iconophobia. We do not believe that images are in and of themselves better, more visceral or more impressive than words. We do not believe that images are inherently dangerous and seductive. They can be dangerous and seductive, but this depends on the use to which they are put – the practices through which identifiable agents seek to achieve some goal by resorting to visual communication – and not on their inherent qualities. The notions of iconophilia and iconophobia result from the idea that images can have values in and of themselves and that, therefore, they can be embraced or rejected a priori and independently from their use. Analysing images in use is more ambivalent.

In a previous volume, Images and Communities (2007), we discussed a rather specific use of images in visual communication, i.e. in the (re)constitution of the community. In that volume, we focused on the contemporary situation, where/when the social processes associated with the cultural logic of late capitalism seem to undermine the social construction of reality and even the notion of the social itself, and investigated the relevance of images for these processes.

On that occasion, we concluded with this assessment:

If images are important in constituting the community, visual communication can be considered an arena of political competition … But if visual communication is a (communicative) arena in the competition for control over the distribution of values in societies, then one may expect the discourse on visual communication to be inherently important in shaping the conditions under which it makes sense to talk about visual communication at all … For purposes of systematic reflection on the visual construction of the social and the political in the postmodern condition … we need a critical standpoint from which to assess the role of visual discourse … This is a standpoint that is capable of engaging not only with the constitutive potential of images-in-use, but also with the implications of visual discourse for the relations established by visual communication.

(Stocchetti and Sumiala-Seppänen 2007: 306–309, emphasis in original)

In the present collection, we invite the reader to continue this discussion by engaging more directly with issues of power. Power today is embedded into what Jameson calls ‘the cultural logic of late capitalism’, i.e. commercialisation and experientiality. This logic is indeed “… the force field in which very different kinds of cultural
impulses ... must make their way” (Jameson 1991:6), and it affects not only the contemporary experience of the social (as we argued in the previous collection) but also of the political (the focus in this collection) in fundamental ways.

In this volume, we test the limits of critical approaches to visual communication, and work out their implications for the analysis of images in use. The contributions to this volume explore the ‘images in use’ approach to visual communication both in conceptual and in applied terms. We choose the verbs ‘test’ and ‘explore’ consciously, as we are interested in presenting critical approaches which offer an alternative to the established (contemplative) paradigms of visual analysis, rather than outlining a new method which would be fixed from the start.

Analysing ‘images in use’ means focusing on processes and not objects. Images are not considered as meaningful objects in and of themselves but as part of the processes of negotiating social values, i.e. politics and power. The relevant question for this negotiation of social values is ‘who gets what, when and how?’ and, with this, meaning itself becomes a variable dependent on the outcome of this negotiation. From our standpoint, images do not ‘have’ but ‘are given’ meaning. In this process not all agents have the same opportunities or the same influence. The critical ambition in this approach is not primarily that of subverting power by subverting meaning, or vice versa, but rather that of (re)introducing this standpoint in the current discussion on visual communication.

If visual discourse treats images themselves as agencies, power relations are misconstrued by hiding the responsibility of the users. Not images but their uses should be the focus of critical attention. The main epistemological implication of investigating ‘images in use’ lies in shifting attention from the ‘meaning’ of images to the communicative strategies that inspire the uses of images by agents. If critical attention is redirected from images to the practices constituting the ‘image in use’, then the analysis of the power relations associated with visual communication appears more complex, indeterminate but ultimately more reliable if the goal is to assess its impact on the competition for the distribution of values in society.

We do not propose a clearly delineated methodological outline in this volume, but suggest taking a new angle on visual communication and exploring its implications before setting down such an outline. The key steps of our approach are, first, shifting critical attention from the images themselves to the social and political processes into which they are embedded and, second, assigning agency within these processes. Assigning agency is not without its problems, as this also implies issues of responsibility and rationality, and social processes are highly complex mechanisms in which agency can have manifold and unforeseen effects. Such complexity, however, is constitutive of the power relations in communicative behaviour, and it cannot be resolved by denial (denial of the agents) or by relativism (relativism of meaning, autonomy of the sign, etc.).
In lieu of outlining a new methodology, we can draw the following conclusions:

Visual communication is both powerful and complex, and its critical analysis can shed light on these features. The elements that constitute complexity in the analytical process are also the reasons for the efficacy of its practices. Visual communication is powerful because it binds the viewer in a communicative relation where agency is hidden and meaning is ambivalent. Our contributions bring agencies and uses to the fore and explore the ambivalence of meaning that arises from them. We do not pretend to offer a systematic or even an exhaustive discussion of the linkages between visual communication and power. We do not believe any single piece of work could do that, but we do believe that in this volume interested readers will have at their disposal a text capable of inviting further critical reflections.

* * *

The volume falls into two parts, one dealing with the conceptual concerns of ‘images in use’ and the other exploring ‘images in use’ in today’s society in case studies across different contexts of visual communication in the Western world.

The volume opens with a programmatic account of ‘images in use’, “Images in use: notes for a critical approach to visuality”. Matteo Stocchetti suggests that discussing visual communication in terms of the ‘power of images’ is a fundamental attribution error that has important consequences on the way we think and talk about images; both on epistemological and on normative grounds. Images cannot be agents – instead, they are mere tools in the hands of a plurality of agents using them for a variety of purposes and usually with indeterminate outcomes. In the effort of bringing images back within the reach of a critical approach to visual communication, this opening intervention outlines three threads that are picked up by the next three chapters in the same section: (a) the lack of critical attention or incapacity to engage with the politics of the images (due to the attribution error) in mainstream visual studies (see Herkman), (b) the conceptual implications for visual representation (see Kukkonen) and (c) the broader consequences of uncritical visual communication on politics and media (the mediatisation of politics) in terms of the fictionalisation of politics and the politicisation of fiction (see Wodak).

The claim that the analysis of visual communication needs a critical approach capable of engaging with material power receives empirical support in the second chapter, where Juha Herkman discusses the meaning of ‘critical’ when applied to the study of visual communication. His content analysis of articles published in Visual Studies and Journal of Visual Communication in 2002–2008 suggests that, in the dominant poststructural and postmodern connotations, relativism and
constructivism are the privileged forms of criticism. What is notably lacking is what Herkmans calls ‘The Critical Tradition’: one that acknowledges and engages with the competition for the control over the distribution of values in society.

The role of images in political discourse and the limits of poststructuralist approaches to the ‘power of images’ are further addressed in the third chapter, “The map, the mirror and the simulacrum”, where Karin Kukkonen discusses the nature and role of these metaphors associated with the political discourse in visual communication. Images viewed as mirrors persuade through their mimesis; images used as maps through their tellability, i.e. their claim to relevance. Both of these work as effective rhetorical strategies in the competition for the control over the distribution of values in society. The poststructuralist (de)construction of the image as simulacrum, however, assuredly unveils the political role of images without offering an alternative standpoint to participate in the same competition.

The notion of simulacrum is also useful to understand the effects of visual communication on politics, discussed by Ruth Wodak in her chapter “Disenchantment with politics and the salience of images: Afterthoughts”. In late modern societies, visual communication determines a crisis of legitimisation by blurring the distinction between fiction and reality and between media and politics. The fictionalisation of politics and the politicisation of fiction, as exemplified in the TV series West Wing, are synergic processes that, on ideological grounds, are far from innocent or ‘neutral’. The reduction of the political to its visual and mediated representations sacrifices complexity to snapshots and narrative linearity, changing and challenging the fundamental notions of representation and legitimation, and ultimately transforming the active demos into a passive and mostly dissatisfied audience. What is left are a simulation of politics and a simulacrum of the political: a process that, as Baudrillard warned, cannot produce social change.

The chapters in the second part are empirical discussions about the process(es) of visual construction of reality and, more precisely, the problematic aspects (or ‘issues’) of political reality such as European integration and the ‘war on terror’ (Koski, Curticapean and Palu), the visualisation of spaces associated with relevant political issues (Kuusisto-Arponen and Yrjölä), and various forms of visual entertainment (Dullaart, Kolehmainen-Mäkinen and Miettinen).

In “Organising consensus: The visual management of diplomatic negotiations over the Finnish accession to the EU”, Anne Koski discusses the use of images on national television to preserve domestic consensus on controversial foreign issues. In “Walls, doors and exciting encounters: Balkanism and its edges in Bulgarian political cartoons on European integration”, Alina Curticapean looks at the use of political cartoons in the troubled accession of Bulgaria to the EU. These cartoons represent the identity politics at stake in that process as a negotiation between the discourse of Balkanism, which understands the Balkan as an ‘other’
to Europe, much like Orientalism, and the rhetoric of European integration. In “The politics of visual representation: Security, the US and the ‘war on terrorism’”, Helle Palu suggests that, in propaganda, words are used as images or, more precisely, as signifiers for (mental) images. The ‘imagination’ of security discourse therefore appears as a distinctive communicative strategy for the construction of political phenomena and emotional manipulation through the constitution of binaries that reduce complexity, polarise political discourse, exclude opposition and reduce politics to the narrow tracks of ‘self-evident’ truths.

The chapters by Anna-Kaisa Kuusisto-Arponen and Riina Yrjölä both deal with the visual representation of spaces that are, for different reasons, ambivalent through the agencies involved. In “The politics of identity and visuality: The case of Finnish war children”, Kuusisto-Arponen proposes to consider the role of images in the elaboration of trauma connected to displacement. Subjective and personal space is shown to be a socio-culturally and politically relevant issue – albeit a suppressed one. The more public visual construction of politically relevant space(s) is discussed by Yrjölä in “Visual politics and celebrity humanitarianism: How colonial culture is revitalised in the West”. Her empirical analysis of visual texts representing Africa in the ‘celebrity humanitarianism’ of musicians Bono and Bob Geldof suggests that the beneficiaries of humanitarian attention, and the political issues of underdevelopment itself, are construed in ways that reproduce rather than challenge colonial culture.

The ambivalence and the subversive potential of visual communication in the entertainment industry are explored in the last three chapters. The ambivalent effects of media ‘visibility’ on the social construction of sexuality is the focus of Marjo Kolehmainen and Katarina Mäkinen in “The economics of gay reality television: The visualisation of sexual difference in contemporary consumer culture”. They challenge the idea that gay visibility is inherently emancipative and an enabling form of power per se. Their analysis of three reality TV shows (Queer Eye for the Straight Guy, Playing it Straight and How to Look Good Naked) suggests that the emancipative potential of gay visibility is indeed subverted by the use of imagery that, instead of challenging, reproduces market-driven stereotypes and, ultimately, consumerism.

The chapter by Gerda Dullaart, “Mending endings: Power and images in film plots”, deals with the use of visual communication in filmic production to tame the subversive potential of film making. She interprets especially the canon of ‘happy endings’ as the key narrative device for such preservation of the status quo. Dullaart analyses several mainstream productions as indicative of the role of visual communication in this process and encourages film students to break through the mould of this canon and its entrapment.
In the final chapter, “Visuality and narrative in superhero comics”, Mervi Miettinen presents a successful instance of the subversive potential of visual communication. Visual narratives such as superhero comics reflect and reinforce the paradox of the ‘state of the exception’, a concept that Giorgio Agamben uses to describe the increase of governments’ powers in times of crisis. Discussing Alan Moore’s *Watchmen*, Miettinen describes how this comic reflects and highlights this ‘state of exception’ both for the concept of the superhero and for the very form of narration in the comics medium.

*Images in Use: Power and Visual Communication* explores and exemplifies the processes and agencies of visual communication in today’s societies. The articles of this volume concern themselves programmatically and conceptually with what it means to analyse images not as objects of meaning, but as embedded in processes of meaning-making, and they present the implications of this approach in a number of case studies. The visual, the social and the political are investigated side by side as we consider ‘images in use’.

References


PART I

Approaches to visual communication
and the question of power
CHAPTER 1

Images
Who gets what, when and how?

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This introductory chapter explains what it means to reinscribe the political
dimension into studying images. Ever since the ‘visual turn’ was proclaimed by
W. J. T. Mitchell, images have been analysed for what they ‘do’ to their observers,
for the almost magical power they seem to have. In a basic category mistake,
agency is ascribed to images in the discourse of visual studies. Images, however,
are merely tools in the political media discourse and society’s negotiation of
values. Drawing on poststructuralist analyses of the postmodern condition in
late modern societies, this article ventures forth to design an ‘images in use’ ap-
proach to visual studies, which allows us to discuss power and images in politi-
cal terms.

1.1 From the social to the political: Engaging the Leviathan

In a previous volume (Stocchetti & Sumiala-Seppänen 2007), we asked why and
how sharing images may reconstitute the social in the postmodern condition. If
shared uses of images may indeed establish relations, identities and meaning that
can be the reproductive ground for communities even in postmodern times, what
about the political?

In this book, we offer a preliminary discussion of the political role of visual
communication. Contemporary reflection on the social role of images has been
influenced by the idea of the ‘pictorial turn’ and its association with the idea of
‘emotional communities’ (Maffesoli 1996: 12) – ephemeral communities based on
the commonality of feeling, on the prominence of the imaginary, of feelings rather
than on interests. The marking of a turning point of some sort (the ‘pictorial turn’) and
the rediscovery of the emotional power of images (puissance in Maffesoli’s
terms) evoke a promise of redemption that may look (unsurprisingly) appeal-
ing. These ideas are interesting and evocative. They are evocative because they
introduce the reader/spectator to a notion of power which is both irresistible and
undomesticated – some sort of Leviathan inhabiting the abyss of our collective unconscious, waiting to be awakened once the pressure of civilisation becomes unbearable.¹

But is this so? Can we shred the veil of scepticism inherited by late modern thinkers and embrace the myths of an irreducible sociability and salvation through contemplation? The emotional power of images has not exhibited much of its subversive potential. The visual guerrilla of urban graffiti artists has neither prevented nor slowed down the process of corporate appropriation of public space. The visual provocations of legions of avant-garde artists have been unable to challenge the rampant culture of ‘exchange value’ and the fact that this culture “has been generalized to the point at which the very memory of use value is effaced” (Jameson 1991: 18). And is it not the case that the visual ‘mobilisation’ of sociability has occurred as a result of the unchallenged spreading of a promotional culture that has ‘saturated’ the symbolical capacity of our civilisation (Wernick 1991)?

The Leviathan, of course, is a well-known character in political discourse. As a representation of political power, it contains all the elements of ambiguity and ambivalence usually associated with politics and images. Since its creation, it has been a deception, a tool for ‘deterrence’ (in the Baudrillard sense, 1994: 61–73), a visual ‘trick’ of the early 17th century to affirm the legitimacy of a new form of power – the ‘absolute’ power – against the older powers unwilling to yield. And it is because of this deceptive nature that the Leviathan is still a most appropriate representation of power in general and political power in particular. As Anne Norton has observed (1988: 97), representations are always also (and primarily, I would claim) a sign of absence that hides the agency: a giant made of humans but with the face of the sovereign – the latter is dependent on the former but claims power over them! The whole point of that image, and of the book named after it, is that the subjects must interiorise the King’s command as coming from inside their souls: as a moral imperative – with a strong religious element, if one has to take Hobbes’ comparison between King and God seriously! Power, therefore, is not an attribute of the King but rather a certain form of connection with strong emotional and psychological connotations that binds God, the King and the people in a necessary relationship – since the notion of suzeraineté is developed in

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¹ In Civilization and Its Discontents, Sigmund Freud discussed progress as result of repression and neurosis as a result of progress. Looked at about a century later, in a somewhat paradoxical way, his account of ‘progress’ seems to have overestimated the ‘governability’, so to say, of the unconscious. The notion of collective unconscious, proposed by his former disciple Carl Gustav Jung, refers to a deeper level of the human unconscious, less open to enquiry but also less negative than Freud’s unconscious (Freud 1989; Jung 1981).
relation to, and therefore limited by, the parallelism between the power of God and the King on the World and the State respectively.

The notion of power also tends to be elusive because power relations are usually better preserved by hiding the nature of their terms rather than exposing them. And this is why the primary purpose of the reflection on power in the 20th century, and the raison d’être of a discipline such as Political Science, has been the definition of power: as a preliminary condition for the control of political power and a restraint on absolute and totalitarian rule. This effort, and its emphasis on rationality, is usually not inspired by the belief that emotions, feelings or passions are politically irrelevant. Quite the contrary, these are very much what politics is all about (Lasswell 1976: 184–185; Ascher and Hirschfelder-Ascher 2005: 119–125). Politics, one can claim, is a competition between actors that seeks to seize control over emotions, feelings and passions as the human 'glue', so to say, that keeps the Leviathan together.²

Most of the efforts to bring the Leviathan and its emotional appeal under control are based on at least three conceptual steps. On epistemological grounds, if relations of power had to be brought within human reach, the notion of power itself must belong to the social world. The choice to discuss political power in terms of human-on-human influence is arbitrary (like all definitions!). This first step fundamentally removes God and Nature from the picture and puts the control of the social world back in human hands. This is not to say that nature or luck are not influential, but rather that the term ‘power’ used in relation to nature is a different concept from ‘power’ as applied e.g. to the King. In the exercise of its ‘power’, so to say, nature does not have a purpose, does not have agency, does not have a will nor morality, does not have a meaning nor indeed a need for humans.

Secondly, power should not be confused with the material and immaterial resources on which the effective exercise of power depends. While resources can indeed be ‘possessed’ in greater or smaller quantity, used more or less effectively, etc., power is not an attribute but a relationship. As Harold Lasswell put it:

The power relation is give-and-take; or, to give a more dynamic twist to the words, it is giving-and-taking. It is a cue-giving and cue-taking in a continuing spiral of interaction. (Lasswell 1976: 10)

Finally, if power belongs to the human world, it is finite: even the most unbalanced of power relations is based on conditions that can, in principle, be changed. On conceptual grounds, and for the purpose of critical or anti-hegemonic theory, this suggests the relevance of notions such as ‘scope’ and ‘domain’ in the analysis

². While feelings and passions are the ‘glue’ that keeps the Leviathan together, I would also claim that political science is the rational serum against this emotional power.
of a given power relation: what is included in this relation and what is left out, or, in one word, the ‘space’ of power. Once again, the inclination to depict power as an all-encompassing type of relationship – like in magic or religion – does indeed facilitate the unconstrained exercise of power. More precisely, if the boundaries of power (the constraints on the exercise of effective power reflecting the dependency on resources) remain undifferentiated on conceptual grounds, control is more difficult on practical grounds.

If ‘the power of images’ depends on their (multiple) meanings, to answer questions of meaning is necessary and preliminary to access the ‘secrets’ of the ‘power of images’ and, therefore, to explain their uses. But since the meanings of images are always ambivalent, power becomes an elusive phenomenon. Unsurprisingly, the ‘power of the image’ appears virtually unlimited or even ‘magic’ if the notion of power itself has uncertain or elusive contours. My suggestion here is that, if one is interested in power, the sense of the relation between meaning and uses is actually inverted: from uses to meanings. In these terms, and consistent with a long tradition of thought that includes Max Weber, Harold D. Lasswell, Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu and many others, power is not an attribute of images but rather a relation or a ‘technique’ involving different users of images or actors involved in visual communication. What I am arguing, in sum, is that the promise of salvation associated with the supposed ‘awakening’ of the Leviathan is a reassuring but misleading and ultimately detrimental intellectual move towards the effective reconstitution of the political – a genuine confrontation between competing visions of political order – through visual communication. As I shall argue in a moment, the distinction between the private and the public use of images is particularly relevant here.

With this collection, we aim to reintroduce the political into the discussion about the ‘power of images’ in late modern societies and to provide a conceptual framework for the critical engagement with this form of power by asking, with Lasswell, ‘Who gets what, when and how’ in relation to the uses of images. This means, for example, looking at the image of Hobbes’ Leviathan to see not so much ‘a magical relation between a picture and what it represents’ (Mitchell 2005: 9), but rather a tool for the communicative construction of a rather specific type of relation between rulers and ruled ones, serving the political needs of its time; a visual tool to ‘prescribe’ much more than to ‘describe’, to legitimate an idea – that of the absolute exercise of authority – when, between the 16th and the 17th centuries, the same idea was challenged by a plethora of traditional authorities whom, for this

3. In media studies, for example, Nick Couldry states: “… I approach media power not as a property which media institutions simply possess, but as a broad social process that operates at many levels.” (Couldry 2000: 39).
very reason, the strength of the Leviathan was designed to destroy. The Leviathan is not so much a beast in our unconscious as a distinctively political animal.

But I would also like to convince our readers that the actual strength of the Leviathan is made of the same substance as dreams: so formidable while we sleep but ‘melting – rapidly – into air’ as soon as we awake. Or, to put it differently, the power of that image consists in its use and the moment in which we become aware of it is a necessary, albeit not sufficient, moment in the process of its dissolution.

In this study, following an influential tradition within the analysis of political power (Lasswell 1976; Easton 1965; Lasswell and Kaplan 2000), I suggest to define politics as the competition for the control over the distribution of values in society. From this point of view, I would argue that the (public) use of images is never politically neutral or socially irrelevant, and that the role of visual communication can be described in terms of a continuum with ‘subversion’ on one end and ‘reproduction’ on the other. In these terms, tertium non datur: the use of images either supports a given distribution of values or challenges it.4

In this chapter, I will first discuss the postmodernist challenge to the conceptualisation of politics in late-capitalist societies and some of the limits I believe are affecting the current approaches to visual communication in addressing this challenge.

Second, I will sketch the profile of an alternative conceptual framework that, looking at visual communication as a political process, I hope may provide a more effective angle to this end.

1.2 Visual knowledge and the challenge of the postmodern condition

In some of its most interesting formulations, the postmodern intellectual tradition couples an uncompromising critique of political power with an equally un-bending epistemology of truth. The interlocking of these two confronts critical intellectuals with a fundamental challenge: to address issues of power in terms of knowledge and issues of knowledge in terms of power simultaneously. This challenge (I discuss it here only in relation to Jean-François Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard and Guy Debord), cannot be ignored by analysis claiming a critical posture. However, it is difficult to engage since the hypotheses described by notions such as the ‘crisis of truth’ (Lyotard), the ‘subversion of reality’ (Baudrillard) or the ‘society of spectacle’ (Debord) affect not only the exercise of power but also the conditions of knowledge, therefore eroding the credibility of the conceptual grounds on which

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4. See the chapter by Curticapean in this book for a different view.
a would-be critical argumentation can be constructed. If the re-valuation of visual communication is partly a response to the conceptual impasse of logo-centric criticism, it is useful to reconsider the terms of this challenge in order to assess if, and under which conditions, visual communication can indeed reconstitute the political.

Jean-François Lyotard (1982: 45–48) describes the political problem consequent to the crisis of truth in the ‘postmodern condition’ as follows:

Capitalism solves the scientific problem of research funding in its own way: directly by financing research departments in private companies, in which demands for performativity and recommercialization orient research first and foremost toward technological ‘applications’ … Scientists, technicians, and instruments are purchased not to find truth, but to augment power. … This is how legitimation by power takes shape. Power is not only good performativity, but also effective verification and good verdicts. It legitimates science and the law on the basis of their efficiency, and legitimates this efficiency on the basis of science and law. It is self-legitimating, in the same way a system organized around performance maximization seems to be … Thus the growth of power, and its self-legitimation, is now taking the route of data storage and accessibility, and the operativity of information.

Late capitalism, in other words, addresses the problem of legitimation as a problem of control. Effective power can be transformed into legitimate power since the normative, legal and moral conditions for legitimation are themselves within the reach of (performative) power. And the more effective the power is, the greater are the chances for legitimation. In the last instance, it is performativity – in itself a knowledge-based form of control – that allows the exercise of power to create the conditions for its own legitimation.

The control of reality (not through coercion but through the control of knowledge!) is the key aspect here. Other authors, especially Jürgen Habermas and Niklas Luhmann (1971), have formulated different conceptualisations of the same problem – the legitimation of power in ’mature capitalism’ and proposed different solutions – ’communicative action’ and ’double negation’ respectively. Herbert Marcuse had already voiced a concern for the situation of ’unfreedom’ and the degeneration of the political in an ’economic-technical coordination which operates through the manipulation of needs by vested interests’ and “precludes the emergence of an effective opposition against the whole” (Marcuse 2002: 5). In the works of this and other Frankfurt scholars, the competition for power remains within the ontological and epistemological boundaries of reality and (scientific) truth. The postmodern critique, however, seems more conceptually radical and challenges the ’legitimation by power’ with a double move: on epistemological grounds it
negates the ‘truth’ claim and the ‘technological’ power associated with scientific knowledge, and on ontological grounds it contests the nature of reality constructed by the technological power for its own legitimation. This critique is indeed so radical, and the epistemology of postmodern truth so destructive, that the mere possibility of the political – the engagement with hegemony – seems destroyed.  

While the system of self-legitimation of power described by Lyotard looks at the postmodern condition from the point of view of knowledge, the idea of simulation proposed by Jean Baudrillard describes the same process but from the point of view of representation and communication. The common element, unsurprisingly, is the notion of truth:

The transition from signs that dissimulate something to signs that dissimulate that there is nothing marks a decisive turning point. The first reflects a theology of truth and secrecy (to which the notion of ideology still belong). The second inaugurates the era of simulacra and of simulation, in which there is no longer a God to recognize his own, no longer a Last Judgment to separate the false from the true, the real from its artificial resurrection, as everything is already dead and resurrected in advance. (Baudrillard 1994: 6)

The linkage between the crisis of truth, the end of the real and representation (through signs or images) is even more explicit in Debord:

The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images. (Debord 1995: 12)

Although the simulacrum is not the spectacle, both notions are key components in conceptual systems having at least two points in common: first, the common purpose of a political critique based on the process of representation; second, the methodological strategy of waging this challenge by pointing to the destruction of the real and the subversion of truth, respectively, while at the same time establishing an epistemological ground of ‘radical truth.’

Debord’s notion of ‘spectacle’ is more accommodating to discussions of power than the simulacrum, because it still implies human agency. However, the spectacle also has important ontological consequences:

The spectacle cannot be set in abstract opposition to concrete social activity, for the dichotomy between reality and image will survive on either side of any such distinction. Thus the spectacle, though it turns reality on its head, is itself a product of real activity. Likewise, lived reality suffers the material assaults of the spectacle’s mechanism of contemplation, incorporating the spectacular order and

5. See the so-called ‘Habermas – Lyotard debate’ on this and Steuerman for a focussed summary of it (Steuerman 2000).
lending that order positive support. Each side therefore has its share of objective reality. And every concept, as it takes its place on one side or the other, has no foundation apart from its transformation into its opposite: reality erupts within the spectacle, and the spectacle is real. This reciprocal alienation is the essence and underpinning of society as it exists. (Debord 1995:14)

The ideas of the crisis of truth and the ‘legitimation by power’ (Lyotard), of the society of spectacle in which “truth is a moment of falsehood” (Debord 1995:14), and of the absorption of reality “by the hyperreality of the code and simulation” (Baudrillard 2001:123) defines a conceptual framework as radical and uncompromising as the power itself that inspires the criticism of these authors.

Entrapped between the conceptual coordinates of truth, reality and the illusionary representation of both, postmodern criticism aims at removing every possible conceptual support to the discursive reproduction of the rationality that sustains ‘technological power’: the power of the ‘code’, and the practice of control not serving other interests but its own. Somehow underestimating the materiality of power, the ‘strategy’ behind this approach is based on the idea that the exercise of power needs discourse to reproduce the basis of its own legitimacy. Therefore, destroying the conditions of the discourses of technological power may carry the possibility of destroying this form of ‘totalitarianism’ (as Marcuse called it, 2002:5).

The problem, however, is that by destroying the conceptual support to the discursive reproduction of power this approach also undermines the possibility of resistance as a form of anti-hegemonic use of power. Especially in Baudrillard’s work, the terms of this critique are such as to erode the possibility of interpretation itself. To understand the profound implications of the subversive strategy inspiring the postmodern ‘challenge’, one should keep in mind Habermas’s observation:

The fundamental function of world-maintaining interpretative systems is the avoidance of chaos, that is, the overcoming of contingency. The legitimation of orders of authority and basic norms can be understood as a specialization of this ‘meaning-giving’ function. (Habermas 2004:118)

The postmodern challenge is ultimately a challenge to the very possibility of interpretation and ‘world-maintenance’, waged in an effort to confront an order that seems impossible to confront otherwise. For some (Williams 2000:32–33), this is the fundamental political meaning of Lyotard’s ‘differend’ (Readings 1991:117–119) and, more broadly, the disenchantment that accompanied the ‘crisis of the Left’ after the 1960s (Anderson 2006:27–36). But an argumentation waged on epistemological grounds that makes every other counter-argumentation impossible seems to me to be the functional equivalent of a nuclear war in defence politics: it simply makes the very notion of victory meaningless by producing
conditions – a nuclear wasteland – in which no meaningful form of communication (nor political life!) can take place. If we follow Habermas, authority cannot exist in this conceptual wasteland because (intersubjective) interpretative systems cannot be established. The resulting chaos can be interpreted as a moment of creative transition (Maffesoli 1996) or as the distinctive form of domination of ‘these days’ (Bauman 2004:41).

But how do images enter this scene of impossible truths and lost realities? They do so by occupying the space of ambivalence created by the crisis of truth and the credibility of logocentric interpretative systems. And they do so ambivalently: as part of the problem and the solution. In a broad sense, as manifestations of a broader capacity or ‘imagination’, images are the main objective of the assault on the real because imagination is potentially the single most serious threat to control. In a narrow sense, as units of visual communication, they are tools to ‘kill’ the real through mediated representation, but also to regenerate the possibility of reality itself through intersubjective communication and the ‘sharing’ of images (as we argued for the reconstitution of the social, Stocchetti and Sumiala-Seppänen 2007). Images are relevant because the control of the imaginary is a fundamental stake in the reproduction of technological power. And the discourse on visuality is a form of power/knowledge necessary for both the reproduction of control and the resistance to it. Ultimately, visual communication seems to carry with it the potential for imaginative transformation that Frankfurt scholars attributed to critical theory (Horkheimer 1972:241).

In this perspective, postmodern criticism suggests a more constructive ‘challenge’: a serious invitation to re-establish the conceptual grounds for a notion of truth which is subtracted or ‘invulnerable’, so to speak, to the control of technological power – to use Lyotard’s terminology – or capable of carrying a value that cannot be exchanged (and that the system cannot return – this is in essence the strategy of terrorism for Baudrillard 2003) and that is beyond the reach of the ‘spectacle’ and its delusionary effects.

The communicative ‘place’ where this ambivalence is given a chance to be resolved in one way or another – to reproduce control or to challenge it – is presumably the visual discourse or ‘visuality’.

Images and visual communication have always been studied from a variety of perspectives and approaches. But if the notion of pictorial turn is given the meaning that Mitchell intended to give it – a recurrent trope that displaces moral and political panic onto images and so-called visual media (Mitchell 2002:170) – then I think this moment is the invention of ‘visuality’ as the conceptual place where the subversion of reality, truth and power takes place. And this, one should add, is not dissimilar to another process that occurred earlier and was studied by
Foucault: the invention of ‘sexuality’ and the incitation to sexual discourse as necessary moves to exert control on biopolitics. Like sexuality, also visuality is the name that can be given to a historical construct: not a furtive reality that is difficult to grasp, but a great surface network in which the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special knowledges, the strengthening of controls and resistances, are linked to one another, in accordance with a few major strategies of knowledge and power.

(Foucault 1990: 105–106)

As every discourse contains a certain level of entropy that makes reproduction both necessary and risky – the possibility of change being just an implication of the multiplicity of possible meanings discussed by Lyotard in his notion of ‘differend’ – one may suspect that visuality may ultimately also be ambivalent: legitimation by power but also de-legitimation; death of the real but also its resurrection; the actualisation of the spectacle but also the realisation of its true falsity. Considering its ambivalent value as both the strength and the weakness of a seemingly invincible system of power (what Baudrillard calls simply ‘the system’), it is not surprising that ‘visuality’ and the discipline most closely associated to it – visual studies – has rapidly become a rather popular domain of intellectual engagement. And this is the other side of the ’pictorial turn’: the study of visual communication as a form of communication autonomous from the purposes and the identities of those who use it.  

One possibility, reflecting Baudrillard’s suggestion that the end of the system can only come through ‘saturation’, is to use the irreducible ambivalence of the images to challenge performativity and the subjugation of knowledge to the imperatives of control by either increasing the entropy of the system itself (and therefore the costs of control) or by setting the conditions for the development of an alternative logic whose traits cannot even be anticipated at this stage but whose fundamental requirement would be that of antagonising performativity itself.

The first possibility seems to be the one preferred by those suggesting to use images against images, visual technology against visual technology, ‘codes’ against ‘codes’ and so on as e.g. in culture jamming (see Lehmuskallio 2007: 201). At least for now, this strategy doesn’t seem to have achieved much. Quite on the contrary, the ‘system’ has been quick and creative in responding to the visual challenge and, as a matter of fact, there are no visible signs of imminent collapse. One of the problems here is that in the political universe there is no such thing as ‘vacuum’. The system cannot be antagonised without an alternative ideology, and one of

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6. On discourse and legitimation from a critical perspective see Leeuwen (2005); Leeuwen and Wodak (1999); Leeuwen (2007). I will return to this later.
the effects of the system itself is the constant erosion of the ground for alternative ideology to emerge. Legitimation by power feeds on images, but the overflow of images that results does not foster but rather destroys political imagination, ultimately inducing the belief that the system is a natural object, the only possible world. While imagination is nevertheless the most reliable source of its eventual demise, the postmodern attempt of deconstructing the power of the ‘system’ without offering productive alternatives seems, however, to underestimate the creative dimension of political power and the fact that the competition for the control over the distribution of values in society cannot be waged – even less ‘won’ – with ‘negative’ strategies only: strategies that deny, obliterate or negate the adversary’s values or the adversary’s use of available values (just look at the disproportion between the abundance of anti-corporate logo ‘jamming’ available on the web – the visual place par excellence – and the impact of this community-based use of images on the actual power – legal, cultural, economic, social, etc. – of the targeted corporation).

The second strategy of developing an alternative logic, then, seems more promising. The possibility of mounting an indirect, rather than direct, challenge by setting the conditions for a new conceptual ground to emerge requires, in my view, the transformation of visuality (this ambivalent place!) into a new public sphere of the postmodern condition. With all its ambivalence, this may indeed be the place where power can be engaged in its regenerative moment, where politics is still possible as an opportunity for change, where the circuit of self-legitimation can be broken and where the competition for the control over the distribution of values in society can finally involve credible competitors. If this is the challenge, the ambivalence of the images is clearly part of the solution. But that is not enough. And this is where I think visual studies have shown its greatest weakness: the inability to engage with issues of agency, purpose and private/public divide in ways useful for reconstituting the political.

1.3 The failure of visual studies and the reconstitution of the political

As it happens, successful research programmes institutionalise in academic disciplines. But is academic success a reliable indicator of the capacity of a research programme to have ‘transformative’ effects on society? Academic institutions are not immune to the effects of technological control that guarantees ‘legitimation by power’ (see Lyotard!). If reality has been effectively substituted by its (mediated) representation, how are we not to think of academic success and institutions as simulation and simulacra respectively? And if the strategy of choice is not confrontation but avoidance or, in Baudrillard’s terms, ‘dissuasion’ (Baudrillard
the same strategy may indeed be reflected in the nature of the problems that a research programme in search of recognition or ‘authorisation’ chooses for itself.

My argument here is that, despite its academic success, the actual contribution of visual analysis to the constitution of the political seems uncertain. The study of images seems to have been unable to engage the politics of images and, therefore, to mobilise the political imagination against the seemingly irresistible spread of corporate ‘promotional culture’ to the institutions of knowledge and the reduction of societal cultural production into its logic (see Wernick 1991).

Nicholas Mirzoeff (2005:1–2) expresses quite explicitly the frustration associated with this social failure when he describes his encounter with the captive viewer of mainstream war coverage:

For all the deconstructive, feminist, anti-racist, visual culture theory that I have at my disposal, there was no way to counter the sweating, exulting triumph of the war watcher. To call attention to the deaths of Iraqi civilians or to mention that this attack lacked the authority of the United Nations would simply have added to his delight.

Part of the problem may be the tendency to specialisation, fragmentation and therefore ‘isolation’ of knowledge that accompanies the institutionalisation of successful research programmes. Before the institutionalisation of visual analysis into a discipline, images and visual communication were always part of something else: not objects of interest on their own but rather tools, representations, or forms of evidence associated with problematic aspects of the social reality (history, religion, artistic expression, politics, etc.). These problematic aspects, and not the visualisations associated with them, motivated the analysis. Images were effects rather than causes, or merely tools to find answers to a variety of questions. By taking visuality per se, as natural phenomena that can exist independently of agents and purpose, visual analysis has effectively engaged the ‘politics’ of science and gained its place in the academia. In doing so, however, it has neglected the politics of the images: the competition for the actual control over the (political) uses of visual communication and the knowledge associated with it.

In this sense, one may suspect that the function of the myth described by Roland Barthes also applies to the concept of the image so hypostatised as a specialist domain of academic interest:

… driven to having either to unveil or to liquidate the concept, it will naturalize it … everything happens as if the picture naturally conjured up the concept, as if the signifier gave a foundation to the signified … myth is speech justified in excess.  

(Barthes 1972:129–130, emphasis in original)
On social grounds, the naturalisation of images is a fundamental ‘move’: it hides, silences, puts out of sight and critical scrutiny the fact that image itself is culturally constructed and – more importantly – that, as every cultural construction, it serves some purposes better than others, some interests but not all, some values to the detriment of others. In sum, it conceals the very process of power at work in social (visual) communication. And if one is tempted to introduce agency in this process, one may agree with Pierre Bourdieu’s suggestion:

So as to avoid being misled by the effects of the labour of naturalization which every group tends to produce in order to legitimize itself and fully justify its existence, one must thus in each case reconstruct the historical labour which has produced social divisions and the social vision of these divisions.

(Bourdieu 1991:247–248)

Albeit concealed, the elements of ambivalence remain: do the practices of visual knowledge reproduce the spectacle – e.g. socialising the citizen/spectators to it – or do they undermine their own postulates – e.g. that an image is worth a thousand words? Do they support simulation generating simulacra or do they rather saturate the system, creating the conditions for ‘impossible exchange’ (and terrorism)? One may even suggest that the ultimate critical stand of visual study may indeed be the demise of visuality itself as a significant place for the legitimation of the system. But ambivalence is now constitutive of the discipline as an academic practice: visual studies is no more an intellectual tool to deal with a social problem but rather an institutional solution to an intellectual problem.

Unsurprisingly, this ambivalence has indeed ambiguous epistemological effects. In some respects, the pursuit of visual knowledge as a distinctive research programme has been influenced by a modernist idea of science and ‘objective’ truth which is blind to the social dimension of science itself as well as the practical implications of the politics of knowledge – the competition for the control over the production, dissemination and uses of knowledge in society. In some other respects, however, the postmodern crisis of truth and authority, the destruction of meaning and reality, and ultimately the unsustainable ambivalence of the spectacle seem to have undermined the belief (or even the faith) in the possibility of performing socially relevant truth: forms of moral truth (like Foucault’s ‘parrhesia’) that direct and positively affect politics.

The opportunity for a more direct political engagement has always been around the corner – inscribed in the very essence of the reality (illusionary or not) that visual analysis set out to investigate. For example, if one is serious about discussing the ‘language of images’ in all three meanings described by Mitchell (1980: 3), one has to ask questions about their legitimate meaning that draw one immediately into the domain of political power. If the media (and therefore mediated images)
are endorsed with Bourdieu’s notion of ‘symbolic power’ (Couldry 2000: 4), should it come as a surprise that visual ‘power’ seems to work more effectively for the ‘production and reproduction of legitimate language’ and the order supported by it (Bourdieu 1991: 43) than it does in support of the challenges to it?

Visuality may appear the distinctive form of power/knowledge of our era for no other reason than its unique suitability for the practices of control. While power in the ‘panopticon’ is still archaic in its functional association with coercion, the visuality in legitimation by power, in the substitution of the real with simulation and simulacra, or in the regime of the spectacle has evolved as a form of autonomous relation of power in which coercion is unnecessary. As Bauman suggests (2004: 42–48), the dismantling of the panopticon has brought about a freedom full of insecurity that inhibits resistance. My suggestion here, however, is that if, and to the extent that, the exercise of control is dependent on visual discourse as its distinctive form of power/knowledge, then visuality is as much part of the problem as it is part of the solution.

What is needed, put simply, is the reconstitution of the political for the visual discourse and for it to discover those intersections, joints of space of ambivalence that can support these conditions. It means to engage in a serious effort to develop a critical theory of visuality: a deliberately transformative and subversive engagement.

For this to happen, however, I believe one has to deal with some serious obstacles on conceptual grounds. First, there is the problem of agency falsely ascribed to images themselves; second, their naturalisation as objects, and third, the neglect of the divide between public and private.

What I would call ‘the problem of agency’ results from the idea that images ‘have’ power. How many times have we heard or read sentences about ‘the power of the image’? This formulation is so simple, so seemingly innocent, so clear and intelligible, so ‘natural’. Still it is wrong. Images are objects and objects cannot have power – except in physical terms, e.g. an engine producing a certain amount of power in the form of speed, heat, etc. Objects cannot ‘do’ anything by themselves because they do not have a will, an autonomous capacity for doing anything. Only animals, humans included, can act. Humans can act by using material and immaterial tools like hammers and airplanes, concepts and theories. Humans can do things using images while other animals cannot, because humans can communicate with language (or at least a language) that other animals do not have.

Talking or writing about the ‘power of images’ is therefore wrong: it is a mistake, a sentence that, while passing the test of grammar, nevertheless joins the large company of distortions – e.g. ‘fundamental attribution errors,’ as this type of mistake is called in social psychology – that we commit in the communicative construction of the social world. This confuses physical and social notions of
‘power’. It mystifies the construction of social reality, the social or political power, by putting the tool, rather than its users, under the light of critical scrutiny, and thereby erases the agent behind a naturalised structure, hiding responsibility under the cloak of automatic and necessary mechanisms.

As early as in the 1960s and the 1970s, critical linguists warned about the manipulative implications of the ‘agentless passive construct’ (see Fowler 1979; Hodge 1993; O’Halloran 2003), and ‘nominalisation’, (see Billig 2008). Sentences like ‘the gun killed the man’ or ‘he was run over by a car’ are instances of linguistic complicity between the author – who produced the sentence – and the killer – who pulled the trigger, who drove the car, etc. Take, for example, the case of the worldwide Muslim community enraged by the publication of an image of Mohammed by Western media. Muslims and non-Muslims know very well that the publication of the image of Mohammed is a provocation, and it is this provocation – a specific form of communicative behaviour, like threats or promises – that solicits their reaction. While it may be technically true that the victim was killed by a gun, a more relevant social truth is that the victim was not killed by the gun but by the person that pulled the trigger.7

However, in common parlance and, more worryingly, in academic texts, it is not uncommon to see sentences in which images are indeed the ‘actants’ of descriptive and explanatory narratives. For example, in his introduction to The Power of Images, David Freedberg (1989:xxii) explains:


The interesting thing is that the same author describes the practical effects of considering images as agencies when, for example, he explains, to the amazement of contemporary readers, that

the whole apparatus of execution could be employed upon images, not only in hanging, but also in pillorying, burning, quartering, and decapitating them.

(1989:257)

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7. The enormous difference between these statements and the dramatic implications attached to them were experienced by Finnish forensic expert Helena Ranta when she was called upon to examine the bodies of people killed in Račak. Medical investigation can tell how these people were killed, how they died, but not who killed them. The analysis of the bodies, no matter how profound and extended, cannot produce the kind of social truth that was needed in support of the war against Serbians. In the same way, the analysis of the image alone cannot produce the kind of social truth that is relevant when discussing visual communication: who is trying to do what and with what result?
The symbolic uses of images attract unto the image itself the wrath and the punishment for the human agent associated, one way or another, with those images. But burning images is just another use of images – like burning a flag – whose social relevance goes beyond the image itself. While the symbolic dimension of communication and politics should not be underestimated, the incitement to engage with images should not undermine but rather support the engagement with human agency and the social purpose inspiring the uses of images.

Discussing ‘vision as a psycho-social process’ W. J. T. Mitchell (2005:352) incites the reader to understand why it is that images, works of art, media, figures and metaphors have ‘lives of their own,’ and cannot be explained simply as rhetorical, communicative instruments or epistemological windows onto reality. … why it is that objects and images ‘look back’ at us; why the ‘idol’ has a tendency to become an idol that talks back to us, gives orders, and demands sacrifices, why the ‘propagated’ image of an object is so efficacious for propaganda, so fecund in reproducing an infinite number of copies of itself. … why the child’s doll has a playful half-life on the borders of the animate and inanimate, and why the fossil traces of extinct life are resurrected in the beholder’s imagination. It makes clear why the questions to ask about images are not just ‘what do they mean?’ or ‘what do they do?’ but ‘what is the secret of their vitality?’ and ‘what do they want?’.

What is interesting in this quote/narrative is that the reader is implicitly compelled to adopt the child’s point of view in engaging with the half-living doll and to embrace the ‘beholder’s imagination’ in the resurrection of extinct life. Put simply, we are asked to engage with images in the realm of imagination. This is the problem of agency: the idea that images ‘do’ something, that they ‘have power’, that they ‘speak a language’, etc. It implies the attribution of agency to inanimate objects and produces something rather similar to what in social psychology is called ‘the fundamental attribution error’ (see Heider 1958; Jones et al. 1971; Nisbet and Ross 1980). But the power of images, I would suggest, is just the power of humans misconstrued, reified, reduced to a fetish. It is an instance of what John Ruskin called ‘the pathetic fallacy’: a rhetorical figure in poetry but a fundamental error in science. The unveiling of this ‘fallacy’, the debunking of the visual ‘myths’ associated with it, as well as of other forms of deliberate use of humans’ cognition for purposes of manipulation, should be the primary goal of the critical analysis of visual communication.

A second problem of visual studies on conceptual grounds, closely associated to and possibly resulting from the agency problem, is what I would call ‘the naturalisation of images’: the transformation of an eminently social artefact into a natural phenomenon. Once images are credited with power, they become ‘agents’.
And once this is done, their role as social artefacts – objects that cannot exist independently of human will, knowledge and purpose – is masked by narratives that construe them as ‘natural’ objects. Another way to put this is to say that the discipline of visual study may not be able to engage with the (radical) challenge of postmodernism because the institutionalisation of visual study into a disciplinary field implies a form of ‘disembedding’ that Giddens describes as a fundamental consequence of modernity. In fact, to be transformed into the objects of a new discipline, the process of visual communication has to be ‘disembedded’ (Giddens 1990: 21) and images have to be transformed into ‘symbolic tokens’ that can be ‘passed around’ by ‘expert systems’ organising “large areas of the material and social environments in which we live today” (Giddens 1990: 27; see also Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999).

Reassigning allows for the shift from the ‘contemplative’ to the ‘political’ approach to visuality, positioning the image-in-use within the domain of the competition for the control over the distribution of values in society. In this perspective, what really matters is not the purpose of the ‘author’ but that of the ‘user’. In practice, the two can be the same person – and political cartoonists are the best example that comes to my mind.8 Furthermore, it is the context of the user, rather than that of the producer, that should be kept in mind when asking questions about purpose. An example of this would be Diego Velasquez’s Las meninas. Is the ‘displacement of royalty’ not the purpose that makes this work and its uses, as described, for example, by Michel Foucault in The Order of Things (2002: 3–18) and John R. Searle (in Mitchell 1980: 247–258), a relevant piece of art in the discussion about the visual construction of the world? If the problem in which we are interested is that of assessing the relevance of this work of art on the distribution of values in society, we need to look at the uses to which it is put. We already encounter the fact that it is not the image itself but its uses that are of political relevance when discussing the Mohammed cartoons.

A third problem of visual studies is the underestimation – if not complete neglect – of the public/private divide. The problem here is twofold. First, this divide is constitutive, so to say, of the very meaning of politics as both a concept and a set of practices. If everything is political then nothing is. This is a simple language game that makes the difference between the possibility or impossibility of thinking of politics as a distinctive domain of human life and social behaviour. Second, on more practical grounds, the blurring of this distinction is part of the way technological control works: publicisation of private life and privatisation of the public (e.g. in the entertainment industry, in the representation of politics,

8. In principle however, the two roles are distinct: while the production of an image must logically precede its use, production per se is politically irrelevant without use.
The continuous shift from one to the other in the representation of socially relevant issues denies moral, legal or other criteria a firm ground to challenge the practices so represented.

From a political perspective, the relevant uses of images are the public ones. In this use, the display of images should be seen as a form of action performed by an agent in order to achieve a certain purpose. This does not mean that private uses of images are irrelevant per se. Quite the contrary – Barthes's notion of ‘punctum’ is presumably the most prominent example of the fundamental importance of images in our private life that comes to my mind.9 The importance of this divide between public and private uses of images is underestimated. When it comes to the competition for the control over the distribution of values in society, the capacity of an agency to access the public dimension of communicative process gives that agency an incomparable – and in fact decisive – advantage over those agencies who cannot. In fact, despite decades of criticism and deconstruction, corporate visual communication is still influential – and more or less organised challenges such as ‘culture jamming’ seem to be relevant only as opportunities for corporate visual communication to reach greater levels of sophistication. This explains why the competition for the control of public spaces is so crucial: as Baudrillard clearly understood looking at New York graffiti (Baudrillard 1993:76), it is there, in the public space of the walls of our cities that the use of images becomes politically influential. A similar instance, but on different grounds, applies to the images of the ‘Wehrmacht exhibition’ and the scandal that it produced in German and Austrian societies (Heer et al. 2008).

Since agency has disappeared in visual discourse, politics is beyond reach. Once images are looked at as natural phenomena, their social purpose remains invisible, criticism become impossible and the only option is adaptation. If meaning explains uses, hermeneutics determine politics. And as the political meaning of the public/private divide is lost, the individual – a conceptual precondition for the possibility of politics as a form of rational behaviour – becomes extinct and is substituted by the mass or the tribe (Maffesoli 1996).

A further element that undermines the possibility of critical knowledge in visual analysis – in addition to the disappearance of agency, the misconstruction

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9. In this respect, I think Mitchell misconstrues the notion of punctum in Barthes (Mitchell 2005: 9) when he states that “… when he [Barthes] … was faced with a photograph of his own mother in a winter garden … he begun to waver in his belief that critique could overcome the magic of the image”. Barthes is quite clearly discussing the use of a particular image in what I would here call his private sphere, while the function of critique of images’ ‘resistance to meaning’ would refer to the public use of images. The two approaches are not incompatible: they are just different approaches to different problems.
of politics and the nature of political power, and the blurring of the public/private distinction – is the lack of recognition for the interpretation of images as a distinctive and very influential use of images itself. This omission, so to speak, contributes to hide the role of the analyst (the intellectual engaging in visuality) as the social agent on which the very reproduction of visuality (as a form of ambivalent power/knowledge) mostly depends. In this way, a fundamental actor is removed from the scene – or, actually, removes itself from the scene. It is somewhat paradoxical that in a discipline where postmodernism/poststructuralism is a very influential – if not the mainstream – interpretative tradition, the role of the analyst itself seems to be removed from the range of legitimate ‘deconstructive’ efforts.

1.4 Power in visual politics: Images-in-use

The misrepresentation of power in visual communication as ‘the power of images’ is itself a communicative act with important political consequences that ultimately supports the technical claim of ‘legitimation by power’, the anonymity of the ‘code’ and the naturalisation of the ‘spectacle’. The grammatical simplicity of an apparently innocent linguistic construction conspires with the less innocent interests of the agents who prefer to blame the gun rather than themselves.

In fact, if the image ‘has’ power, then the analysis of the image can reveal the secrets of this power. This is a fascinating and totally harmless intellectual adventure, which drives scores of beautiful minds in the exegetics of the images – leaving the actors using this ‘power’ and the purposes of their uses in similarly beautiful peace. The myth here is that the ‘power of the image’ is, in principle, accessible to anyone who captures its ‘secrets’. Thus people, companies, governments and other types of agents see in the management of their image the answer to their sense of powerlessness in the visual age. In the vast majority of cases, for all those who believe in the ‘magic’ of images and uncritically buy the services of self-appointed gurus of visual communication, the use of images reduces the agents to their image: simulacra, an empty – but good-looking – shell.

A corollary of the prejudice concerning ‘the power of images’ is the idea that ‘one image is worth a thousand words’ – another falsity with extraordinary currency even among intellectuals. But even a primary school child could tell that to compare the quantitative worths of images and words is absurd. Images and words cannot be compared because they are incommensurable objects (like my teacher used to say “adding apples and pears”). But why should one be induced to believe that visual communication is ‘richer’ than written or oral communication? Surely it seems more ambiguous, but again the intrinsic ambivalence of virtually every image is downplayed. In 2003, images of dead (Arab) children were
denied to Western audiences in observance of some television etiquette, while Arab networks exhibited them to show the ‘true’ face of war. Implied in both positions is the idea that images of dead children move the viewer to disgust and/or compassion. What these two positions neglect is the fact that the same images were available on the internet for the morbid pleasure of an ethnically undifferentiated audience. Those images may have been exchanged for thousands, even tens of thousands of words, but of very different discourses and for very different purposes. An isolated episode and a unique example? The same thing can be observed with Abu Ghraib, with images of death, with images of sex, with virtually every image.

What are the roots of this ambivalence? A radical proposal here could be that images are ambivalent because in themselves – independent of their practical uses – they have no meaning at all. And this is the important point: *the meaning of images depends on the uses of images*. One may even dare to suggest that, once taken away from the practices of their uses, their historical, empirical linkage with agents, interests, media, circumstances, times and spaces, etc., they ‘stand’ for nothing, like a jellyfish taken out of the sea or a snowflake grabbed in the middle of its fall toward the ground.

A less radical position would at least acknowledge that all that an image can ‘do’ is to try to ‘puncture’: to sting the viewer more or less deeply, more or less violently, and to open up a more or less exclusive access for its user into the viewer’s sensitivity. In this view, the image can be a more or less sharp tool to puncture the viewer, but issues of meaning and purpose belong, and can only be meaningfully asked in relation to, the user and the viewer.

What this perspective also suggests is that visual communication is associated with an unbalanced communicative relationship and that, for example, communicative agents may resort to images when their interest is to engage with a subordinate agent (just think of children’s books!) or to establish a relation of subordination (see Tufte 2006). While words may appeal to reason (e.g. making causal connections explicit while images cannot), the use of images appeals to emotions and forces the recipient into a situation where interpretation is necessary but at the same time always arbitrary – and therefore ambiguous. While words can be the communicative tools of a dialogical relation in which both parties are equally exposed (on communicative grounds), as viewers of images we enter a process of construction of meaning that is located beyond the reach of reason and, to some extent, even consciousness. These implications of the use of images matter little in the private domain – see e.g. Roland Barthes and his ‘giving himself up’ to the image of his mother (Barthes 1982: 75). In the public use of images, however, these implications matter a great deal.
The public use of images is always a form of institutional use in which some institutional actors (corporations, political parties, the State, etc.) engage the viewers in a form of communication that is fundamentally unbalanced. The emotional engagement appeals to individual private space in a 'tactical' move that the individual cannot reciprocate since institutional actors do not have a private sphere that individuals can tamper with. One consequence is, for example, that while institutional visual meaning is always 'objective', individuals have to 'prove' that their subjectivity is not impairing their understanding and, most importantly, they cannot reciprocate in kind (just imagine the use of nudity in public spaces for individual self-promotion instead of commercial advertising!). The use of images, therefore, violates the conditions of communicative equality, making it impossible for the individuals – the irreducible unit of political process – to participate in the communicative dimension of the competition for the distribution of values in societies.

If the power of the image is not in the image but in the nature of the relationship it makes possible, we need to look not at images but at the uses of images to reintroduce the issues of agency and purpose. This also means, in practice, that every use of an image is a form of 'image elicitation': a form of behaviour in which an image-user is pursuing his/her interests by soliciting certain forms of response from a viewer.

Discussing the use of photo elicitation in anthropological research, for example, Malcolm Collier misconstrues the relationship established by the use of images between the researcher and the 'respondent' by attributing to images what is indeed a human capacity when he observes:

> Perhaps the least known research potential of images is their use as vehicles to knowledge and understanding via the responses they trigger in photo elicitation sessions … The richest return from photo elicitation often have little connection to the details of images, which may serve only to release vivid memories, feelings, insight, thoughts and memories. … A particular attribute of images is that they give birth to stories, which themselves are important sources of information. (Collier 2001:46)

Not images but humans 'give birth' – and such a 'pathetic fallacy' in anthropological work is a serious mistake. The meaning of the story that a photo may elicit is not in the picture but is rather a result of its use by someone who is willing to look at it and tell us about him/herself – in this case, the viewer interviewed by the anthropologist. But this form of result is conditioned by many factors, not least the inclination of the viewer to comply with the interests and the requests of the researcher: to 'perform' according to expectations which, in the last instance, reflect the degree to which our interviewee has interiorised the terms of the relations we
are imposing on him by saying: 'look at this and tell me your story'. It is the result of a form of compliance that should not be taken for granted as 'natural'. By attributing the power of 'generating' meaning to the images rather than the researcher and the researched, at least three types of politically relevant consequences are implied: First, the responsibility of the elicitor in the uses of images is hidden. Second, the role of the viewer is passivised – as the dog in Pavlov’s experiment. And, third, we become blind to the fact that the elicitor and the viewer are indeed actors involved in an unequal communicative relationship in which one claims the exclusive right to learn about the personal experience of the other (in their emotional, cognitive, intellectual world) while denying the other the same possibility.

What this perspective should immediately suggest is that image analysts are also a form of image-elicitors: they use images to solicit recognition for themselves and for whatever point they are making – the nature or importance of beauty, the visual avenues to the sublime, the visual reproduction of hegemony, the intellectual relevance of the ‘gaze’, etc. More distinctively, however, they are among the most influential actors – if not the most influential – in the constitution of those symbolic relationships that hide the power of the users behind the power of the images and that misconstrue the power of visuality.

Once again, this power, as political power more broadly speaking, is not an attribute but a relation: not something that someone can ‘have’ but rather a process in which the status of each participant is defined by the relative status of the other participants. This idea is a fundamental tenet in political analysis that applies equally well to the notion of symbolic power as discussed by Bourdieu:

> symbolic power does not reside in 'symbolic systems' in the form of an 'illocutionary force' but … in and through a given relation between those who exercise power and those who submit to it, i.e., in the very structure of the field in which belief is produced and reproduced. What creates the power of words and slogans, a power capable of maintaining or subverting the social order, is the belief in the legitimacy of words and of those who utter them. And words alone cannot create this belief. (Bourdieu 1991:170)

If what applies to words can apply to images, the power attributed to both is a reflection of beliefs about the legitimacy of the users – the anthropologists, the analysts, the experts, etc. The nature of these beliefs – and the possibility of legitimation – depends on a relation that involves the influential and the influenced i.e. the essence of politics and the distinctive focus of the study of politics that Lasswell long ago defined as the “study of influence and the influential” (Lasswell 1950:3).

There is a tendency in visual analysis to reduce the discussion about the political dimension of visual communication to the use of images in support of domination and ‘political tyranny’ (Mitchell 2006:96 in Mirzoeff). But ‘tyranny’
and ‘domination’ are terms used in relation to political regimes with rather specific connotations. Political power is at work in circumstances and instances more common and less dramatic than the propaganda machineries of totalitarian regimes. See, for example, the effects of ‘fictionalisation’ described by Wodak in this volume, the notion of ‘visual display’ in Anne Koski, that of ‘celebrity diplomacy’ in Riina Yrjölä, the role of visuality in the representation of the ‘state of exception’ in Miettinen or the corporate representation of gay sexuality in Kolehmainen and Mäkinen, or even the ‘mending ending’ in Dullaart. If visual communication is the dominant form of political communication (and there are plenty of reasons to assume that), these effects are also relevant and influential in pluralist societies. As Kukkonen argues, used as maps, mirrors or simulacra, images are alternative strategies for the competition over the distribution of values in society, quite independently of the nature of the political regime.

In the age of visuality, images are the tools used not only to ‘do politics’ within established political space but, as Kuusisto-Arponen suggests, to create alternative spaces, alternative dimensions of the political, spaces of uncertainty in which the interpersonal and the intersubjective quickly turns into a matter directly affecting the competition for the distribution of values in society.

In this perspective, for example, the idea that images have a meaning on their own, independently of their uses, that they ‘do’ something, that they have ‘power’ or that there is such a thing as a ‘language of images’ supports specific readings, uses and ultimately identities – or ‘legitimate’ communities – associated with those meanings. As we argued in an earlier volume, this idea can be challenged on the grounds that the meaning and role of images cannot be understood and even less explained outside of and independently from the community that uses those images. In this sense, at least, the uses establish the meaning – rather than the other way around.

The idea that politics is about competition and that the politics of images is the competition for the control over the uses of images in society – and therefore the elicitation of meaning – is more conveniently associated with a notion of power within the range of social phenomena and the reach of human rationality. If images are seen as

one of the last bastions of magical thinking and therefore one of the most difficult things to regulate with laws and rationally constructed politics – so difficult, in fact, that the law seems to become infected by magical thinking as well, and behaves more like an irrational set of taboos than a set of well-reasoned regulations,

(Mitchell 2005: 28)

the very purpose of politics is put beyond the reach of politics itself. As strange as it might seem, this ‘ontology’ of the visual implies a very modern epistemology
based on ‘discovery’. As I discussed earlier on, the discourse on visuality can be criticised on the same grounds as the discourse on sexuality. Following Michel Foucault, I claim that issues of meanings are always issues of social meanings and that these are subordinate to issues of agency and purpose: who is using what and why? If this is true, then the use of images, rather than their meaning, should be the terrain where the ambivalence of images and imagination can be engaged for the reconstitution of the political.

The ambivalence of visual images reflects the broader ambivalence of the imaginary for human action. Visual politics is the competition to control this ambivalence and the subversive potential of imagination itself. An important element in propaganda, imagination is also the necessary medium for the reflection on the present unbounded by the constraints that hegemonic forms of control pose to the representation of the present itself. But imagination can also be used to hamper change, like Utopia can become a trap, a golden cage of illusion, rather than a weapon against the hegemony of the present. This is the conceptual crossroads where the political must be reintroduced, where the competition for the control over the distribution of values in society can be re-opened and where critical knowledge about visual communication is needed.

1.5 Summary

1. This study engages with the political dimension of images and visual communication.
2. This engagement is a preliminary step towards an approach capable of producing critical knowledge in the domain of visual analysis.
3. Understanding images as images-in-use is necessary to avoid the conceptual trap that in social psychology is known as ‘the fundamental attribution error’.
4. This ‘error’ consists in the attribution to images of the conceptual role of agencies or, in the terms of political science, the conceptual status of political actors. Attribution theory in social psychology has revealed that this ‘error’ is rather common as a cognitive defensive mechanism deployed by individuals and groups in the explanation of behavioural (e.g. decision-making in a political process) failures.
5. On ontological grounds, the images in use approach contends that visual communication and images as a process and objects belong to the social world (contra Mitchell and all others who argue for an ontology of ‘magic’).
6. The images-in-use approach promotes the idea that the analysis of images is a socially relevant form of activity. The analyst cannot hide: s/he is a producer of meaning that, in our terms, constitutes communities and relations
of power within and between communities. Most importantly, the belief in the legitimacy of the analysts’ work affects the way in which the ambivalence of visual communication is resolved: in support of or in antagonism to the legitimation of power.

7. In this approach, the analytical focus shifts from the image to its user: the agency, the human element in the role of political actor when issues of power are at stake.

8. The social identity of the agency is defined by the interests or purpose associated with the uses of images in the competition for the control over the distribution of values in society. Images – whatever their nature – are always used (produced, shown, interpreted, copied, destroyed, etc.) for some purpose. In this sense, visual communication should be considered as a form of purposeful action, independent from its effects and the question whether these are intended or not. Once again, this should help avoid the trap of naturalising images and the idea that visual communication can be assimilated to natural phenomena deprived of agency and purpose.

9. This perspective invites a re-evaluation of the public-private divide. Politics is impossible without communication. But not all communication is equally relevant for the purposes of political practices and, therefore, for those of political analysis.

10. The analysis of the images-in-use in terms of human agency and purposeful action reconstitutes the political in the domain of visual communication as it investigates the role of visual communication in the competition for the distribution of values in society.

References

This article gives a comprehensive account of ‘The Critical Tradition’ in today’s study of visual culture. The Critical Tradition encompasses approaches which focus explicitly on the power struggles between different social groups, institutions and ideologies. A content analysis of articles published in *Visual Studies* and *Journal of Visual Culture* in 2002–2008 shows a rejection of material and political reality as a starting point and a favouring of relative and constructivist forms of criticism in humanist approaches of visual culture, and emphasis on empirical instead of critical perspectives in social scientific visual studies. Poststructural and postmodern criticism has dominated in visual studies. What visual studies needs, this article suggests, is a new focus on real power relationships.

This article discusses the relationship between critical tradition and contemporary humanistic and social scientific visual studies. Critical tradition means here those kinds of theorisations explicitly focusing on the struggle for political power between different social groups, institutions or ideologies. Critical tradition aims at increase of social consciousness and therefore pursues challenging the reproduction of inequalities associated with traditional forms of knowledge (see e.g. Horkheimer 1970; Lazarsfeld 1972; Jay 1973; Williamson 1978). Critical tradition has therefore often referred to Marxian critique of capitalism, but its roots are in the classics of western philosophy and it today also contains a huge variation of post-Marxian critique.

The first section of this chapter gives a rough overview of the developments of critical tradition in the late twentieth century’s visual studies. It is evident that the highly popular research field of visual culture has emerged in accordance with the spread of cultural and gender studies, which, in turn, have been closely connected to the criticism of rising structuralism and poststructuralism of the late twentieth century. One of the main questions in these approaches has been their relations
to Marxian critique of capitalism, which is considered in the second section of the chapter.

In the third section of the chapter, theoretical discussions are completed by a brief report on an empirical analysis of articles published in *Visual Studies* and *Journal of Visual Culture* between the years 2002 and 2008. Analysis shows that forms of poststructural and postmodern criticism dominated the early twenty-first century’s visual studies insomuch that other forms of critique had just a minor role in humanist and social scientific research of visual culture. Explicit Marxian materialism, for example, has remained almost absent in contemporary visual studies.

The bias in forms of critique has evidently been linked to the construction of identity for the new research field of visual culture since the late 1980s. Therefore, the last section of the article considers the problems which the dominative status of self-reflexive poststructuralism as ‘an only legitimate form of critique’ may cause for visual studies. Finally, I will also ask what other kinds of approaches could be needed to refresh the critical tradition of visual studies.

### 2.1 A short history of critical visual studies

Visual critique, of course, had a long history before the approaches of contemporary visual studies appeared. Traditional art critique and art history, for example, have criticised visual arts for centuries on the grounds of aesthetic or social values and norms. However, this critique has mainly been used in canonising ‘good’ or denouncing ‘bad’ visual culture in favour of constructing cultural and social hierarchies. In this chapter, the focus is conversely on those kinds of critical approaches which aim at deconstructing or even disproving the dominant cultural hierarchies and social power structures, and therefore pursuing the emancipation of oppressed social groups and their interests.

These forms of cultural critique have often been rooted in Marxian criticism of capitalism. Explicit formulation of the critical theory was made by Max Horkheimer (1970 [1937]) in his well-known comparison between ‘traditional’ and ‘critical’ theories, in which the former are based on instrumental thought-reproducing dominant power structures and the latter are challenging the predominant power relations and are therefore committed to action or *praxis* in the current historical moment, instead of just producing ‘non-historic pure knowledge’ (also Jay 1973: 80–84).

A good example of the differences between these two forms of approaches is the one between the common critique of ‘mass culture’ and the Frankfurtian
critique of ‘culture industry’. Commercial mass culture – including visual products such as posters, photographs, magazines, comics, films and, more recently, television programmes, videos, computer games and web-sites – has been criticised as ‘bad’ or even ‘harmful’ for ages because it has been thought to erode the high cultural values, lack intellectual challenges and stimulation, prefer the undemanding ease and escapism, and therefore represent the vulgar taste of the ‘manipulative crowd’. The spread of superficial and trivial mass culture has often been connected to the fears of so-called Americanisation, in which American commercial culture has been seen as the ultimate threat to ‘genuine’ national cultures and European ‘high culture’ or art (e.g. Strinati 1995: 10–30). This kind of conservative and elitist critique of mass culture was common in many European countries in the early twentieth century and still flourished as late as in the 1960s and the 1970s.

The critique of mass culture has to be distinguished from the Frankfurt school’s theory of ‘culture industry’, which shifted the focus of criticism from cultural taste to elite’s domination over ‘the superstructure’ or consumption culture in capitalism (ibid.: 61–64). As is widely known, the leading members of the school, Theodor W. Adorno (1903–1969) and Max Horkheimer (1895–1973), reworked during the 1930s and the 1940s the theorisations of Kant and Hegel through Marxist critique and thereby accounted for the dialectical failure of the Enlightenment project in Europe and the US. The result of this failure was an extensive diffusion of instrumental thought that enabled the rise of totalitarian fascist and Nazi regimes in Europe as well as the economic exploitation of the lower class in capitalist societies. According to Adorno and Horkheimer, a key factor in producing this kind of ‘false consciousness’ was the distribution of information and entertainment by the mass media – a process called the culture industry in the Marxian terms of their theory. (Horkheimer and Adorno 1979 [1944]: 120–124, 144–145; Jay 1973: 216–218.)

The Frankfurt School transferred Marxian critique of capitalism to cultural and social theories as well as to psychology and studies on art. Since that, the focus in critical theorisations has been more on ‘superstructure’, for example on popular culture, arts, mass media and ideologies, than on their material base, capital, social classes or means of production.

After the Frankfurt school, it was perhaps the concept of ideology that inspired critical visual scholars most until the 1980s. One reason for the popularity of ideology theory was the rise of structuralism in the 1950s and 1960s, when Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009) applied Ferdinand de Saussure’s (1857–1913) structural linguistics to anthropology and considered culture as a system of communication (Lévi-Strauss 1969 [1958]: 67–69). Ideology could now be seen as ‘a missing link’ between the material base or structures and culture.
Critical visual scholars of the 1960s and the 1970s were especially inspired by French ‘semiologist’ Roland Barthes (1915–1980), whose famous book *Mythologies* (first part originally published in 1957) pursued Lévi-Straussian myth critique in analysing popular phenomena such as Hollywood film stars’ hairstyles and American wrestling shows as manifestations of contemporary myths. According to Barthes (1973: 123–124), the myth operates as “a second-grade sign-system”, and analysing myths means ‘denaturalising’ the ideological structures of society. Barthes was one of the first scholars who theorised explicitly the popular forms of images, especially the photographs, and became therefore one of the key figures in humanist visual studies (e.g. Barthes 1977a, 1983). However, his semiotic analyses have not been as essential for critical endeavours as his early myth critique and later turn to poststructural text theory in the 1970s.

Another important name of the 1970s was French philosopher Louis Althusser (1918–1990), who in turn considered the operation of ideology in the framework of psychoanalysis and construction of subjectivity. Althusser (2008 [1969]: 16–21) formulated in the late 1960s his famous conception of ‘ideological state apparatuses’, by which he meant church, education system and mass media, among others. According to Althusser, it is these ideological apparatuses, rather than repressive state apparatuses like the army and the police, which assimilate subjects into the capitalist order in late modern societies. Althusser applied Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis in explaining how we do not actually become aware of the ideology in progress because ideology hides itself as a ‘natural’ part of our identity formation. If one recalled Althusser’s famous phrase “ideology interpelates us as subjects” (*ibid.*: 44–50) and the Althusserian theory of ideology more broadly, then one could provide a fresh answer to the Frankfurtian question of how it was possible that the instrumental thought promoted by Nazis and fascists, or by oppressive capitalism, could become accepted among so many people and penetrated whole societies without large-scale resistance.

One of the most popular subjects of neo-Marxian structural and ideology critique of the 1970s visual studies was advertising, which was now explained as an ‘ideological apparatus’ producing consumerism and therefore ‘false consciousness’ that prevents people to be socially conscious and active citizens. Best-known examples of this approach were perhaps Wolfgang Fritz Haug’s (1986 [1972]) analysis of ‘commodity aesthetics’ and Judith Williamson’s (1978) combination of Barthesian myth critique and Althusserian theory of ideology in favour of ‘de-naturalising’ the ideological signification systems of advertisements.

At the same time, some film theorists adopted ideas from structuralism and Althusserian ideology theory and combined them with film semiotics and narratology. This approach came to be known as ‘Screen theory’ after the British
journal that published the most innovative theorisations of the new film theory (Lapsley and Westlake 1988: 10). Early Screen theory tried to explain the psychological processes of spectatorship with the term ‘cinematic apparatus’, based on the idea that film’s narrative structure could determine spectator’s identification to such an extent that her or his subjectivity is constructed over and over again while watching the film in the process of ‘interpellation’ (ibid.: 80–81, 95–96). This approach came therefore also to be known as ‘psycho-semiotics’. In this framework, British film theorist Laura Mulvey (1975) applied feminist critique to structural psycho-semiotics and argued that in classical Hollywood narratives the cinematic apparatus constructs a spectator-subject as male and an object of the male gaze as female. Mulvey’s theory was widely discussed in the late twentieth century, and its influence on contemporary feminist visual studies has been undeniable (see e.g. Mulvey 1989).

Marxian ideology critique was, however, challenged in the 1980s by the rise of visual culture studies, which was inherently connected to the spread of poststructuralism, postfeminism, cultural studies and to broadening the notion of visual culture from ‘fine art’ to different forms of commercial popular culture and the mass media. Cultural studies began to direct attention to positive dimensions of popular culture, active audiences and their signifying practices, which were now considered highly political in their nature (e.g. Fiske 1987, 1989). Yet, the turn happened gradually and was not complete.

Still in the 1970s, the members of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, for example, defined their task in Marxist terms as “developing theories of cultural and ideological formations within the broad framework of a Marxist problematic, without resorting either to economism or idealism” (Chambers et al. 1977: 109). Cultural scholars thus enthusiastically adopted the Marxist-based ideology theorisations, formulated, for example, by Althusser (2008 [1969]), and applied structuralism in explaining how culture reproduces social power relations. But during the 1980s, the cultural studies’ bridge to Marxist materialism began to tremble. The reason for this ‘great divide’ (cf. Murdock 1995) was the spread of French poststructural theory to the mainstream of cultural studies in accordance with postmodernism and ‘popular populism’.

On the one hand, the critique of poststructuralism was aimed against positivist empiricism, on the other hand, against Marxist materialism and structuralism (see Jenks 1995: 16; Mirzoeff 1999: 23–24). A good example of this change was Roland Barthes’ turn from structural semiotics to poststructural text theory, in which the meaning of the text was seen to originate in signifying practices of reading rather than in some fixed structures of language/society junction (Barthes 1977b).
Postmodern criticism also challenged structuralism and Marxian materialism – even though in some sense it continued the commentary on commodification of culture and society because it revealed the ultimate shallowness or lack of substance in ‘hyper-reality’, as Jean Baudrillard (1988) described society’s postmodern condition. However, in the postmodern perspective the commercial culture was not seen as a threat against the civic society, because there was thought to be no longer any confidence in ‘meta-narratives’ of enlightenment and modernism lurking behind its critique (Lyotard 1984). In postmodern critique, the whole idea of modern civic society was denounced as a myth because, according to postmodernists, there are no material structures or substance to which society could be reduced. Marxian materialism was thus seen as reductionism and also politically as too oppressive (Boyne and Rattansi 1990: 23–36). These authors believed that postmodern ways of living were constructed by diverse micro-narratives and the politics of identities and consumerism, not by some overall ideology of the capitalist order.

When poststructural and postmodern constructionism demonstrated that there is no longer any reliance on common or universal truths, the very basis of Marxian structuralism was eroded. This erosion allowed the revaluation of popular culture and its political meaning for ordinary people and everyday life (e.g. de Certeau 1984; Fiske 1989). ‘Popular’ was now seen as a battlefield of ‘identity politics’ and individual activities rather than as some oppressive ideological apparatus which reproduces social power structures. Popular culture turned from being the cause of ‘false consciousness’ into being the source of ‘empowering’ practices, for which reason this cultural approach has been condemned by critical-normative scholars as cultural populism (see McGuigan 1992).

The theory of postmodernism became popular simultaneously with the spread of commercial image production of television and video (e.g. Jameson 1998: 135; Mirzoeff 1999: 1–3). Postmodern theorisations supported therefore the so-called visualisation thesis, whereby cinema, television and, more recently, digital networks like the Internet have changed our environments profoundly by putting visual media into the very core of our individual ‘life-worlds’, and gave visual scholars an opportunity to achieve a higher profile in the academic realm. The changes in environments and theories were also called ‘the visual turn’ (see Mitchell 1994; Jay 2002: 267–268). It was this ‘turn’ that during the late 1980s and the early 1990s generated ‘new art history’, ‘visual media studies’ and ‘cultural studies on visual’ – approaches of contemporary visual studies as it is today often understood. The consequence of the ‘turn’ was therefore a whole new research
field of visual culture with the canon of established classics and increasing interests in textual analyses of all kinds of images (Walker and Chaplin 1997: 39–47).

In her answer to new art historian visual culture questionnaire in the mid-1990s, Susan Buck-Morss (1996) cited Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan and Walter Benjamin as ‘the top classics’ of the field. The first three were the key figures of French poststructuralism of the 1970s. Benjamin (1892–1940) was an associate member of the Frankfurt School in the 1930s, but he was ‘found again’ by cultural theorists of the 1970s and the 1980s. According to Buck-Morss, other central names of visual culture studies have been French philosophers Guy Debord, Jean Baudrillard and Gilles Deleuze as well as Anglo-American feminists like Laura Mulvey and Donna Haraway (ibid.). It is of course possible to list dozens of names which have been important for different sections of visual studies. However, James Elkins (2003: 32–33) concludes his discussion of the subject: “but it would not turn up anyone as fundamental and as often cited as Barthes, Benjamin, Foucault, Lacan, and two or three others. They are, effectively, the theoretical bases of visual culture.”

The canon of classics reveals the character of the criticism in contemporary visual studies. Its criticism has been solidly anchored to French theories of poststructuralism and postmodernism, in which the main argument is distrust of fixed truths, meanings, identities and ideologies of modern thought (see Jay 1993). Benjamin and early Foucault could be seen as ‘intervening’ thinkers between Marxian structuralism and poststructuralism or postmodernism, but even their thoughts have often been applied ‘genealogically’ to support the view of productiveness of power (Foucault) or potentialities in new reproduction technologies and their uses (Benjamin), rather than ‘archaeologically’ to reveal the structural distortions of social power.

Poststructuralism’s and postmodernism’s connection to visual culture has been highlighted by the fact that they prefer the visible to the substance in such that they actually do not believe in any deeper truth behind the visible surface. Their criticism has therefore been directed towards normative idealism of modernism and its reliance on Enlightenment and rational reason. John A. Walker and Sarah Chaplin (1997: 35–37) encapsulate the meaning of this kind of criticism for visual studies as an increasing self-reflexivity among visual scholars since the 1970s. The consequence of the self-reflexivity has been an explosion of theorisations and conceptions as well as textual analyses of visual culture in the beginning of the twenty-first century (e.g. Mirzoeff 1999; Rose 2001; Sturken and Cartwright 2001; Mitchell 2002; Bal 2003; Elkins 2003; Seppänen 2006).
2.2 Marxian materialism and visual studies

The crucial question in critical visual studies has been its relationship to Marxian tradition. Even though the poststructural and postmodern canon of visual approaches has operated as some sort of resignation from traditional Marxian structuralism, there has been a strong confidence that visual analysis could reveal ‘the shallowness of visual culture’ and therefore increase people’s social consciousness (cf. Elkins 2002: 97–98, 2003: 66–67). ‘Showing seeing’, or more precisely, “to awaken students to the wonders of visuality, practices of seeing the world and especially the seeing of other people” has been the main target in the teachings of visual culture (Mitchell 2002: 166). This kind of paradox between the rejection of substance and material reality and the confidence in the moral need for ‘opening people’s eyes’ to the emptiness of the postmodern culture or inequity of visual representations has been typical of critical visual scholars, who have adopted the Marxian utopia of ‘a better world’ but rejected the materialist world view.

An example of the ambiguity in critical visual studies has been the continuum of Guy Debord’s (1931–1994) materialist notion of ‘society of spectacle’ and Jean Baudrillard’s (1929–2007) postmodernist concept of ‘simulacrum’ repeated in visual culture textbooks as essential narratives of criticism (e.g. Mirzoeff 1999: 27–28; Sturken and Cartwright 2001: 164–165; Seppänen 2006: 33–44). In the 1960s, Debord was a leading figure of the French avant-garde movement called The Situationist International (L’Internationale Situationniste), whose background was in Marxian philosophy. In 1967, Debord (1994 [1967]) published his famous book *La société du spectacle*, in which he launched the notion of spectacle as a central concept of the contemporary condition of society.

In Debord’s thought, ‘the spectacle’ did not mean only images or visual culture but a large-scale development whereby societies, social relationships between people, and the whole life itself had become spectacle-like and genuine relationships to the material world and to other people had disappeared (Debord 1994 [1967]: 12). Visual scholars of the late twentieth century adopted eagerly Debord’s ideas because he used terms such as ‘spectacle’, ‘representation’ and ‘image’ in describing the consequences of late modern capitalism for the human condition. Hence, ‘the alienation’ or ‘false consciousness’ was in Debord’s theorisations described explicitly by visual metaphors. He therefore expanded Marx’s and the Frankfurt School’s critiques to visual culture by saying that “the spectacle is capital to such a degree of accumulation that it has become an image” (ibid.: 24).

Jean Baudrillard’s concept of ‘simulacrum’ was a further step in visual criticism. He postulated that, instead of living in a society of spectacle, we have moved to ‘the age of simulacrum’, in which no relation to any reality behind the images can be found. ‘The simulacrum’ was borrowed from Plato’s doctrine of ideas and
means ‘a copy without an original’. According to Baudrillard, we live in “a hyperreal culture of simulation”, in which reality is its own pure simulacrum (Baudrillard 1988: 166–170). As a form of criticism, the move from spectacle and, at the same time, from representation to the simulacrum meant a poststructural turn from Marxian materialism and structuralism to the postmodern distrust of substance and material (Seppänen 2006: 40–41). Both forms of criticism have been vital and overlapped in the canon of visual studies.

However, the new-born research field of visual culture was filled simultaneously with poststructural and postmodern theories, which seems to cause the same phrases and conceptions to repeat from analysis to analysis. There has been a danger that the concepts of simulacrum and spectacle may lose their critical potential in this kind of use and themselves turn into the shallow metaphors which they try to denaturalise.

Leaning on the spirit of Horkheimerian critical theory, Chris Jenks (1995: 10) reminds in one of the first readers of visual culture that

... much social and cultural theory also works in relation to ‘secondary data’ like official statistics or through textual analysis, the sources of which have already been used by other people for other purposes. And fine art, though not having ended with photography as Ruskin predicted, often finds inspiration through Coca-Cola cans, billboards, photography and the at-hand rather than ethereal. These sites of visual knowledge are the artefacts and cultural products of Benjamin’s ‘age of mechanical reproduction’ and the practical embodiment of Baudrillard’s ‘simulacra’.

According to Jenks, therefore, much of visual culture and its analyses too have been just a shallow surface of postmodern culture (industry) and signs of instrumental reason (ibid.: 13). According to Jenks and many others, the majority of visual studies have been more ‘administrative’ than ‘critical’ (cf. Lazarsfeld 1972 [1941]). What is needed, then, is more reflexivity (Jenks 1995: 12) and a ‘strategy’ for both artistic practice and its analysis to elude non-critical institutionalisation of visual culture (ibid.: 23). The problem is that this ‘new self-reflexivity’ has too often lost its connection to ‘the real world’ and its power structures.

2.3 Case study of two journals

I proved whether Jenks’s postulate about non-criticism and non-reflexivity of visual analysis was true in the beginning of the twenty-first century by using a small-scale content analysis of two academic journals of visual studies, namely, Journal of Visual Culture and Visual Studies (see Herkman 2010). The data for the content
analysis consisted of 216 academic research articles and essays published in *Journal of Visual Culture* and *Visual Studies* between 2002 and 2008. The precise research questions asked in the content analysis were: (1) Of the academic articles, which could be classified as 'critical'? (2) What kind of critique was favoured in those articles classified as critical?

There is no point in going deeper in the details of the content analysis here. As an overall result, however, it can be said that, in all, Jenks's concern about the lack of criticism in visual studies turned out some years later to have been unwarranted. Even if a little less than half of the articles (44%) could be classified as 'non-critical', focusing mostly on empirical analysis or questions of aesthetics, visual techniques or perception, the number of critical approaches was significant: more than half of all 216 articles could be classified as having some sort of critical perspective. However, Jenks seems to have been right in his view of the minor role of traditional Marxian critical theory among visual studies. Only 11 of all the articles could be classified as clear representatives of Marxian structuralism or the Frankfurt School's critical theory.

The analysis demonstrated that the criticism of visual studies in *Journal of Visual Culture* has been highly reflexive, but the subject of its criticism has been the research field of visual culture and its concepts itself rather than 'the reality of visual culture'. It seems that, in postmodern and poststructural traditions, the critics have been more interested in theorisations themselves than in any 'real' research subject, such as visual culture as material reality or as a medium of social usage. In this, *Journal of Visual Culture* differed significantly from *Visual Studies*, which has been much more interested in 'visual reality'. The emphasis in *Visual Studies* was on empirical analyses of visual environments, and even though there also appeared theoretical discussions on the disciplinary identities, the number of these discussions was remarkably less than in *Journal of Visual Culture*.

The difference can be explained by the longer history of *Visual Studies* and by its background in social sciences. *Visual Studies* was first being published as *Visual Sociology Review* (1986–1990) and after that as *Visual Sociology* (1991–2001). The tradition of visual sociology as an autonomous research field is long, and the commitment to empirical sociology and anthropology did not promote the ongoing debates on disciplinary self-estimation in *Visual Studies*. Respectively, *Journal of Visual Culture* was established as a forum for the fresh research field of humanist visual culture studies in 2002. Its commitment to the twentieth century's cultural theory led to large scale reflexive theorisations which aimed to legitimise the institutional status of visual culture as a new research field. This, in turn, bound its studies to poststructural criticism, where empirical reality was not such an interesting research subject. However, the number of empirical analyses increased
and the number of self-reflexive theorisations decreased also in *Journal of Visual Culture* towards the end of the sample period.

A good example of the differences between the journals was the fact that many articles of *Visual Studies* considered themes like social class, labour or ethnic groups with no or only minor explicit references to critical theory. If there were such references, they were often pragmatic or pedagogical. In *Journal of Visual Culture*, there appeared just a few articles on themes described above but many more articles on theorising poststructural criticism itself and its relationship to ‘material reality’. However, *Visual Sociology* changed its title to *Visual Studies* in 2002, the very same year that *Journal of Visual Culture* was launched, which also reflects the overall challenge the poststructural turn evoked for humanist and social scientific visual studies. The move from ‘research’ to ‘studies’ has indicated the ideological change of this turn in general.

According to my analysis, it is possible to conclude that there is no unanimous view on critical forms of contemporary visual studies because of the differences in the traditions of the approaches and disciplines in which visual studies is carried out (cf. Barnhurst et al. 2004). However, it seems evident that Marxian structuralism and traditional Frankfurtian critical theory have been almost completely marginalised as explicit forms of criticism and that they have been replaced by poststructural and postmodern self-reflexivity or pure empiricism in the early twenty-first century’s visual studies. Nevertheless, there were some signals of the rise of a new kind of materialist criticism – often connected to post-colonial criticism – towards the end of the sample period (e.g. Tang 2007; Hsu 2008).

### 2.4 Critical visual studies revisited

According to my analysis, empirical visual studies might be in danger of being ‘administrative’ research without self-reflexivity or connection to critical theory, whereby visual scholars will not be sufficiently aware of their engagement to presuppositions of the ‘naturalness’ or ‘universality’ of their research. Because of the protracted descent of Marxian materialism and structuralism in humanities and social sciences, the origins of critical theory have often been ignored or resisted on purpose. It can thus be argued that visual sociologists, for example, should again be more interested in their roles as critical scholars and in theorisations of power than pure empirical analyses.

However, as more problematic than this kind of ‘empiricism’ appears the dominance of poststructural criticism, promoted in my content analysis more by *Journal of Visual Culture* than by *Visual Studies*. There is a danger that this form of criticism will, if it has not already, turn itself to ‘a spectacle’ or ‘a simulacrum’
which actually does not have much to say about anything other than self-definition of visual studies and its disciplinary identity work. What worries me, then, in contemporary visual studies is the large-scale ignorance of other forms of criticism than poststructuralism and self-reflexive meta-theorisations.

It was surprising, for example, how little room there was for traditional Marxian structuralism or critical theory in the analysed academic articles. In practice, this has meant rejection of material reality as a starting point, and concentration on constructivist and relative forms of criticism. According to Martin Jay (2002:276), there is no reason for this kind of bias: “Now that the tide of cultural studies is beginning to recede a bit and the limits of radical culturalism are becoming increasingly apparent, relativism no longer seems as inevitable an implication of the abandonment of transcendental naturalism.”

The lack of ‘the material’ or ‘the social’ as empirical facts has been explicit in poststructural analyses of the visual, even though there has been a lot of discussion on these subjects. The disparity between articles and textbooks, the latter referring recurrently to Marx, the Frankfurt School and Debord, is distinct. It has been dangerous to subscribe to materialism without being condemned as an essentialist, a naturalist or something else as horrible. W. J. T. Mitchell (2002:171) has called this bias ‘the fallacy of overcoming naturalistic fallacy’ or ‘the naturalistic fallacy fallacy’. But as there is no question that one can find physiological, psychological and social dimensions of sight (e.g. Messaris 1994; Jay 2002), there are also possibilities to anchor the criticism, if not in universal, at least in material bases of power relations or in some other, more ‘realistic’ perspectives.

It looks like humanist scholars of visual culture have been very interested in the conceptions of the new research field but too little interested in the actual visual world around them. Visual culture as a research field has itself become “an object or a target of study” (Mitchell 2002:166), whereby the dominant form of criticism has been self-reflexive poststructuralism. This kind of criticism cannot be considered as ‘empowering’ or ‘radical’ for anyone other than the scholars themselves, which might also be important within academic power struggles. But if the main task of visual studies is ‘showing seeing’ (ibid.), one has to ask: for whose and what purposes are we shown to see? As W. J. T. Mitchell (2002:169) puts it:

My sense is that visual studies is not quite as dangerous as it has been made out to be (as, for instance, a training ground to prepare subjects for the next phase of global capitalism) but that its own defenders have not been especially adroit in questioning the assumptions and impact of their own emergent field either.

The problem in disciplinary identity work is that its definitions can be, for several reasons having to do with academic competition or disciplinary politics, too
rigorous or exclusive. There have certainly occurred remarkable changes in our environments during the last few decades, and some of them have to do with the new media forms of visual culture. However, the visualisation thesis and, related to it, the demands of the so-called visual literacy can often be placed on academic power struggles in which visual scholars dispute their discipline after the so-called ‘linguistic turn’ of the late twentieth century and the consequent dominance of langue-based discourse and textual analyses among the humanities and social sciences. It is therefore worth asking what is meant by visual literacy and how it really differs from visual perception and other ‘literacies’ (see Messaris 1994; Elkins 2003: 125nn; Seppänen 2006: 91–94).

Today’s media culture is loaded with all kinds of media texts, and better than by visualisation, the era can probably be described by the concept of mediatisation – “the process whereby media increasingly come to saturate society, culture, identities and everyday life” (Fornäs 1995: 1; see also Thompson 1990). Today, various forms of textual, visual, verbal and aural communication live together and overlap, and none of them dominates the others. That is why the political of visual culture cannot often be found by analysing only images themselves but rather by analysing images as material objects which have been produced and used in relation to other forms of communication as well as in connection to social and economic conjuncture.

Critical visual studies has itself become a kind of spectacle with a loose relationship to material and social reality other than academy itself. Its critique has been closer to Platonian and Kantian metaphysics with a strong reliance on immanent self-reflexivity than to Marxian materialism focusing on real power relationships between different institutions or agencies of society. As a critical form of thinking, these theorisations have not proven to be very productive. Thus, what is needed, to my mind, are more serious attempts to empirically analyse the role of visual culture in actual power struggles of various kinds, as well as more realistic theorisations which do not take Vulgar Marxian presuppositions as such or avoid normative conceptions based on real inequalities in contemporary visual culture and societies. These kinds of critical approaches can, and should, in turn themselves become subjects of critical evaluation.

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CHAPTER 3

The map, the mirror and the simulacrum

Visual communication and the question of power

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This article identifies the three metaphors of mirror, map and simulacrum as central for the political discourse in visual communication: images designated as mirrors, such as documentaries, convince because they seem to reflect reality. Images designated as maps, such as advertisements, convince because they imply that they tell their observers something worth knowing. Poststructuralist criticism has deconstructed both the persuasion of mimesis and the persuasion of tellability. Kukkonen thus suggests reconsidering the rhetorical strategies of the mirror and the map when discussing the role of images in political discourse.

In that Empire, the Art of Cartography attained such Perfection that … the Cartographer’s Guilds struck a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it. The following Generations, who were not so fond of the Study of Cartography as their Forebears had been, saw that that vast Map was Useless. (Borges 1998:325)

Jorge Luis Borges’ parable tells of a guild of cartographers who create a map that is ultimately precise but ultimately useless: it reproduces every detail of the territory like a mirror and thus cannot provide the simplifications and aggregates which make a map a helpful device for orientation. Of course, the 1:1 scale map is more accurate, but if I were lost somewhere in Finnish Lapland, I would prefer a map with a much smaller scale, which represents roads as lines and the towns as dots, for finding my way back home. If Borges’ cartographers had decided to modify this mirror, and thus the official representation of reality, they would have produced a simulacrum (see Baudrillard 1981:9ff. for his own take on the parable).

From this parable of Borges’, three central ways of representation in visual communication can be deduced: the image as a mirror of reality, the image as a map of reality and the image as a simulacrum which only seems to reproduce
reality but ultimately hides it. These three metaphors describe possible ways to understand the relationship between image and reality in visual communication. Images are put to work in visual communication as relays between sender and audience. They are used for different persuasive strategies in media discourse and, as we shall see in this article, these persuasive strategies correspond to the metaphors for image representation: presented as a mirror of reality in documentaries or newscasts, the image persuades through its mimesis. Presented as a map of reality in advertisements, propaganda or fiction, the image persuades through its tellability. With the image as a map, reality has been structured in order to provide clues for helpful or pleasurable orientation. As a simulacrum of reality, the image attempts to persuade through its mimesis, even though it does not actually correspond to reality. In showing up this attempt through presenting the image as a simulacrum, its persuasive powers are shattered.

The relationship of image and reality thus relates directly to its persuasive strategy in visual communication. As critical media analysis began to unmask these persuasive strategies, it denied the image truthfulness and legitimacy and conceptualised it as a tool which ‘interpellates’ its recipients into an ‘ideological state apparatus’. I am using Althusser’s terminology from his essay on “Ideology” quite consciously here because it is similar to much of postmodern thinking. Postmodern thinkers such as Baudrillard and Barthes made important contributions to the way we think about images in political and media discourse. They have provided a much-needed and timely critique of the implicit uses of images as ideology; however, their highly sceptical stance towards the persuasive use of images has also discredited the image as a communicative tool. If any image persuasive of its tellability becomes an example of ideological interpellation and if any image persuasive of its mimesis becomes an example of a successful simulacrum, then images have no legitimate role in the political discourse of late modern societies. Postmodern thinking, because of its very scepticism, has difficulties making a productive contribution to political discourse, and if we want to conceptualise the productive use of images in late modern societies, we need to come to more positive terms for images.

1. Ernst Gombrich (1982) discusses the mirror and the map as modes of visual representation in “Mirror and map: Theories of pictorial representation”. Gombrich’s account, however, emerges from his dispute with J. J. Gibson on the nature of perception and pays little attention to the uses of mirror and map as social strategies in visual communication, which forms the point of departure for my treatment of these metaphors.

In the following, I will develop the metaphors of the mirror and the map as suggestions for such ‘positive terms’. The mirror, the map and the simulacrum are three conceptualisations of images which allow us to talk about the role of images in political discourse and its negotiation of power in society without being paralysed by their possible ideological abuses. The postmodern contribution to our critical thinking is crucial in that it makes us aware of ideological apparatuses, modern myths and the mediatisation of our lifeworld. This awareness, however, should not make us withdraw from the negotiation of values in society that is political discourse, nor should it merely condemn it, but rather provide the basis for an informed and productive participation.

My examples for images as mirror, as map and as simulacrum are drawn from TV newscasts, fine art, music video clips and advertisements. I am thus talking about ‘images’ in the very broad sense of images and image artefacts as tools of visual communication, be they in mono-modal media like Renaissance paintings or in multi-modal media like presidential campaign ads or music video clips. My discussion focuses on the visual element of these image artefacts and only occasionally refers to the verbal or musical elements.

3.1 Visual communication

Even though the word use in academic discourse on images suggests otherwise, images do not actually have agency (see Matteo Stocchetti’s contribution to this volume). An image does not ‘convince’ you that something is the truth, nor does it ‘make’ you buy something or ‘make’ you vote for someone. So why am I talking of an image’s persuasion of mimesis and tellability? Admittedly, I indulge in using the active voice throughout when talking about the effects images have on their beholders, but from the perspective of images being tools in visual communication, this makes good sense.

Visual communication is communication by proxy. The sender and the receiver do not have a direct, reciprocal relationship. Images are the proxies through which communication takes place in media discourse. They are the point of contact between sender and receiver, and they are usually the only element in which the sender’s intention is manifested for the recipients. As we make sense of an image in visual communication, we instinctively inscribe the sender’s intention into it. Of course, we have no possibility to be absolutely certain of the sender’s intention, as poststructuralist criticism has made clear for the discourse of literature (see Barthes’ essay “The death of the author” or Foucault’s “The author function”). However, in order to make sense of the message, recipients still infer the speaker’s intention from the clues in the message, from its paratextual markers, such as its
identification with a genre or earlier texts, and its pragmatic context, for example, on which channel and at what time the image is presented. The image thus seemingly stores the agency of the speaker in itself. During the reading process, this agency is reconstructed from textual clues, paratextual markers and pragmatic contexts. As these elements begin to interact, an image can persuade its receivers of its mimesis or it can fail to do so; it can convince its audience of its tellability, i.e. that it is worth looking at, or it can fail to do so. The visual communication of contemporary media is, despite its many feedback loops of internet formats and viewer call-ins, largely indirect. The agency of the speaker is relayed to the image which mediates and it gets reconstructed in the reception process. In the terms of this understanding of visual communication, we can talk of an image’s persuasion of mimesis or tellability.

Yet, what exactly is an image’s persuasion of mimesis and what is an image’s persuasion of tellability? Put succinctly, persuasion of mimesis means that the clues, paratextual markers and pragmatic contexts of the image claim that it is truthful. Newscasts claim to be truthful through attributes like ‘live’ broadcasting or the presenter standing on location. The medium of the photographed image in film, which is a chemical reaction and not the human act of drawing or painting, also supports the persuasion of mimesis. The persuasion of tellability means that the clues, paratextual markers and pragmatic contexts of the image claim that it is worth looking at. Advertisements are a prime example of such persuasion of tellability: they demand attention through loud colours and big letters, what they have to tell is clear and to the point, and they provide gratification through catchy phrases, pleasant images and flattering promises.

In visual communication, senders use these strategies of persuasion consciously or unconsciously in creating their images and mediating them in a particular context. Receivers of the image reconstruct the textual elements of persuasion while reading the image, and thus the image’s persuasion of mimesis and tellability becomes actualised in the minds of receivers. This process is largely unconscious and only its outcome in judgements like ‘this is boring’ or ‘that cannot be true’ and actions like changing the channel is conscious.

Postmodern thinking brings the rhetorical nature of visual communication to the fore and works against this unconscious and automatic persuasion of images, also called their ‘naturalisation’. Roland Barthes, for example, unmask the workings of connotation in images in his essay “The rhetoric of the image” and his collection Mythologies. Connotation is the cultural meaning of an image as opposed to its denotative or analogical meaning. On the cover of Paris Match, Barthes singles out a black French soldier saluting the tricolore. “I see very well what that signifies to me,” he writes, “that France is a great Empire, that all her sons, without any colour discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that
there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this Negro in serving his so-called oppressors” (116). Such connotative or cultural meaning is to a large degree ‘naturalised’ (129), i.e. receivers are not aware of the reception process it is part of and which Barthes explicates here. Barthes not only describes the rhetorical effects the image has on its participants and thus exposes the image’s persuasion of tellability, but identifies connotative meaning as part of a second order semiotic system, a bourgeois ideology (142ff.). Barthes makes a very similar argument to that of Althusser here: the modern myth, the image’s tellability framed in an ideological apparatus, is addressed to the subject and the subject is “subjected to its intentional force” (Barthes: 124). And Althusser also describes how the interpellation of material elements of ideology (among which we can count the image) transforms individuals into subjects of the ideological state apparatus (1971: 168ff.). The image has ‘intentional force’ which subjugates its recipients and relegates them to the state of subjects of a hegemonic ideological system. The persuasion of tellability of the image in visual communication becomes understood as a force of oppression. Roland Barthes’ sharp analysis of the workings of images and their connotative meaning in visual communication, which is part of his crucible against bourgeois complacency and ideology, brought the image’s persuasion of tellability in discredit.

The image’s persuasion of mimesis, only indirectly addressed in Barthes’ Mythologies, has been tackled head-on by Jean Baudrillard in his Simulacres et Simulations. Baudrillard states that images are not preceded by reality, but that our notion of reality has images as its precedent (“précession des simulacres” 1981: 10). Reality as we know it is constructed from our memory of images and thus does not offer any ground on which to claim truthfulness. If images are presented as mirrors and operate on the persuasion of their mimesis, this is nothing but an ideological move to entrap the recipients even deeper in the simulacrum. For Baudrillard, the persuasion of mimesis in visual communication does not have any credibility. What recipients understand to be the signals of a mimetic, documentary image, such as grainy pictures, uncouth editing or oblique angles, has been compromised as conventions of mimesis. As film-makers use them in ‘mockumentaries’ or in rendering realistic footage in fiction films, the mimetic persuasion of these textual clues does not work anymore. Baudrillard raises our awareness that images are not preceded by reality, but that in turn the reality against which the image is compared might well be made up of nothing but other images and, through this, the persuasion of mimesis has lost its credibility.

With the image’s basic strategies of persuasion compromised by postmodern thinking, its role in visual communication and political discourse is in question and its very power lies in shatters.
3.2 The mirror and the map: Persuasion of mimesis and tellability

After tracing the postmodern deconstruction of the image as mirror and the image as map, I would now like to explore how these strategies are at work in visual communication, i.e. how they put images to use. The image as mirror supposes an unbiased reflection of reality. The chemical process of photography and film and the electronic process of TV broadcasting seem to allow for perfect mirror images and accommodate for the desire for immediateness, thus persuading their audience of their mimesis. Paradoxically, the live broadcast seems the most successful at the mimetic persuasion of the image as mirror, even though the instances of its mediation and agency are more present than in the pre-recorded show. Grainy images, small mistakes and rough editing imply that the filming was not carefully planned and constructed but executed ad hoc and that only little post-production was implemented. With this, the role of the filmmaker as a creative human being, who intervenes in the chemical mimesis of photography and the electronic mimesis of the live broadcast, is downplayed. Instead of revealing agency, the small mistakes, rough editing and uneven filming of the live broadcast have become the central textual clues of the documentary image. Media, especially in the field of newscasting and documentary, base much of their truth claim on the status of their images as mirrors.

The image as map, on the other hand, implies a constructed and controlled representation of reality. The image is composed to please and excite, its important elements are highlighted for easy orientation and it wants to be perceived as tellable, i.e. worth the recipient's time and attention. Be it the painted image in an art gallery, on a church wall or in a comic, or the photographic image of the advertisement or of political propaganda, the image as map employs visual rhetoric in order to convey a certain meaning which is based on social and cultural conventions. Through techniques of visual rhetoric like composition, iconography or the eventfulness of the ‘pregnant moment’, the relevant meaning of the image is highlighted. A quite clear example is the iconography of the portraits of rulers. The Rainbow Portrait of Elizabeth I of England (by Isaac Oliver, c. 1600) is certainly no mirror image of the looks of the then 67-year-old queen. Instead, it points towards her wisdom (the snake on her sleeve), her virginity (the pearls) and her exposed position to the scrutiny of the public (the eyes and ears on her dress). These iconographical references highlight information the painter deemed relevant about his queen. Of course, Oliver’s Rainbow Portrait is part of the larger ideological system of Elizabethan England, in which Elizabeth I is presented as the ageless ruler who guarantees the country’s peace and prosperity. Hence the rainbow, symbol of peace, and the inscription non sine sole iris (‘there is no rainbow without the sun’, i.e. the ruler). However, the tellability of this image is not
tied to its ideological interpellation: beholders might just as well disagree about the iconographical implications, simply use it as a pleasant game of ‘spot the reference’ or enjoy its aesthetic effects.

In order to be tellable, the complexity of reality is reduced to a map in which only the relevant information is retained and retained in a way which might not bear much direct resemblance to reality. On a map, the towns can be red spots and the roads black lines; the relevant information is their respective location. The *Rainbow Portrait* might be a completely unrealistic depiction of Elizabeth I; the relevant information is encoded in the iconography. Images as maps highlight such important information with the aim of communicating their message more effectively.

A John McCain advertisement from the 2008 US presidential campaign is a case in point here. The advertisement compares Barack Obama to Paris Hilton and works with the rhetorical device of metaphor: Barack Obama is like Paris Hilton in that he seeks media attention. When the clip extends the metaphor, its makers imply that Obama has the same competence in politics as Hilton. The visual information in this clip is reduced and geared to convey the relevant meaning: images of the smiling and celebrated Barack Obama are combined with an image of Paris Hilton and then juxtaposed with bullet point style information about Obama’s seemingly unsound energy politics. Images as maps often imply a prescription of action for the viewer, especially in political propaganda (‘vote for X’) and advertisement (‘buy X’). However, the persuasion of tellability in images is rarely as hegemonic and all-powerful as Barthes’ or Althusser’s arguments imply. In the case of McCain’s campaign advertisement, Paris Hilton answered with a clip of her own which was distributed over the internet. In it, she intentionally misreads McCain’s comparison of her to Barack Obama as the Republican’s endorsement of a possible candidacy for the White House of her own.

Images as maps aim to persuade the audience of their tellability. They want viewers to know that their message is worth their time. For this, they demand attention, simplify the information and its relation to reality and present it in an aesthetically pleasing way. The truthfulness of the image is only a secondary consideration. However, the dimensions of mimesis and tellability overlap as newscasts on TV and the internet want to gain the attention of their audience and to convey their information most efficiently, and as advertisers certainly do not want their product advertisements to be perceived as untruthful. Indeed, the photographic footage of the newscast is usually edited for tellability. However, the persuasion of mimesis is still dominant in these images and only complemented by a claim of tellability. Advertisements often feature scientific test results on the efficiency or quality of the product and thus supplement their persuasion of tellability by an appeal to mimetic truthfulness.
3.3 The simulacrum: “I’m afraid of mimetic persuasion”

The music video of David Bowie’s song “I’m afraid of Americans”, directed by Dom and Nic (1998), is an image artefact which reflects a basic scepticism of the visual persuasions of mimesis. In the video, we see the singer walk down a New York street. As he walks along, he thinks he sees people with guns in their hands, threatening each other and committing random acts of violence. He also feels pursued by a young man (Nine Inch Nails front-man Trent Reznor) whom he encounters on the road, whom he sees as his taxi driver and as the Jesus actor of a Day of the Dead parade, carrying the cross. As viewers, we never know if the passers-by are really attacking each other or if Bowie is just imagining it. The opening shot of each of these sequences shows a person making the movements of emptying a gun and experiencing the recoil. This is followed by a reaction shot of Bowie who is shocked to see such violence in the streets. A third shot then shows the apparent shooter without any weapon in his/her hand or aggression in his/her face being surprised at Bowie’s reaction. The recency effect in reading makes readers assume that the last version of the story to be told is the true one (see Sternberg). Applied to the music video, this would imply that Bowie is imagining things. On the other hand, the video begins with a point of view shot from Bowie’s perspective, and viewers are encouraged to identify with Bowie as the first person narrator of the events. This perspective makes viewers assume that Bowie actually perceives the attacks. None of the possible mimetic explanations of the situation, which would be (a) Bowie is paranoid and only imagines the events or (b) the events actually happen and Bowie perceives them, can be confirmed. The mimetic persuasion of this image artefact is thus constantly avoided.

Presenting the image as a simulacrum means unveiling its attempts at mimetic persuasion and thus discrediting them. The music video for “I’m Afraid of Americans” achieves such a discrediting of mimetic persuasion in two respects: it avoids to identify any of the perspectives it offers as the truthful one and it draws heavily on mediated images of the US for rendering its setting. The image as simulacrum replaces reality with the ‘hyperreal’ (Baudrillard 1981: 11). The hyperreal is the space which is made up of communicated content. It has lost all anchoring in reality and is not kept together by a specific imagination, as is fiction (Baudrillard 1981: 11). In fact, Baudrillard’s notion of the simulacrum is a conceptualisation of the Catch-22 of mediated meaning-making: the audience constructs meaning from media, which is in turn inevitably constructed and presented, while at the same time media experience (and not reality) is already the context against which this meaning is constructed. What Baudrillard calls the ‘tautological’ nature of the communicative act is the reason why media seem to provide truth status themselves. The audience is used to the fact that the newscast tells the relevant and
truthful news. Therefore it constructs as relevant and truthful news what it sees on TV, mostly in the conventions of the documentary image. The individual instance and the general context begin to reinforce each other’s truth claim.

In the case of the music video for “I’m afraid of Americans”, all the instances Bowie perceives are closely tied to the mediated perception of US culture. The US is perceived as a place of random street violence involving guns and of religious devotion, just as Bowie sees people shooting on the street and Reznor carrying the cross in the Day of the Dead parade. The video refers to other texts which have shaped such a perception of the US like Martin Scorsese’s *Taxi Driver* (1976) and Sam Peckinpah’s *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967). It is this intertextual version of US culture which informs Bowie’s perception of the events in the video. The persuasion of mimesis does not refer to reality but to this simulacrum of reality in “I’m afraid of Americans”. The video both questions the truthfulness of Bowie’s perceptions through its juxtaposition of different realities, rendered in different diegetic strategies like recency effects and first person narration, and through its heavy reliance on images from other texts. The processes of mimetic persuasion in visual communication are revealed, and the image is exposed as a simulacrum.

The image as simulacrum relies on the persuasion of mimesis, yet it is not mimetic of reality but rather of an already mediated version of reality. It draws on conventions of visual communication, like the mockumentary employing grainy image material, rough editing and small mistakes, and on previous texts which have shaped the cultural memory of the audience. Postmodern thinking, especially Baudrillard’s account of the simulacrum, has highlighted that the mimetic persuasion of images only refers to other images, a mediated version of reality, but not reality.

For Baudrillard, this loss of reality is dangerous, and in his book *The Gulf War Didn’t Take Place* he claims that the media coverage of the Gulf War essentially shapes the audience’s perception of the war, more specifically the perception that the events were part of a war and not merely acts of violence. However, if all images are compromised a priori as untruthful, because they can only mimetically persuade of their correspondence to the hyperreal, then all visual communication becomes fencing in a hall of mirrors.

### 3.4 Map, mirror, simulacrum and the question of power

Postmodern thinking exposed the persuasive strategies of images and thus discredited images as tools in political discourse. If the image’s persuasion of tellability relies on its naturalisation of connotative meaning and its interpellation of the subject into an ideological apparatus, as Barthes (and Althusser) claim, then the
image is a tool of indoctrination and has no legitimate use in political discourse. If the image’s persuasion of mimesis relies on its correspondence with mediated reality rather than actual reality, as Baudrillard claims, then such images only entangle their recipients further in the simulacrum and have no credibility as tools in rational political discourse. In both cases, images as tools in visual communication constitute an abuse of power.

Max Weber defines power as being in the position to “carry out one’s will” (1976:28). In order to get into this position, in order to gain power, one needs to have support from other members of the community. For this, one needs to persuade the other members of the community, and images are viable tools in attempts at such persuasion. Such power not only involves persuasion but also hegemony, as being in the position to carry out one’s will implies that someone else is not. In a larger frame, we can understand power as the control over values in society (see Norton 2003), and then visual communication is the place where the negotiation over such control is carried out. Power in visual communication belongs to whoever can persuade their audience, both in terms of mimesis and tellability, better than their competitors. The TV channel which offers the most immediate news, and thus persuades in terms of mimesis, has an edge over its competitors. The advertisement which gets most attention and can persuade the audience that it is worth this attention in terms of tellability makes more people buy the product than its competitors. In visual communication, a sender can gain power by succeeding to persuade the audience in terms of mimesis and tellability of his or her image.

Postmodern thinking has discredited such rhetorical attempts to persuade the audience as insincere and ideological. Tellability becomes indoctrination, mimesis becomes incarceration in the simulacrum. Any attempt to enter the negotiation for power in society has to be highly reflected for it not to be discredited by postmodern scepticism. However, once an argument is highly reflected, it loses much of its persuasive powers and thus limits one’s chances of success in the debate over society’s values. Scepticism is powerful because it can deconstruct almost anything as false tellability or false mimesis, yet it cannot provide a viable alternative since its very scepticism hampers its own persuasion. Presenting the image as simulacrum is one of the most effective moves a sender can make in the negotiation of social values because it evaporates the persuasion of the rival image; however, it also creates a vacuum of power if no alternative image is offered. This alternative image is of course just as much subject to deconstruction as simulacrum as the previous image. The image as simulacrum thus rather disrupts than engages in the political negotiation of values in society.
3.5 Conclusions

Postmodern thinkers like Barthes and Baudrillard have shown how power in visual communication is connected to the image’s persuasion of mimesis and tellability. However, they framed their argument in largely negative terms: images seem reduced to mere reflections of ideological apparatuses, hegemonic power structures and prison houses of simulacra. Their scepticism exposed the image’s persuasion of mimesis as being not a mirror but a simulacrum, and it exposed the image’s persuasion of tellability as being a map which does not let you choose your own direction anymore. Postmodern thinking shows that images are highly powerful, but it takes away both the epistemic and moral grounds on which images can be used in the political negotiation of values in society.

From this point of view, the thoughts of Barthes and Baudrillard are not simply decades-old theory but reflections of the larger social structures today – what Zygmunt Bauman describes as ‘liquid modernity’ and Ulrich Beck as ‘risk society’. The scepticism and deconstruction which underlie the criticism of Barthes and Baudrillard come to the fore in the disengagement of political debate and the profound insecurity felt in today’s world. As Bauman (2004:125) puts it:

[...] the learned classes have not made the journey [into resignation and indifference] alone. They travelled together with a lot of company: together with increasingly extraterritorial economic powers, with a society increasingly engaging its members in their role of consumers rather than producers, and with increasingly fluid, ‘liquidised’, ‘deregulated’ modernity.

The strategies of representation, or rather their discrediting, which we find in postmodern criticism reflect larger political changes, and the mirror, the map and the simulacrum are therefore highly relevant for considering visual communication and questions of power today.

In the limited frame of this article, I want to suggest images as mirrors with their mimetic persuasion and images as maps with their persuasion of tellability as strategies of visual communication which are potentially more productive than postmodern scepticism. While the image’s persuasion of tellability is certainly connected to larger ideological structures, its interpellation is not always successful and the persuasion of tellability of a rival image in political discourse might be stronger. Images are part of our lifeworld, which holds our cultural memory, the symbolic order of our society, but also our physical existence. It is this lifeworld which informs the image’s persuasion of mimesis and not its correspondence to actual reality, whatever that may be.
Within the negotiation of values in society, all three image metaphors are viable strategies to attain a position of power: the image as mirror persuades through its claim to mimesis, the image as map persuades through its claim to tellability, the image as simulacrum discredits other images through its profound scepticism. While the image as simulacrum is an efficient rhetorical strategy for discrediting other arguments, it needs to be followed by a productive argument in order to offer an alternative which can actually attain a position of power itself in the debate. This new argument will have to be framed either in a persuasion of mimesis or a persuasion of tellability.

Borges’ cartographers saw that the 1:1 scale map was ‘useless’ because a mirror does not fulfil the functions of a map. Baudrillard, in turn, declares Borges’ fable ‘not usable’ (‘inutilisable’ 1981: 10) because, other than the 1:1 map, a simulacrum has no referential connection to reality anymore. In fact, all these approaches – mirror, map and simulacrum – are useful because they reflect the different approaches to visual representation and the different persuasive strategies that accompany them in the negotiation of values in late modern society through visual communication.

References


Image artefacts

CHAPTER 4

Disenchantment with politics and the salience of images

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Iconic images are often used to reduce complex political questions into simple divisions which ultimately exclude alternative voices and preserve hegemonic ideology. This chapter discusses fundamental questions concerning the role of images in public’s view of politics and, in particular, three tendencies associated to the current visual turn: the fictionalisation of politics, the politicisation of fiction; and the glocalisation of hegemonic political values.

The focus is here on the use of images and TV soaps in the discursive construction of political events. The main argument is that visual representations of the political such as The West Wing or similar reinforce public’s disenchantment for politics and politicians, fostering depoliticisation and ultimately the ‘democratic deficit’ in Western politics.

4.1 The ‘visual turn’

In an era when it is argued few pursue political information, the blending of politics and popular culture becomes an important source of political knowledge. (Lilleker 2006:9)

Politics is a struggle to impose the legitimate principle of vision and division, in other words, the one that is dominant and recognized as deserving to dominate, that is to say, charged with symbolic violence. (Bourdieu 2005:39)

The two quotes above summarise some salient aspects of current politics: politics depends on the media as do the media on politics and the – frequently carefully selected and censored – information conveyed by politicians. Politicians have to be ‘media personalities’ to be successful; the boundaries between various professions, between politics and pop culture, between politicians and celebrities are blurred. Traditional dichotomies do not grasp postmodern realities adequately, the ‘principle of vision and division’ (Bourdieu) is challenged throughout. This
chapter, while drawing on recent literature, discusses the current role(s) of images in use in the discursive construction of political events on ‘the frontstage’ and everyday politics on the ‘backstage’, and the various potential implications of visual media representations on the public’s opinions about politics and politicians, frequently labelled as ‘democracy deficit’. Indeed, current debates stress the assumed transformation of discourses and performances of political action and their representation in contemporary Europe and across the globe: books on nationally and internationally famous politicians (like Berlusconi, Blair, Haider, Merkel, Rasmussen, Sarkozy – or Obama and Palin) try to come to terms with the emergence of celebrity culture in the political field. At the same time, analyses of the new managerialism of politics point to the growing interdependence of global business and national politics (Chouliaraki and Morsing 2010). The ‘commodification of politics’, connected with a focus on life-style and televised performances and a reduction of an overly complex world to political personalities and their perceived power have become elements of everyday life (Mancini 2010). Studies of political apathy and the death of regular politics (Hay 2007) are found alongside narratives of political extremism and the rise of populist parties in many parts of Europe.

One such narrative is the so-called ‘Berlusconisation’ of Europe, which is defined as “a happy-clappy populism mixing feel-good consumerism, ethno-nationalist sentiment and shallow hedonism with lamentable actions against immigrants, minorities, and the vulnerable in general” (Ash et al. 2010: 1); of course, ownership of, and influence on, media play a salient role here. Another – competing narrative – is the so-called ‘Haiderisation’ of Europe, a label drawing on the

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1. When investigating politicians’ complex activities and routines in national and transnational political organisations, it makes sense to draw on Goffman’s seminal work on organisations (Wodak 2009a, b, 2010, 2011). Goffman’s notion of performance is inherently related to the metaphor of ‘being in the theatre and on stage’. He distinguishes between frontstage and backstage. Frontstage is where the performance takes place and the performers and the audience are present (Goffman 1959: 17). Backstage is where performers are present but the audience is not, and the performers can step out of character without fear of disrupting the performance: “the back region is the place where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course” (Goffman 1959: 112). However, when performers are in the back region, they are nonetheless engaged in another performance: that of a loyal team member, a member of the field of politics and of related communities of practice.

2. Sparks and Tulloch (2000) and Dahlgren and Sparks (1992) have investigated the blurring of boundaries between pop and serious culture already throughout the 1990s while focusing primarily on print media; similarly, Lull and Hinerman (1997) emphasised the routine constructions of media panic via scandals in the tabloid press. However, images in use were not considered an object of study at that time.
name of the former leader of the Austrian Freedom Party, denoting the rise and further radicalisation of right-wing populist parties in several EU member states (Austria, Belgium, Hungary and the Netherlands, for example) since the end of the 20th century (Wodak and Pelinka 2002). The latter parties, which claim to speak for ‘the people’ and oppose those in power, frequently endorse chauvinist and nativist ideologies and employ exclusionary rhetoric which triggers an overall ‘politics of fear’.

Moreover, across Europe and beyond, we are witnessing the development of a ‘media-democracy’ in which the individual media-savvy performance of politics seems to become more important than the political process (Grande 2000). Accordingly, politics becomes simplified to just a few slogans apparently comprehensible to the broad public. In this vein, Judt (2010:142) notes that politicians like Palin “can only benefit from rising confusion and anxiety in the face of apparently unmanageable change”. This discrepancy can lead to public disenchantment with politics. Paradoxically, the discontent with politics, however, does not lead to the decrease but to the increase of expectations in politicians (Hay 2007). Trust in mainstream politicians and governing parties has dropped significantly across Europe (and beyond). Indeed, the level of trust in several major EU countries (including the UK and France) barely exceeds 10% (Eurobarometer 2010).

In this context, some might speculate that the salience of images, icons and symbols is new and might have substituted traditional genres in the field of politics. Images lend themselves to interpretation in manifold ways; viewers are able to project whatever associations they might have into such images and retract the meanings which seem convenient to justify and legitimise their ready-made opinions (see also Wodak 2006; Couldry 2003). However, I claim that the preoccupation with images as icons for complex political processes is not new. Indeed, iconic images have served throughout the 20th century, for example, to condense complex political processes in simplistic ways. Images provide us with a quasi

3. Grande (2000) argues convincingly that “there are the two dimensions of politics, guided by different types of political logic”: on the one hand, the functionally-oriented logic of political execution and implementation of power [Verhandlungsdemokratie]; on the other, the logic of gaining or sustaining power rooted in the socio-economic conditions of media-based representation of politics [Mediendemokratie] (ibid.: 123–124). These two dimensions of politics are characterised by significantly different types of political behaviour and practices, which, in turn, also impinge on the relevance of certain political actors. Thus, Verhandlungsdemokratie is based on the constant search for political compromise and on the anonymisation of individual contributions to the complex processes of negotiation-based consensus-seeking (usually backstage). Mediendemokratie, however, is based on recurrent foregrounding of political issues as well as on the ‘personalisation of successes and failures’ (ibid.: 129), which are then ascribed to selected media-savvy individual political actors (frontstage).
static snapshot of political and historical events (Strâth and Wodak 2009). Thus, complexity is frequently reduced to simple Manichean divisions, the wide range of possible interpretations and readings as well as alternative voices and narratives remain excluded and one hegemonic and dominant perspective or ideology, vision or imaginary remains.

In my necessarily brief considerations, it is therefore time to pose some basic questions: Is it the case that modern media have impinged on the public’s understandings of politics? And if this is the case, what are the consequences? Have new hybrid genres evolved? Has the preoccupation with images led to more simplistic expectations and beliefs about politics? Or are we ‘nostalgically’ re-inventing the past as much more argumentative, critical and enlightened while confronting current global crises (Judt 2008)? And, subsequently, in which way may images influence the public’s views on politics and, indeed, the wide-spread sense of a ‘democracy deficit’ and disenchantment with politics (Castells 2009; Wodak 2009a)?

The current visual turn leads, I claim, to three important tendencies which affect both the production and reception of media events about political issues: to the fictionalisation of politics, to the politicisation of fiction; and to the glocalisation of hegemonic (frequently US) political values. In a recent study on *The Discourse of Politics in Action: Politics as Usual*, for example, I contrasted the everyday life of politicians, which I was able to study via ethnography in the European Parliament, with fictional genres such as TV soaps construing and representing the everyday life of politicians for the consumer’s use (such as *The West Wing*; Wodak 2009a, b, 2010, 2011). As such series are recontextualised and translated worldwide but also adapted to local needs, we are confronted with a very interesting dialectic: a dialectic between the values of the US (in the case of *The West Wing*: how politics should be), which are spread globally, and the traditional national contexts of the countries where such series are aired and where these American values are *glocalised* (Amin 1997; Wodak 2010; Oberhuber et al. 2005).

In the following, I will briefly elaborate the points made above: I will touch upon the salience of iconic images, taking both a recent EU project (EMEDIATE) in which I was involved as point of departure (Triandafyllidou et al. 2009) as well as the above-mentioned research on ‘politics as usual’ in EU institutions, which served as case study for the profession of politics more generally. It will be important to juxtapose the salience of images for historical narratives throughout the past centuries and the impact of new media in recent years. This will lead to the question: can we really observe a salient change nowadays, or just ‘more of the same’, globally and with more impact?

In this vein, I follow the historian Tony Judt, who argues that
[w]e are predisposed today to look back upon the twentieth century as an age of political extremes, of tragic mistakes, and wrongheaded choices; an age of delusion from which we have now, thankfully, emerged. But are we not just as deluded? In our newfound worship of the private sector and the market have we not inverted the faith of an earlier generation in ‘public ownership’ and ‘the state’, or in ‘planning’? Nothing is more ideological, after all, than the proposition that all affairs and policies, private and public, must turn upon the globalising economy, its unavoidable laws and its insatiable demands. Indeed, this worship of economic necessity and its iron laws was also a core premise of Marxism. In transiting from the twentieth century to the twenty-first, have we not just abandoned one nineteenth-century belief system and substituted another in its place? (Judt 2008: 16)

4.2 Media and politics

“We’re selling a product. That product we are selling is democracy.” These words are attributed to former US Secretary of State Colin Powell defining American diplomacy (quoted in Van Ham 2002: 250). As Mitsikopoulou (2008: 353) argues, “if this shift in political paradigms, from the modern world of geopolitics and power to the postmodern world of images and influence, continues, it is expected to have a pronounced impact on both the nature of international politics and on the character of nationalism and democracy”.

Politics and the media have always, to some degree, been interdependent. However, I argue that these two fields are increasingly interwoven in very complex and intricate way, and with profound implications for each. Indeed, in The First Campaign: Globalization, the Web and the Race for the White House, Graff (2008) introduces “a new way of doing politics”. He illustrates ways in which the Internet, YouTube and blogs allow supporters to find each other, to voice opinions, to share information, to collaborate, to comment and to donate (money, time and ideas). The results, he claims, could catapult, punish or finish a candidate. Like never before, people are networked together, communicating opinions and consuming information on a global basis and at unprecedented speeds. In this way, politics has become increasingly innovative, and a strategic understanding of the media and its effects is now an essential aspect of being a successful politician.4 This kind of political participation is, of course, dependent on affordable and easy access to the Internet and on computer literacy. Paradoxically, therefore, this form of

‘e-democracy’ is both a mechanism for increasing democratic participation and for reproducing forms of social inequality and exclusion (Wodak and Wright 2007).

Thus – as mentioned above – boundaries are becoming blurred between entertainment and information, between private and public domains, between marketing, advertising and campaigning, between politicians and celebrities, between traditional media and new media, and so forth (Higgins 2008). ‘Mediated politics’ refers to a situation in which media have become the most important source of information and vehicle of communication between the governors and the governed’ (Strömbäck 2008:230). ‘Mediatisation’, however, relates ‘to changes associated with communication media and their development’ (ibid.:232). An increasingly complex world is reduced to political personalities, their perceived power and ‘charisma’ (Grande 2000) – although Karvonen (2010), after having compared media reporting on politicians in the UK, Finland and Sweden in recent years, finds major differences in the amount and modes of personalisation across EU member states. There is an obvious need to understand how these changes linked to the mediatisation, personalisation, and commodification of politics affect the ways of ‘doing politics’ in everyday life and their perception by citizens in different national contexts.

A lot of media coverage tends to generate and encourage rather unrealistic expectations among laypeople that politics or politicians are capable of solving urgent problems in rational and efficient ways. The media, especially television news formats, seem to be reducing complex processes into brief spotlights, snippets or ‘scoops’.5 Indeed, Street (2001: 58–59) emphasises that ‘why reporters tend to ignore processes and favour personalities is not to be explained by the prejudices of journalists and their editors’. The answer lies, he continues, ‘in the structure and organisation of the media, in the need to deal with events in a limited space and under the demands of tight deadlines’.

Thus, frequently, iconic images symbolise important events and acquire the meaning of a ‘turning point’ in history while neglecting the socio-political and historical contexts: the developments which led to the events and their aftermath. Examples of such perceived quasi-sudden turning points in Europe, are 1914, generally held as the beginning of a new age or the end of the old world, and 1945 – particularly in Germany – viewed as the ‘zero hour’. The Hungarian revolt in 1956 or the 1962 Cuban crisis are condensed versions of complex and protracted international conflicts. Similarly, May 1968 is seen as the symbol of a general European (and beyond) generational revolt, and August 1968 in Czechoslovakia as a European icon of a very different kind from the May revolt in Western

5. See, for example, Stråth and Wodak (2009); Machin and Niblock (2006); Wodak (2009b).
Europe. The condensation of events in connection with the ‘Fall of the Berlin Wall’ on 9 November 1989 is another case in point (see Stråth and Wodak 2009). All of us are still aware of the images of 9/11 (the attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York), which have become iconic of the sudden and terrible attack by terrorists. The revolutionary events in 1789, 1848 and 1917 are other examples of condensed events with huge symbolic or iconic value. They are all closely connected through their intensity to the concept of ‘political crisis’ and to contentious value-mobilisation (right-wrong, good-bad, friend-enemy, etc.). Experiences of crisis are thus mediated through appeals to specific values which deal with dogmatic and normative concepts of ‘right or wrong, good or bad’ (see Koselleck 1992 [1959]).

Such situations of crisis are reflected and reinforced by media in the respective public sphere (Koller and Wodak 2008: 3–6). Complex processes in the media are then reduced to certain images while many other accompanying, often contradictory, processes and positions are simply not mentioned anymore or swept under the carpet. History is thus reduced to static events captured by images and the agenda-setting by journalistic news production (see also Chouliaraki 2006). In this way, several fields in society relate to each other and are linked in complex ways, and – in some ways – serve differing (also economic) and national interests.

While studying press coverage of specific European political crises Triandafyllidou et al. (2009) noted the important role of the so-called national filter of perception of Europe: hence, while in most countries Europe is (if at all) congruently represented through the ‘spatial’ and ‘East-West’ (Cold War) lens, it is always defined in ways which defend and legitimise the different national perceptions of Europe. Interestingly, the national filters for perceiving Europe remain more or less stable over time, as established throughout several crisis events where the media of similar countries were investigated.

In the UK press, for example, whose coverage is analysed for the crises of Berlin 1961 (erection of Berlin Wall), Paris 1968 (Student Revolution), Prague 1968 (Soviet Invasion), Poland 1981 (Solidarnosc Movement) and Berlin 1989 (fall of Berlin Wall), the perception of events taking place in foreign (European) countries remains the same and is rooted in Britain’s ‘Euroscepticism’. This Eurosceptic
perception persisted even in the coverage of the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the so-called Mohammed cartoons crisis in 2006. In a similar vein, West German media (whose coverage was analysed for the same crises as the UK media) displayed characteristics of a ‘bilateral perception’, typical of the post-war German will to restore stability in Europe. Additionally, national perceptions differed according to the liberal or conservative character of the investigated media.

On the other hand, the existence of the national filter persisted in the interpretation of the crisis events by national media, which attempted to mirror their own countries’ relation with or to Europe. For example, during the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the UK media postulated that the relations between Europe and East Germany should remain ‘realistic’ or even ‘Eurosceptic’. Finally, the lack of a significant change in the media coverage in the Second Gulf War in 2003 was surprising. Even though the 1990s had witnessed the dismantling of the Communist regimes, the progressive ‘reconnection’ of Europe and the process of redefinition of the EU as a clearly defined European-political actor, no changes to the previously described nationally conditioned and (at the most) bilateral perceptions of Europe were detected. Quite the contrary, the media coverage of Europe’s reaction to the invasion of Iraq in 2003 by the US and the Allied forces brought a strong revival of national perceptions of Europe since different European countries positioned themselves differently vis-à-vis the Iraq crisis (some supported it and joined the Allied forces while others clearly condemned the invasion). Accordingly, Europe was portrayed as an arena of various agonistic struggles and was frequently metonymically condensed in media discourse to the key (national) actors (e.g. Blair vs. Chirac as representing the different stances of the UK and France, etc.). Importantly, the EU as a transnational European actor did not play any role in unifying the European space: its disunity and inability to take a position were criticised in the national media while its role in providing humanitarian aid for rebuilding what “the US troops were destroying” in Iraq was noted in an almost cynical tone by most national newspapers (see Krzyżanowski et al. 2009 for an extensive discussion).

Thus, to put it simply: journalists (journalistic field) want a ‘good story’, a story which will attract many readers due to the respective readership at which the newspaper or broadcast or TV report is directed (the criterion of newsworthiness plays a big role here). Politicians (political field) depend on reporting in the media – otherwise their political programmes would not be disseminated – and the media depend on the politicians for information/news stories. And finally, the media is also characterised by numerous other groups in society lobbying, at various times, for representation in the news. In this sense, the media is heteroglossic, representing multiple ‘voices’ in society (Lemke 1995); or in Bourdieu’s terms:
to understand what happens in journalism, it is not sufficient to know who finances the publication, who the advertisers are, who pays for the advertising, where the subsidies come from, and so on. Part of what is produced in the world of journalism cannot be understood unless one conceptualizes this microcosm as such and endeavours to understand the effects the people engaged in this microcosm exert on another. (Bourdieu 2005:33)

4.3 Disenchantment with politics: The legitimation crisis

Although – as presented briefly above – the media focus primarily on the kind of ‘grand politics’ already well documented in Edelman (1974), specifically the orientation towards celebrities has led to huge interest in the private life of politicians (Talbot 2007). Thus, scandals are perceived as newsworthy, and they set the agenda (Ekström and Johansson 2008; Kroon and Ekström 2009). News stories also try to trace the genesis of relevant decisions and claim to make intrigues and conspiracies transparent, specifically when problems arise with certain decisions (Machin and Niblock 2006). Moreover, we observe that in recent years the boundaries between celebrities and – traditionally serious – politicians have become blurred due to the pressure to appear on TV as frequently as possible. Political personalities and celebrities seem to rely on similar advisory resources since both groups strive to appeal to large audiences. Street (2004:441) summarises succinctly that “[p]oliticians become stars, politics becomes a series of spectacles and the citizens become spectators”. However, in many cases journalists typically rely on secondary (and often anonymous) sources and it is usually impossible to validate stories about the backstage of politics. Generally, journalists and the media do not have access to the ‘politics de couloir’ and the everyday life of politicians and their advisors; hence rumors and speculations prevail.

This widespread appetite for scandals and celebrities goes hand in hand with a decreasing interest in political engagement. As mentioned above, opinion polls detect a general disillusionment with politics; we are facing a so-called ‘democratic deficit’ in the European Union. Alternatively, this discontent and dissatisfaction might not in fact indicate political disinterest, but rather a growing cynicism about the power of national politicians to exert any real influence in decision-making processes in the context of globalisation, and the diversification of social, economic and political forces that this entails (see also various White Papers of the European Commission 2001, 2005a, b, 2006, which propose a range of policies to counteract such disillusionment).

Hence, representation and legitimation, two crucial concepts in our political systems, are changing and being challenged (Pollak 2007). In their forthcoming
book *Democracy without Politics. An Alternative View On European Integration*, the historians Hagen Schulz-Forberg and Bo Stråth conclude that “[t]he crisis of legitimacy of political Europe lies in the tension between rhetoric and the institutional cover, between expectations and imaginations of Europe and the actual politics negotiated on a European level. The urge to prepare a homogenous support for a European ideal that is somehow related to the institutions in Brussels is not a way to democracy” (Schulz-Forberg and Stråth, forthcoming: 341). They criticise the policies of the European Commission in that “[t]he efforts at legitimacy through a backdoor democracy are an effort at installing a strong focal point of political power in the thriving soft European public sphere” (*ibid.*). However, they claim that “[i]n the face of a lack of political will supporters of this step have triggered a top-down process of seemingly apolitical programmes on identity, culture, media, and communication in order to make Europeans share values and ideals”; this top-down procedure, they continue, is doomed to fail. In a similar vein, Neunreither (1994:302) states: “[t]he very important function of the European Parliament to establish links with the citizens will only develop substantially when it gets more powers and when it becomes … a major decision-maker of the European Union’. Such a development would guarantee more representation, responsiveness and thus legitimacy. It would also guarantee more transparency (see Pollak 2007:242ff.).

In Max Weber’s *Domination Theory*. Bureaucratic organisations, for Weber, were based on the following characteristics: hierarchical chain of authorities; civil servant status of personnel; exact delimitation of functions, responsibilities and competences; legitimation by virtue of procedure and legal statutes; the bureaucratic actor as executive agent of political decisions; and the normative separation of administration and politics (Weber 1976:126f.; Bach 1999:34). The representative protagonist of modern bureaucracy, Weber claimed, was the “impartial, therefore strictly objective specialist” (*Fachmann*) (Weber 1976:563).

Thus, Weber’s model clearly presupposes a differentiation and relative balance of legislative and executive powers as developed in the democracies of the Western nation states (Weiss and Wodak 2000:186–187). The supranational EU system, however, is different mainly because of the constitutional preponderance of the Commission in the policy-making process. The Commission not only serves as administrator and ‘guardian of the Treaties’ but also monopolises the right of initiative in the legislative procedure of the Community. This structural superiority of the Commission comes at the expense of democratic participation in general and the role of the European Parliament in particular (Pollak and Slominski 2006:118ff.). With the Commission taking over not only the political-
administrative function of the EU organisational system but also an important part of its political-strategic function, Weber’s concept of the normative separation between politics and administration no longer seems valid.

The removal of differentiation between the executive and the legislative procedure evokes two interdependent tendencies: firstly, the bureaucratisation of political decision-making processes, and secondly, the politicisation of the administration (Bach 1999:32; Weiss and Wodak 2000:187). As a result, the bureaucrat can no longer be seen as an executive agent of the political system (as in Weber) but becomes him/herself a kind of political actor or a policy-entrepreneur (Krugman 1994:10). Such policy-entrepreneurs are both a Fachmensch in Weber’s sense (i.e. an expert), and a political strategist. The dominance of policy-entrepreneurs in the EU organisational system goes hand in hand with the emergence of the ‘committee regime’ of EU policy-making – i.e. the many highly specialised expert groups that develop programmes, concepts and strategies in their respective policy fields (Weiss and Wodak 2000:188). Political legitimacy in the traditional sense is thus increasingly being replaced by functional legitimacy by virtue of administrative efficiency and technocratic expertise. As a consequence, the ‘real’ politicians, i.e. the MEPs, feel more and more excluded from policy-making, leading to calls for systemic reforms (see Wodak 2009a, 2011).

Weber’s theory on political legitimacy was broadened by Jürgen Habermas’ conception of the ‘legitimacy crisis’ (Habermas 1976; Engel 2008:4). Grounding his analysis in the rise of fascism and totalitarianism, he argued that the rational-legal authority of legal legitimacy had become hollow, as charismatic leaders made pre-existing legal frameworks irrelevant (McCormick 2007:31). While Habermas agreed with Weber’s understanding of legitimacy as a concept ‘where facts and norms merge’ (Steffek 2003:263), he argued that rational-legal authority grounded solely in the subject’s belief in its ability to provide order cannot be stable and more closely resembles the legitimacy of traditional authority. Weber’s analysis neglected, Habermas argued, the naturally antagonistic interests of the class structure. Habermas thus concludes that there is a fundamental “discrepancy between the need for motives declared by the state … on the one hand, and the motivation supplied by the socio-cultural system on the other” (Habermas 1976:75). Thus, the loss of belief in the ruler’s legitimacy despite the maintenance of the legal-rational framework was bound to lead to a ‘legitimation crisis’ in a technocratic and capitalist state, which is certainly true for the European Union, frequently described in terms of a ‘democratic deficit’ (see above).

Habermas (1992, 1999) proposes that civil society should participate in politics as much as possible, apart from necessary parliamentary control. Via debate, deliberation and rational argumentation, Habermas suggests, political action would be optimised (Habermas 1981). This model obviously presupposes that people
actually wanted to participate. But Pollak and Slominski (2006) argue rightly that many structural conditions would have to be met in order to render Habermas’ model fully functional. In any case, as summarised above, Triandafyllidou et al. (2009) illustrate that national perspectives in reporting on the European crises override transnational European reporting and that a European Public Sphere related to media reporting is thus rarely or almost never apparent. It is also not the case – as might be expected – that a European Public Sphere is converging more and more, especially after the so-called ‘big bang’ of 2004, the accession of ten more nation states to the European Union; quite the contrary, the discursive construction of such a public sphere depends on the socio-political contexts and on strong national Weltanschauungen and related traditions in journalism. While discussing Habermas’ proposals, Flynn (2004:448) concludes that

the concept of communicative power has a normative core insofar as it is internally connected to communicative action (submitting power to reason). But this rationalisation of power is not the democratisation of power. Power may be discursively generated, but it is not democratically legitimate until it is democratically tested. (author’s emphasis)

Hence, I endorse Flynn’s argument (ibid.:451): “the burden [of public debate] lies not with democratic theorists but with democratic publics to revitalise the public sphere as a site for realising the radical content of democratic ideals”.

4.4 The fictionalisation of politics and the politicisation of fiction

The growing disenchantment with politics, the exclusion from the backstage, and the growing interest in celebrity politicians and their personalities are probably some of the reasons explaining the rising popularity of fictional genres that depict the everyday lives of politicians and the intricacies of political decision-making: fiction films like The American President, soaps such as The West Wing, Commander in Chief or Im Kanzleramt, and parodies like Yes Minister. Although different in salient aspects, these ‘big screen’ dramas and TV series have drawn huge audiences; for example, the series The West Wing has attracted between 13 and 17 million viewers every week since its pilot in 2000 on CBS in the United States (Riegert 2007). The series presents the everyday events, routines and crises in the staff of the American president in the White House. What makes such a series so attractive? Which interests and needs of large audiences are addressed and satisfied? As Rollins and O’Connor (2003) elaborate, there is no simple answer to these questions. In any case, the motives range from pure curiosity to the identification with ‘alternative’ politics (Riegert 2007; van Zoonen 2005; Wodak 2009a, b, 2010).
In her chapter “Narratives journalism can't tell” (2003:26–27), Donnalyn Pompper summarises some of the viewers’ needs very well indeed:

The *West Wing* teleplay writers enable viewers to eavesdrop on the Oval Office, witnessing a myriad of contemporary social issues and dramatic complications faced by policy workers on the job. For example, plots involve love-hate relationships between White House staff and press corps, partisan backbiting, and personal sacrifices for public service, as well as issues like substance abuse, interracial dating, and gender issues in the workplace. Through it all, White House staffers are portrayed as witty, sarcastic, and intelligent, yet frail, vulnerable humans who sometimes ride their bike into a tree while on vacation, humbly pray to God for guidance, argue with their ex-wives, work at being involved with their children in spite of hectic schedules, suffer from debilitating diseases, are jealous of their spouse’s former lover, and solve crossword puzzles over morning coffee.

Hence, politicians are portrayed as normal human beings, as are their advisors. However, Levine (2003:62) rightly states that “curiously, it [*The West Wing*] turns a blind eye to the stories of staff politics and factionalism inside the White House”. This indicates that although politicians are depicted as emotional, irrational and ambivalent human beings, they all seem to identify with the ‘noble cause’ and do not compete with each other or contradict each other. Levine (2003) claims that this representation of everyday political life does not resemble the ‘real’ everyday life of White House staff or of any other political organisation.

In sum: *The West Wing* produces a specific perspective (*event model*; van Dijk 2008) on how ‘politics is done’ for the American lay audience (and because the series has been dubbed into many languages, for a much bigger global audience). – In other words, it offers a model of how all of us are supposed to believe politics ‘cooks’. However, while watching this series (and similar productions from other countries), we might ask ourselves if this is THE only way or if it is ONE of the ways of ‘doing politics’ and handling significant political decisions. We might even question whether the story (the representation of ‘doing politics’ in soap operas such as *The West Wing*) resembles ‘real’ everyday (political) life at all? And if, as some authors suggest, it does not, we need to ask the question WHY ‘the media’ represent politics in this way.

If we look through the abundance of web pages related to *The West Wing*, the clever marketing of this series, and the broad range of reception modes, it becomes obvious that such series are situated between the fields of politics and fiction media. Advisors and staff of the Clinton administration were consulted by the producers of the series. The film crew was welcomed at least once a year in the White House by then president Clinton; however, this positive attitude towards the series changed significantly once G. W. Bush became president (O’Connor
The series has been identified largely with the Democratic Party in the US and as opposed to the Republicans. In this sense, watching *The West Wing* was frequently interpreted as a wish for a new government. Some critics have, however, pointed to the many myths constructed through the series: the characters are depicted and constructed as ‘noble’ characters fighting for ‘noble causes’. In this way, an ‘ideal world’ is constructed. Thus, another reading suggests that the series complies with wishful thinking and visions of what politics *should* be, thus serving as a distraction from the ‘real’ everyday life of (US) politics.

As mentioned previously, almost 17 million people watch *The West Wing* every week, and even more people around the world view the series in translation. This implies that the American liberal values which are represented and endorsed in this series are recontextualised world-wide, another effect of globalisation. In sum, I conclude that *The West Wing* and similar soaps (like the German *Im Kanzleramt*) offer a saliently different representation of everyday politics, a myth which people seem to greatly appreciate. Complexity is reduced by providing such simple myths, which obviously function well via images in use and fictional soaps.

*Myth* is used, as Bronislaw Malinowski claims, “to account for extraordinary privileges or duties, for great social inequalities, for severe burdens of rank, whether this be very high or very low” (Malinowski 1948:93). This could also be characterised as ‘sociological strain’ (Edelman 1967:18). Furthermore, Roland Barthes has defined ‘myth’ as secondary semiotic reality, a reality imposed on and substituting our daily experiences (see, for example, Barthes 1957:116). Barthes draws on the concepts of semiology developed by Ferdinand de Saussure at the turn of the twentieth century (de Saussure 2000). According to his structuralist approach, Saussure described the connections between an object (*the signified*) and its linguistic representation (*the signifier*) and how the two are connected. Referring to Saussure, Barthes defines myth as a further sign, with its roots in language, but to which something has been added. To make a myth,
the sign itself is used as a signifier, and a new meaning, which is the signified, is added. This meaning, however, is not added arbitrarily. Although we are not necessarily aware of it, Barthes maintains, modern myths are created with a reason: mythologies are formed to perpetuate an idea of society that adheres to the current hegemonic ideologies of the ruling class(es) and its media.

Running up to the US election of 4 November 2008, the Viennese leftwing weekly *Der Falter* interviewed Martin Sheen, who plays President Jed Bartlett in the US TV soap *The West Wing* and is known to have been a progressive political activist for years. In a second commentary printed in the very same issue, a journalist draws an analogy between Barack Obama’s campaign for US president in 2008 and *The West Wing*. Bartlett is described as a kind of ‘ideal super president’ (*idealer Überpräsident*) and contrasted with the former American president, George W. Bush. Indeed, the commentary also quotes *Isaac and Ishmael* as an example of an episode which conveyed a strong moral message of tolerance and respect for ‘others’ – this illustrates the recontextualisation of liberal American values as embodied in this episode and provided by the model of President Bartlett (see Wodak 2010 for more details about this episode). Thus, the author presupposes that the strong endorsement of Barack Obama by many liberal voters might stem from a general wish that this man were similar to the fictive President Bartlett.

In *The Guardian* (5 July 2009), a long report describes Tory leader (and now British Prime Minister) David Cameron’s ideas about his possible role as prime minister should the Labour Party lose the next elections; the following quote illustrates how many aspects of the TV series are recontextualised in the British context and how *The West Wing* serves as global knowledge brand, model and myth for the ‘ideal politician’ and ‘politics as usual’:

Now it is the Tories who dream of replacing Downing Street as Pennsylvania Avenue. Several headlines have talked of “David Cameron’s West Wing”. When I recently visited the corridor of offices occupied by the Tory leader and his senior team, they looked exactly as they had the week before: an unglamorous suite of rooms with club-land furniture, situated in an undistinguished office block on the edges of the parliamentary estate many hundreds of miles from the Potomac. On that occasion, members of the shadow cabinet and their staff were rushing around in a lather induced by one of the expenses scandals.

When the political editor of the Spectator visited the same corridor, he found himself transported across the Atlantic: “To visit Norman Shaw South is to see a political machine whirring beautifully”, writes Fraser Nelson in the most recent edition of the magazine. “It is like a British version of The West Wing: the key players walking in and out of their rooms and having 45-second impromptu meetings in the corridor.”
In similar vein, a report in Friday’s Independent talks about “a cast of advisers, tacticians, policy wonks and spin doctors that would not look out of place walking the corridors of President Bartlett’s West Wing”.

On the same day, the Guardian predicted that “a West Wing would be created in Downing Street” when Mr Cameron moves in.

What the Spectator, the Independent and the Guardian accurately reflect is the Camerons’ ambitions for themselves. These accounts draw on research by Conservative Intelligence, a new group set up by Tim Montgomerie, founder of Conservative Home. His report is essential reading for anyone who wants to understand the power grid in the Cameron Tory party. It even comes with a handy wall chart that is entitled – this you may have guessed – “David Cameron’s West Wing”.

It is quite remarkable that this American popular drama series is quoted so frequently in the European media; in this way, journalists draw on specific values represented there for global generalisations – a typical example of ‘glocalisation’: on the one hand, specific liberal values are recontextualised; on the other, certain protagonists serve as models (spin-doctors, advisors, president) for ‘real’ politicians; the routines (discursive and material practices and images in use) of ‘politics as usual’ in the White House are conveniently transferred into other national contexts.

Hence, if we apply the concept of ‘myth’ to the world created and represented by The West Wing (or similar series), it becomes evident that viewers identify with a fictionalised world of politics, a simple world where the good win and the bad lose. The longing for such a simple and understandable world in times of uncertainty and insecurity is not surprising. Increasingly dissatisfied with politics, people turn to fiction, or to a fictionalisation of politics. The beliefs, values and social practices displayed in The West Wing, however, fail to truly fulfil viewers’ needs. Rather, they necessarily lead to even more disenchantment when people are confronted with both the contrasting complexity and banality of everyday politics. The implications of this are clear: such soaps may in fact reinforce depoliticisation and disappointment. Thus, the borders and lines of influence between fiction and reality, between the fields of media and politics have become and also remain blurred.

Chapter 4. Disenchantment with politics and the salience of images

References


PART II

Case studies

Visual communication in late modern society
CHAPTER 5

Organising political consensus

The visual management of diplomatic negotiations and community relations in the Finnish accession to the EU

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The community relations of the EU are here looked at as a performative political environment where power is exercised by acts of visual display and diplomatic signalling between the Member States, the EU and the candidate state. The main argument is that, during the Finnish accession to the EU, the television news images were used by the politicians and the media to demonstrate one’s power, to affect the political assessments made by others and to commit oneself or the political opponent to the shared community rules in public. Images representing politics are by default spectacular. A critical perspective changes the role and function of visual analysis in the study of images. In the chapter, suggestions are made of what this could mean in practice.

Political power is ability to control the political circumstances and affect the political outcomes. Television news images representing the Finnish accession to the European Union in 1992–1994 are here studied as an outcome of a power struggle where both the media and politicians strive to affect the political assessments the negotiating parties make of each other and the general public makes about the benefits of membership. By following the ideas of speech act theory, news images are treated as acts of visual display which are used by the politicians and the media to frame the EU as an institution and membership as a prospect in public. The final conclusions are left to the viewers. The candidate country and the EU create an official scene which is not just a façade. The recurring acts of mutual public performance are needed to keep the negotiation process in motion in spite of the disagreements and distrust between the parties and to assure the general public that EU membership will improve Finland’s power position in Europe. The act of
visual display as a concept strives particularly to unveil how certain uses of images are inherent in the plain exercise of power.

5.1 Visuality, performativity and the practices of power in international relations

Politicians seek attention by organising press conferences and by offering good photo opportunities for news cameras, but their ability to control the publicity still depends on how the media and the audience respond to their performances. The aim of this sub-section is to ask if there is something integral to political power itself which would motivate the use of images in public and contribute to understanding the recurring performative acts of political display in television news images.

The idea of performativity originates from speech act theory, which is interested in the ceremonial and conventional aspects of language use. In the empirical analysis, I use the concept of the act of visual display, which is comparable to a speech act. In speech act theory, an expression is used to create referents and do deeds that do not depend on the meaning of the words alone but get existence in their performance by the force of extra-linguistic or institutional rules constituting the language use (Austin 1984: 18–19, 25–26, 121; Searle 1986: 18). The performative is simultaneously intentional and conventional, but neither characteristic governs the performative act in itself alone (Butler 1997: 25).

There is a long tradition of perceiving the international system as a scene in the international relations (IR) theory. States are assumed to act metaphorically in the public scene which is formed by states for one another and which is a site of symbolic action (Aron 1981: 191; Morgenthau 1967: 5). The metaphor of international relations as a scene entails that power needs to be performed and demonstrated in public and that there are different audiences expecting some public acts of display to be carried through. Machiavelli seems to have been the first in IR theory to analyse the construction of political agency as a performative process. According to him, a republic has ‘early prestige’ which is the outcome of the virtue that made it possible to bring about the republic in the first place (Machiavelli 1997: 246). The early prestige seems to be the product of a public performance which gave expression to the actor’s existence. Therefore the prestige becomes a useful means of legitimating the political power of the agency and a condition for exercising power through it.

Both realist and English School IR theory presume that the right kind of public reputation, honour and prestige are integral to political power because they legitimate it. Morgenthau and Wight suggest that power is exercised in public
through honour, prestige and reputation or that power manifests itself in this form. Morgenthau (1967: 36) defines prestige as an “image in the mirror of our fellow’s minds” and claims that it is one of the three main manifestations of the struggle for power and of what he calls ‘political policy’. Morgenthau suggests that diplomats and state leaders form an audience for each other where diplomatic ceremonials and the public display of military force are used for demonstrating one’s power and for making an impression on each other (ibid.: 70). Although Morgenthau writes about prestige as if it were an effect in an individual mind, it also has to be collective as Wight suggests. According to Wight (1995: 97), prestige is “an effect produced upon the international imagination”. The state can possess different power resources, but prestige seems to be the decisive thing in getting results: it “draws material benefits mysteriously in its train” (ibid.).

The neo-realists also trace an international power dynamics where prestige participates in the establishment of the distribution of power between primary states. The basic problem of the international system is that the actors are unable to make fully reliable estimations of each others’ power. War is considered the only reliable test of capabilities, but most of the time the distribution of power is formed in terms of prestige of the supposed power resources of the different actors. Therefore, there is a potential imbalance between the hierarchy of actual power and the hierarchy of prestige (Gilpin 1983: 30–33). Naturally, the division between actual power and mere prestige is in many ways problematic, but by it the neo-realists acknowledge that prestige contributes to the distribution of power between states and that the power position of a state is manageable by public performances.

Gilpin describes the policy of prestige mainly in terms of strategic action, but Morgenthau, Aron and Wight suggest that prestige can be motivated by the actor’s desire for social recognition, which would mean that prestige has a social and institutional aspect. According to Morgenthau (1967: 69–70), prestige is “a potent dynamic force in determining social relations and creating social institutions” in international relations. Both Aron and Wight consider honour and prestige as socially binding. Honour can work as a moral principle in war, as allegiance to the accepted standards of international conduct and as consciousness of status between states (Aron 1981: 608–609; Wight 1995: 96–97). Keohane (1995: 292–293) also suggests that reputation can explain commitment to international regimes. Interestingly, honour and reputation can create social pressure which binds the actors together and keeps the institutionalisation process in progress. This entails that international power can depend on internationally shared rules of appropriateness.

Already Jervis (1970: 4) was interested in how states can project images which back up their political goals by signalling. However, he also supposed that signalling can be either calculative or communicative and that in the end signalling is
intentional and socially governed action (*ibid.:* 64, 50). Sylvan et al. (1998: 8–9) suggest that international relations consist of status groups called prestige groups. States can seek power through belonging to different prestige groups. In international media, such labels as a rogue state, nuclear power, development country and former eastern bloc country appear regularly. The group labels demonstrate certain characteristics which are thought to define the included states and give them a certain kind of reputation. A reference group can be considered as an imaginary means of performing the necessary collective meanings or characterisations for insisting on a particular political agency. At least the member states of the group must be expected to get inspired by the shared meanings or to calculate the benefit from the collective promotion of them.

The European Union is an example of a legal construction which is considered the most advanced interstate society or community in international relations (Buzan 2004: 211; Adler and Barnett 1998: 30). I suggest that the EU is also a prestige group where community building performances start to guide the public interaction between the Member States and the EU. Buzan (2004: 100) suggests that in international relations there is a spectrum of societies ranging from thin to thick. Commitment between the actors in a thin society relies on coercion or rational calculation, but in a thick society the social structure is based on collectively shared beliefs and rules of appropriateness (*ibid.:* 103). Whether the EU has become a thick community or not is naturally a matter of dispute between the differently orientated integration scholars. According to Middlemas (1995: 679), in order to get respected positions inside the different EU organs, the Member States have to show altruism and demonstrate their EU spirit. Especially for the Commissioners it is not appropriate to only advance their national interests without causing suspicion (*ibid.:* 230). The candidacy for EU membership is here studied as a performative process in which Finland is expected to signal that it shares the central community values and objectives.

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1. Jervis does not refer to Hobbes, but Hobbes too suggested that political authority is based on shared repertoires that can be used as collectively understood signs of power in a public debate. For example, being honoured or feared by many is ‘an argument and signe of power’ (Hobbes 1991: 65).

2. Some identity scholars prefer to call strong identification ‘honour’. Honour is seen more imperative for the group member in the sense that the member has a feeling of being forced to a strong commitment and to being ready to participate in public action (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 13).
5.2 The visual public sphere and television news images as acts of political display

If power depends on its public legitimation, any public act of an official representative of the state performed in public can be interpreted as a purposeful signal (Cohen 1987: 20–21). Different kinds of gestures, designs or settings represented, for example, in television news images can signify policies and political attitudes (ibid.: 52, 105–106). Because the speech act theory underlines the conventional and institutional aspects of communication, a condition for analysing images is to learn more about the television news images representing politics as a textual tradition of its own kind (Skinner 1988: 61).

If we study European images representing politics, we find out they consist of recurring public performances of rulers and politicians which participate in the constitution of the so-called public sphere. For example, in medieval Europe, the new monarch, her establishment and the town officers, clergy, bourgeoisie and members of guilds met at the city gate and walked through the city (Strong 1984: 7). The public performance of this ceremony had a constitutional meaning. In the ceremony, the citizens and the state represented by the monarch symbolically recognised each other and the act of recognition legally established the reign (Hanley 1985: 75; Strong 1984: 7). The permanence of the political administration and fiscal state was legally guaranteed by the invariability of the forms of public ceremony through which the King and the officials were appointed to their offices (Kantorowicz 1981: 295). Later, the state entries described above transformed into street pageants consisting of acted scenes and removable arches which demonstrated the political values and the political programme of the new ruler (Wortman 1995: 97–98). The ceremonial details performed in public provided state leaders a means to characterise themselves and their administration. The recurring public performances of coronations, funerals, ‘the entrée’ and ‘the lit de justice’ obtained a permanent position in the public sphere (Giesey 1985: 42).

Diplomatic acts were also carried out in public. For example, the tapestry “The meeting of Philip IV and Louis XIV” from 1670 represents a scene where Philip is making an apology to Louis in the middle while the official delegations stand behind the state leaders. Philip gets Louis’s attention with his right hand and with the left one he makes a gesture of explaining the problem away (Burke 1992: 64–65). The tapestry is a commemoration of Spain’s official apology to France and a representation of the performance of a certain diplomatic act in public. Collective diplomacy was also represented in historical paintings and engravings. For example, Isabey’s famous romantic painting of the Congress of Vienna is an early example of a group portrait of a European Summit where the state leaders are depicted in the middle of their meeting. Nicolson (1961: 201–202) describes how
the state leaders sat together and separately for the painter between the negotiations. Foreign ambassadors were a special audience for these images. The Grande Galerie at Versailles consisted of a permanent exhibition of grand historical paintings portraying the military victories of the nation. It was a part of the ambassadors’ programme to visit the exhibition (Burke 1992: 86–87).

Habermas (1991: 7–10) calls this form of public sphere the ‘publicness of representation’. Characteristic of it is that state officials act as an embodiment of the state and power is represented before the people, not for the people. The people themselves act as spectators of the display. The ‘publicness of representation’ was structured around the public appearances of the rulers, and it was spectacular in the sense that the publicity was completely organised and controlled by the state. Another kind of public sphere called the ‘bourgeois public’ came into existence in the 18th century in Britain and France when private citizens first freely formed an autonomous and critical public independent of state authorities (ibid.: 26–27).

These early forms of visual display seem to have transferred into the age of the mechanical image rather unchanged. For example, one of the earliest sequences of television news history was the arrival of PM Chamberlain from the negotiations of Munich broadcast live on the British television (Short 1989: 165, 175–176). Contemporary television news images are full of the arrivals and entrances of state leaders to meetings and appointments. The international summits and official visits of foreign ministers have been a part of the regular iconography of first the cinema news reels and then their descendent, the television news images, since the 1950s (Whitfield 1996: 157). Like in the 17th century court, the manner in which the official handshake is performed in public is considered a statement of the quality of the official relations between the states even today (Cohen 1987: 89–91). Naturally, we have to remember that image cultivation is no longer a matter of states alone; individual politicians, multinational corporations and international organisations also use images (Kunczik 1997: 27).

Habermas (1991: 179) claimed that commercialisation and public relations management transformed the original bourgeois public sphere from an arena of rational public debate back into another version of publicness of representation where spectacularity gained ground again. Most scholars define spectacles as manipulative and alienating (Kellner 2007: 32). Like Wodak (in this volume), I have

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3. The ideal public sphere postulated by Habermas relies completely on critical and rational verbal communication. According to Habermas (1991: 163), film or television, for example, do not meet the standards of public enough debate. I would like to claim that images can also take a critical angle towards their objects of representation. Caricatures and discrediting news images could be considered examples of this. However, whether they really form a critical enough debate in Habermas’ terms is another question on which I am unable to elaborate here.
to ask whether spectacular television news images are another form of directing the public attention away from complex political issues and the related power struggles. Dayan and Katz make a useful division between critical news events and spectacular media events. Media events rely on the close co-operation between state officials and the media and therefore lack an independent journalistic or critical perspective (Dayan and Katz 1992: 6–12, 66, 70, 114). The live broadcast of a state ceremonial is one example of a media event, but I suggest that television news can also turn into a media event when, for instance, the visual display of a politician is represented in television news without a critical visual or verbal angle, the image sequence dominates the whole newscast and in practice becomes the main issue of the news. Kellner (2007: 42) presumes that the spectacle can always turn into a counter-spectacle when the public attention starts backfiring on the actor who originally launched the spectacle for her own purposes. A reporter or news cameraman with a critical angle can always turn the media event into a genuine news event.

As Stocchetti underlines (in this volume), the critical perspective of visual analysis entails asking who is using the images and for what possible purposes. Knowledge about the conventions of diplomatic signalling and the television news images as a visual tradition can only help to define ‘the illocutionary force’ of the act of visual display of the image. However, in the end, television news images also have to be put into the historical context of their appearance. Only then can it be defined what kinds of acts of political display are carried out through them and in whose interest they are. The visual details of the acts of visual display are analysed here in terms of C. S. Peirce’s division of signs into symbols, indexes and icons because it provides a means for tackling both the conventional dimension of the images and the possible attempts to use them critically. According to Peirce (CP: 4.531; CP: 2.276–277), when images communicate by a resemblance of outlook or an analogical structure with the object, they are icons. When images communicate by pointing to the object in terms of having a factual connection with it, they are indexes. When images communicate by materialising some abstract idea, a learned habit or institution, they are symbols. For example, when a television news image is used to communicate by the force of an existing convention or an established position of power, the image sequence consists merely of symbolic meanings. However, when someone strives for a critical angle, the convention has to be put into question. This is often done by using accidental breaks of conventionality, which increases the role of iconic and indexical meanings in the image.
5.3 The visual management of the accession negotiations between the EU and Finland

If the EU as a political community is held together by public performances, we should be able to find recurring public acts of mutual assurance of togetherness by the Member States and EU officials. Moreover, we should find evidence that joining the EU is also for the candidate state a process where public performances of commitment and team spirit are expected, at least at some point. These kinds of performances are traced from the television news images of the Finnish accession process broadcast both on Channel 1 and Channel FST5 news of the Finnish Broadcasting Company YLE, the national public service television company. The news sample is based on the one I used in my doctoral thesis on the Finnish EU accession process (Koski 2005).

The accession negotiations themselves are a struggle over the details of the commitment between the EU Member States and the candidate sealed in the Accession Treaty. Finland strongly defended its national interests, and at times there were serious disagreements between Finland and the EU Commission. My presumption is that positive visual signalling might be needed the most when the actual negotiations are at an impasse and nearly nothing good can be declared in words. Therefore, my first aim is to go more deeply into the role of public performances at the time when the negotiations came closest to a crisis.

Another part of EU candidacy is the exchange of visits between the EU organs, the Member States and the candidate state and the participation of the candidate states as observer members in the activities of the different EU bodies. The EU’s motive in granting observer status for candidate countries is to train them for the membership (Kuosmanen 2001:285). The exchange of visits at different levels and the participation of Finnish cabinet ministers at Council meetings aroused high media attention, which gave politicians the chance to demonstrate how Finland had already stepped forward into the EU scene. My second aim is to study whether this publicity was used for community prestige and community spirit creating acts by the parties. The difficulties in the negotiations are analysed in this sub-section and the images representing the participation of Finland at the work of the different EU organs in the next sub-section.

In the case of Finland, the most difficult substantial negotiation question in terms of the duration and complexity of the negotiations was the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which is one of the most highly integrated policy areas in

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4. The sample contained 87 pieces of television news altogether from 54 of the most important turning point days of the whole accession process, starting from the preparation of the application to submitting it in 1992 and ending in the national referendum in 1994.
the EU. In the negotiations, Finland was ready to accept the CAP but insisted that its objectives had to be, in fact, achieved in the northern conditions of Finland (Kuosmanen 2001: 110). The key objective in the negotiations was a northern support scheme, which was to be co-financed by the EU, cover the whole country and be integrated as a permanent part of the CAP. In the end, the EU accepted 85 percent of Finnish agricultural land to be covered by the highest Least Favoured Area (LFA) support, and Finland was allowed to pay a northern support, financed nationally, to farms located north of the 62nd parallel for a transitional period (ibid.: 147, 150). In other words, Finland did not get a permanent northern support co-financed by the EU for the whole country.

The fact that Finland did not get a permanent northern support package co-financed by the EU was kept secret from the public before the referendum and became generally known long afterwards (ibid.: 151–152). Had Finnish farmers understood that the support was only transitional, the domestic consensus on membership would have faded away. During the whole accession process, there was a need to keep the setbacks out of the public eye and manage the national public by acts of visual display. Consequently, the nature of the visual messages sent to the domestic and EU audiences differed substantially. The negotiations on CAP officially began in February 1994 when the Commission gave its official answer to the position of Finland. Finland and the EU were not able to end the negotiations on all the details of agriculture before the referendum on the Accession Treaty in October. The Finnish negotiators learned unofficially as early as in October 1993 that the Commission opposed the idea of considering the whole country eligible as LFA area and that any permanent support co-financed by the EU would be ‘anathema’ in Brussels (ibid.: 127, 131).

The final negotiations aimed at closing the agricultural paragraphs of the agreement were held in Brussels from 28 February to 1 March. The inner circle had already decided that all the open positions on agriculture would not be taken under negotiation during this marathon session (ibid.: 141). A substantial number of open positions were scheduled for negotiation later, but in spite of this, on the evening of 1 March, the EU convened into a special public session open to international media to celebrate the fact that the parties had successfully managed to end the difficult negotiations. The fabricated nature of the commemoration session is clear because at least everybody around the table knew that the negotiations were going to continue soon. This commemoration was a mutual public performance aimed at establishing a turning point in the negotiations by manufacturing a ‘historical moment’ or an ‘event which demonstrates the capacity of the EU to go forward in the enlargement process’. During the ‘commemoration’, the EU announced in words that the agreement was a success. Whether the commemoration performance becomes an act that creates a community or not
also depends on how the representatives of the candidate country behave during the ceremony.

In TV news, the commemoration session consisted of two shots edited together. First there is a pan shot of the ceremonial meeting of the Council where the Member States and the EU president and the candidate country applaud each other. The pan ends in a position where especially the behaviour of Delors and the Finns becomes the focus of attention (see Figure 1). The pan shot is followed by a long medium shot where the Minister for Foreign Trade Mr Salolainen declares with an authentic voice that the moment is also historic for Finland. The attention of both the Finnish and international media was captured by the unhappy face of the Finnish Minister for Foreign Affairs and chief negotiator Heikki Haavisto during the ceremony (see the left lower corner of Figure 1). Minister Haavisto was unable to show a genuine smile during the ceremonial applause (Koski 2005:253–254).

Images representing political meetings belong to the oldest tradition of appearing in public together by the states. As is known, in the interstate scene such emotions as fear, disgust, surprise and sadness are not usually expected to be expressed in public (Cohen 1987:105). Smiling is a default and therefore Haavisto’s reluctant face was seen as an index of dissatisfaction at the negotiation result. The indexical sign turned the symbolic act of commemoration into an act of distrust, which aroused the suspicion that there were disagreements behind the scenes, and the media wanted to show this to the viewers. Finland was not able to perform the happy ending expected of it and did not in public symbolically share with the Member States their definition of the outcome of the negotiations as a success.

In the above commemoration session, the Finnish negotiators were under the impression that Finland had been given permission to pay the national northern support permanently (Kuosmanen 2001:150). This was important because the original aim of the negotiations was to get permanent northern support for the
whole country. Two days after the commemoration display, the negotiators found out that the Commission had only given the Member States the mandate to negotiate for transitional and decreasing national northern support, which nobody had told the Finns about (ibid.: 150). The Finnish negotiators officially decided to ignore this because the issue had not been taken up during the actual negotiations and to keep this news from reaching the domestic public. The Finnish negotiators felt in general that after the marathon session they also had to defend several other details against the attempts of the Commission to water down parts of the agreement before its final wording in the Accession Treaty (ibid.: 151–152). This makes the commemoration act even more interesting. In IR theory, strategic signalling is thought to be based on sending costly signals (Schelling 1966: 150). Audience cost is an example of a costly signal. It entails the fear of losing face in public or the political support of some constituency (Fearon 1997: 69–70). In addition to creating the impression of success and celebrating it as a major breakthrough, the mutual public performance must also have had some other aims. I suggest that the mutual public performance was planned strategically to tie up the hands of the Finnish representatives by involving them in an act of public visual display that symbolically declared the negotiations closed, therefore making it impossible for them to try to reopen the issue later on. This is how a public display can be used to create audience costs which irreversibly change the political situation.

Although the EU had allowed Finland to pay the nationally financed northern agricultural support, Finland was expected to get the Commission’s approval for the details of the package, which caused difficulties. At first, the EU showed no interest in taking the package under discussion before the Finnish referendum. Without any clear knowledge of the content of the support package, it would have been nearly impossible to assure the Finnish farmers that accession was in their interest. Therefore, Finland had to lobby at the political level in order to get the Commission to settle the support package before the referendum (Kuosmanen 2001: 154). The package itself was prepared by the Finns without consulting the Commission, a move that was taken as an insult by the Commission. The Commission also considered the Finnish proposition as an attempt to renationalise

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5. The negotiations on the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) also ended with a press conference for the international media on the content of the agreement. In practice, all the formerly neutral candidate countries were forced by the EU in this way to announce in public that they commit themselves to the CFSP with all the consequences the membership may bring in the future. The main reason for demanding the declaration on CFSP was the EU’s suspicion that the former neutral countries were not fully committed to the CFSP. One reason for the suspicion might have been the formerly neutral countries’ hesitancy to openly announce before their home audiences that neutrality was in contradiction to the planned CFSP (Koski 2005: 206–208).
agricultural policy (ibid.: 154–155). Finnish citizens had no clue of these problems because the whole situation was presented to the domestic television audience as an innocent dispute in the effort of matching the Commission’s and the Finnish negotiator’s schedules (Koski 2005: 271).

The only visible sign of the Commission’s distrust towards Finland in television news was the recurring refusal of the former to take any stand or give any public statement on the actual content of the support package. In the visual narrative of television news, the Finnish ministers were shown meeting the Commissioner or Commission officials in Brussels, but only the Finns gave comments to the media (ibid.: 265–269). Although the Commission refused to comment on the Finnish propositions in public, every time the Finns were seen in Brussels the Commission was ready to give access to news cameramen to cover the meetings between the two parties. The fact that photo opportunities were generously created proves the intentionality driving the acts of public display. In diplomacy, the public appearance of two countries together is a symbol of mutual recognition and a sign of normal relations between the parties (Cohen 1987: 52). By appearing on television news images together with the candidate country, the EU in the end gave visual recognition to Finland and the substantial disagreements and suspicions in the background stayed out of public attention. The mutual acts of visual display made it possible for the EU and Finland to maintain normal relations in public, which kept the elements of dissension latent.

The agreement on the main principles of the national support package was finally achieved on 9 September 1994 in Brussels. In the news about the progress of the negotiations, the chief negotiator Mr Haavisto is hopeful of finally getting a satisfactory deal. Minister Haavisto and the Commissioner of Agriculture René Steichen are shown in the news smiling together for the cameras (see Figure 2). This is the first time Haavisto is shown smiling sincerely in television news during the whole eight months of negotiations on agriculture (Koski 2005: 278–279, Figure 2. Television news September 9th 1994. Finnish Broadcasting Company, YLE)
287). This smiling ‘campaign’ is a visually performed, symbolical declaration that all the difficulties and distrust between the parties have been left behind. Again the hard and complicated negotiation process ends with mutual smiling faces. During the agricultural negotiations, Finland verbally and openly criticised the EU only once. Putting this into proportion with the total number of setbacks, Finland very decisively kept the disturbing details and experienced distrust out of the public.

5.4 Entering the EU scene

As mentioned above, observer status in the different EU institutions and the exchange of visits between the candidate country, the EU institutions and the Member States is an inherent part of the candidacy and a cultivation of the candidate country into the community rules and behaviour. Here the visits between the Members States and the candidate country are excluded from the analysis because they can be seen belonging to the sphere of bilateral diplomacy rather than the creation of community relations. There are altogether nine pieces of news in the sample dealing with visits between the EU representatives and Finland and four covering Finland’s participation in Council Meetings. In these television news images, attention was mainly directed to covering what kind of reception the Finnish politicians got in Brussels and how the guests from the EU were received in Finland. A recurring part of the programme of the visits was meeting the press. As a rule, news cameramen were given good photo opportunities before or after the official discussions. The media were naturally keen both to ask the EU representatives for a second opinion on the topical questions in the national publicity and to search for different non-verbal signs revealing the general atmosphere between the parties. Television news therefore became a scene for political signalling and the performative creation of community relations. I will now discuss three instances of visual display related to Finland’s entry into the EU.

The television news image sequence from Finnish PM Esko Aho’s first visit to Brussels after submitting the membership application in 1992 belongs to the tradition of recognising each other via performing together in public, and the tradition directs our attention to the manner in which mutual recognition is exercised before the cameras. The verbal lead of the news informs us that the President of the Commission Jacques Delors ensured that the application is taken to process promptly and that the negotiations with Finland would begin simultaneously with the negotiations with Sweden and Austria. Visually, the main issue seemed to be the official handshake between Delors and Aho. In the medium-long shot, Delors is seen coming to shake hands with Aho who is already waiting in a lobby.
The international protocol expects reciprocal respect in public. According to the existing code of politeness, escorting a visitor right from a car or from the entrance of a building into the meeting room, for example, is considered a symbol of exceptional honouring of the guest (Cohen 1987:98). Mr Aho is first seen left alone in the lobby, which is an index of being kept waiting and not being regarded important enough to be given absolute priority in Delors’s daily programme.

In the lobby, Mr Aho had placed himself too far on the right so that he was not standing in front of the EU flag behind them on the wall. When Mr Delors arrived from the left, the location of Mr Aho led the handshake to take place in a wrong position in regard to the EU flag. After the first handshake, Delors moved Aho into a better position. Aho did not immediately realise what Delors was driving at but nevertheless followed Delors’s lead. The men repeated the handshake in a position where the EU flag is seen in the middle behind the men. In IR theory, Adler and Barnett (1998:39–40, 424) do not define international community as a structure where a struggle for power does not exist. A community can consist of stronger and more powerful core actors that create expectations and make others emulate them. Actually, they expect communities to be a site of learning with teacher and learner states (ibid.:45). The image sequence illustrates how a completely conventional and symbolic handshake turns into an icon of teaching the candidate country about the manners of the EU. An icon is a sign which communicates via constituting analogies between two different things. Delors behaves like a teacher who physically instructs how the ceremonial recognition act has to be performed before the media, and Aho responds reciprocally like an attentive learner. In the repetitions of the handshake, Aho learns by imitation how the act should be carried through. In IR theory, imitation has been treated as the primary means of bandwagoning with the desired group of states or committing oneself to the existing international rules in general (Deutsch 1963; Waltz 1979; Wendt 2001).6

6. Imitation has been seen as the primary means of performing one’s commitment to a group membership in both realist and constructivist thought. According to Waltz (1979:74–77, 92), the structural selection that holds international systems together is based on learning and imitation. States bandwagon with actors that are recognised as the most successful (ibid.: 124–128). According to Wendt (2001:318–320), international culture, which is the equivalent of Waltz’s international system, changes by competition and cultural selection. Cultural selection is based on learning and imitation. Also Deutsch (1963:179) claimed that the source of messages capable of causing imitation among the others has authority. Furthermore, Buzan (2004:222) claims that vanguards have a crucial role in the spread of international social structures. Finally, Nye (2004: 5–6) defines soft power in terms of the ‘ability to attract’ or to cause voluntary ‘admiration’ and ‘emulation'.
The image sequence exceeded the conventional symbolic recognition scene and accidentally revealed that the existing rules of appropriateness are not self-evident to the candidate country. Because of the teacher-learner analogy, the two actors could not be perceived as equal actors. The interaction between Delors and Aho produces for Finland the agency of a bandwagoning country that still has much to learn before earning recognition as an equal insider of the group.

A little over a year later, the television news images from the visit of the Commissioner for External Relations Hans van den Broek to Helsinki declared that Finland had already become a half-insider member of the union. The news story itself followed the events of the day. The verbal lead of the first part of the news disclosed that the estimated price difference in agricultural products between Finland and the Member States was 40 percent, which van den Broek stated with an authentic voice in a sequence from the press conference. The next cut transferred the focus of the news completely from this politically delicate detail, which predicted difficulties in the negotiations on agriculture, to a new subject on which the last part of the news concentrated. The second part of the news consisted of image sequences that represented the opening reception of the EU embassy in Helsinki. The opening of the embassy was not mentioned by the reporter’s voice-over or by the news anchor before. This increased the impression of a radical change of subject in the middle of the news and an intentional shift from the hard issues of agriculture to a more entertaining subject. The news cameramen had been allowed to witness the opening reception of the embassy. Undivided attention was given to the images in the news. The reporter acted as a voice-over commentator without a journalistic angle. Actually, this part of the news did not contain any information of news value at all. It concentrated on transmitting the happenings of the reception, which constitutes transforming the news from a news event into a spectacular media event.

In the image sequence, the Commissioner for External Affairs van den Broek is giving the main speech in an authentic voice in the lower right corner of the medium shot. He verbally ensured in his speech that Finland is already respected in the EU as a close partner. The President of Finland Mauno Koivisto stands opposite
to van den Broek, and the rest of the guests can be seen behind him in the images. President Koivisto proposed a toast to a unified Europe as a spontaneous response to van den Broek’s inspiring words. Next, the Minister for Foreign Affairs Heikki Haavisto, who was in charge of giving the official answers to van den Broek, began his speech. Towards the end of his talk, President Koivisto noticed that Haavisto took his half-full glass of champagne out of his jacket pocket as he was preparing to end his speech by proposing a toast (Figure 4). Koivisto pointed Haavisto’s trick out to van den Broek. When Haavisto proposed the toast, the rest of the guests burst into laughter at Haavisto’s ingenuity and van den Broek joined in.

In IR theory, Müller (2004:403) suggests that the basic motivation behind warming the relations can first be strategic, but when the intercourse is regular and the parties begin to trust each other, the logic of appropriateness can start to guide the signalling. That is, strategic signalling is not enough for performing the commitments expected to keep the constructive process in motion. Expressions which signal that the relations have become closer than before are needed for that purpose. In diplomatic signalling, jocularity and backslapping in public has been a speciality of the Russians. According to the prevailing interstate convention, this kind of behaviour in public is a symbol of exceeding fraternity and comradeship. (Cohen 1987:106.) The behaviour in the news images above is an index of sharing the same sense of humour and of feeling at home, even relaxed, with each other. Because the cameras had been invited to immortalise the opening of the embassy, it is hard to imagine the EU as a host and Finland as a guest not having planned to arrange a mutually beneficial performance in public. The visual performance offered to television audiences exceeds the normal scale of interstate public courtesy. Rather, it is an overt visual declaration that Finland is very much welcomed into the EU and that the mutual relations between the parties have already become rather close. The image sequence with an authentic voice transforms the news into a pure spectacle where the act of visual display becomes the only news item.

As mentioned above, mutual recognition seems to be the central issue in most of the visual sequences of the news dealing with the exchange of visits between
Finland and the EU or Finland and the Member States. The national media was eagerly searching for evidence that Finland had achieved a recognised and respected status in the EU. The subject of recognition was also present in the visual sequence of the news covering the participation of Finland for the first time in the meeting of the Foreign Council during the German presidency in September 1994. The verbal lead of the news joined together the two EU issues of the day, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland Heikki Haavisto representing Finland in the Foreign Council of the EU for the first time and him commenting on the agreement on agriculture from the day before after the meeting. Visually the first part of the news was edited from images covering the representatives of the different Member States arriving at the meeting place, the building where the meeting took place and the media gathered outside. The coverage ended with an interview in which Haavisto defended the agricultural agreement.

The visual sequences representing the arrivals of the different Member States at the Council meeting ended with images showing the arrival of the Finnish representative. In the background, the viewer can hear the voice-over of the reporter describing the content of the images. In the images of the arrival, Mr Haavisto was shown in a full shot approaching the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Germany Klaus Kinkel with a suitcase in his hand from the right to the left along the red carpet (Figure 5). Kinkel is chairing the meeting and receiving the participants at the entrance. Kinkel is first not shown in the images at all because he is behind the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden Margareta Aff Ugglas, on the left apparently discussing with a lady on the right side of Kinkel. During his approach, Haavisto was first seen glancing over his right shoulder and then over his left shoulder before extending his hand to Kinkel in reply to his greeting.

Although the viewer does not see what Kinkel was doing behind Aff Ugglas, I suggest that Haavisto’s look over his shoulders is a response to Kinkel recognising him from a distance and greeting him spontaneously. If this is the case, Haavisto’s gestures are an index of not being sure whether Kinkel’s greeting was really addressed to him. It is as if Haavisto was first checking that there is no one more important or well-known following him to whom Kinkel’s greeting could actually
have been addressed. Kinkel’s initiative was to address Finland as a fully recognised participant of the meeting, but Finland still seemed to behave like an actor who itself does not yet recognise this agency. In the arrival images, Haavisto’s response to Kinkel is a metaphor of the experienced power position and identity of Finland. Finland is just about to change reference groups and has not yet absorbed the self-understanding of itself as a fully recognised member of the group. The official accession itself cannot perform the membership alone; it also requires a change in the actors’ own attitudes.

On the basis of the image sample, one can notice important differences between the typical visual coverage of the EU summits and the meetings of some other international organisations, such as the UN. In the imagery of the UN, state representatives mainly sit behind signs bearing their names. In images from the EU Summits, the Ministers from the Member States are often seen arriving in the meeting rooms and assembling spontaneously into several unofficial groups standing between the tables, with ministers discussing, laughing and whispering with each other. One explanation for the difference probably is that the EU offers the media more generous access than the UN into its meetings before they start. The public imagery of the EU summits gives a completely different impression of the quality of the relations between the Member States than do equivalent visual repertoires from the UN. The gestures of an informal atmosphere, lively networking and briefing each other are used to visually express the community spirit. With the acts of visual display, the EU is able to signal that the relations between the Member States have transformed into genuine community relations which qualitatively exceed the diplomatic relations between the member states of an ordinary international organisation.

5.5 Conclusions

An arranged public performance always takes the attention away from something else and controlling what can enter into the public sphere is an important means of managing the political conditions where public discussion and decision-making take place. I suggest that during the accession negotiations on agriculture Finland and the EU organised several mutual public performances before the cameras to provide the media with visually impressive and entertaining material which would be apt to attract the media attention away from the political difficulties topical at the moment. It seems that media is hardly ever able to resist the temptation of editing the television news around images if they are dramatic, amusing or in some other way excessive. This makes television news images politically both
distractive as Wodak (in this volume) suggests and potentially effective in the exercise of power.

Acts of visual display in television news images can be used to conceal political difficulties but also to force the actors into political engagements in public. In spite of the distrust between Finland and the EU, the parties seldom questioned each others’ authority in public. One can postulate several reasons for this. Without an image of the EU as a competent and reliable partner, Finland’s own action would have ended up appearing irrational. There is a logic of appropriateness between a candidate state and the EU which does not allow the candidate country open criticism of the EU in public. Very quickly Finland learned that a candidate country cannot advance its national interest in public without insulting the EU and stealing positive publicity from it. The dispute about the unhappy face of the Finnish Minister for Foreign Affairs Heikki Haavisto during the EU ceremony made the viewers aware of the existing visual code of conduct expected of the candidate country. This was how Finland participated non-verbally in the public creation of the institutional agency of the EU. The efficient mutual performance of the community spirit is not possible without a shared script between the parties appearing in public. The unconventional images of Haavisto and the Finnish Prime Minister Aho reveal the imbalance between their response and the moves of the EU president Delors and the Minister for Foreign Affairs Klaus Kinkel before the cameras. The lack of reciprocity would not have become apparent without news images breaking the convention chosen to be cast out. In this sense, the media is not totally uncritical, but the discrediting and unconventional images contain potential which can lead the public discussion in a more subversive direction.

The Finnish media were extremely interested in what kind of reception Finland got at the various public engagements with the EU in Brussels. Visual recognition became a recurring subject of public visual display seen in the Finnish media. The demonstration of an achieved power position in the new prestige group could not be efficiently carried through by claiming it with words only. In both chapters analysing EU candidacy (see Curticapean, this volume), the issue of getting a respected position in the EU or the lack of it is communicated visually by suggesting the achieved power position via latent visual meanings. The media and the politicians seem interdependent in this. The reciprocal public courtesy exceeding the normal bilateral and multilateral diplomatic relations is the EU’s primary means of signalling the community spirit. Television news images representing the EU Summits gave plenty of opportunities to assure the close togetherness in public. A shared sense of humour and public joking is a recurring means of transforming the EU Summits and meetings into family gatherings.
References


Television news

CHAPTER 6

Walls, doors and exciting encounters
Balkanism and its edges in Bulgarian political cartoons on European integration

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In investigating the boundaries of the Balkanist discourse in pre-EU accession Bulgaria, this chapter engages with political cartoons – a genre that to this day has remained somewhat neglected by academics. Scholars from a variety of disciplines have pointed out the scant critical attention this genre has received within their respective fields of specialty (e.g. Bostdorff 1987; Dougherty 2002; Koetzle and Brunell 1996: 96; Schmitt 1992: 154; Streicher 1965: 1). Political cartooning “lies in a peculiar no man’s land where several disciplines meet” (Coupe 1969: 79) – including journalism, sociology, art history, education, cultural studies, political science and IR – but none has truly embraced its study (Diamond 2002: 252).

Even though the heyday of political cartooning is long gone, I maintain that political cartoons are worthy of scholarly attention and deserve a place particularly in a book which undertakes to explore the uses of images and the relationship between images and power. In any case, regarding cartoons either as reinforcing or as challenging or subverting prevailing hierarchies and patterns of thinking is a misleading starting point for any research on political cartoons. The complexity and context-specific character of political cartoons rule out the embracement of either one of these mutually exclusive positions in the beginning of the research (see also Rodrigues and Collinson 1995). Indeed, while some studies have examined political cartoons as a rich source of societal stereotypes (e.g. Curtis 1997; de Nie 2004; Edwards and Chen 2000; Edwards 2007; Michelmore 2000), others have shown that some cartoons and comic strips are capable of challenging, subverting or at least questioning dominant ways of thinking (e.g. Hammond 1991; Marin-Arrese 2003; White Coleman 2000; Schmitt 1992). Whether they reinforce, challenge or subvert standard ways of thinking, political cartoons certainly represent more than individual points of view. As the political cartoon is
a ‘fast-read’ which does not aim at contemplative readers (Streicher 1967:433), ‘the idea contained in a political cartoon must not only be easily understood but even be already widely established before the cartoonist uses it’ (Nicholas Garland Kenney and Colgan 2003:229; italics in original).

In this chapter, the examination of the relationship between images and power turns into an investigation of the role played by the Balkanist discourse in Bulgarian political cartoons depicting the last phases of the country’s ‘journey’ to Europe: from peeking through the EU wall to exciting encounters with Europe. Like Orientalism, Balkanism is a discourse (in the Foucauldian sense) organised around a set of binary oppositions – such as rational/irrational, controlled/violent, civilization/barbarism, developed/underdeveloped – arranged so that the first element of the dichotomy is connected with ‘Europe’ and the second with the ‘Balkans’. In spite of the similarities between the two discourses and of the obvious and acknowledged influence of the critique of the first on the critique of the latter, I appreciate that it makes sense to distinguish between the two categories for three main reasons. First, whilst the Orient is discursively constituted as a radical other, the Balkans are consigned to a much more ambiguous, though still negative, position of liminality (e.g. Bjelić 2002; Fleming 2000; Kambourov 2003; Todorova 1997). Second, unlike the Orient, which is generally perceived in the gender/sexual role of femininity, the Balkans are assigned to a masculine position (e.g. Kambourov 2003; Todorova 1997). Yet, supplemented by compensatory inferiorities, masculinity does not grant the Balkans a privileged position vis-à-vis the West. A third point of distinction between Balkanism and Orientalism concerns the institutional organisation of knowledge marked by a long tradition of Western engagement with the Orient. The Balkans were, by comparison, considerably less inspirational (e.g. Bjelić 2002; Fleming 2000).

Examining the Balkanist discourse, its continuities as well as its caveats and complications from the Bulgarian perspective, makes sense if we accept Edward Said’s proposal for contrapuntal readings.¹ The concept of contrapuntality, originating in Western classical music,² was Said’s response to those critics who pointed at his focus on European culture and attendant neglect of the reactions of the colonised in his Orientalism. Contrapuntal readings are intertwined with Said’s

¹. I thank Marko Lehti for drawing my attention to the Saidian concept of contrapuntality and its benefits for this study.

². This is what Edward Said, a lover of Western classical music, writes about the notion of counterpoint: ‘In the counterpoint of Western classical music, various themes play off one another, with only a provisional privilege being given to any particular one; yet in the resulting polyphony there is concert and order, an organized interplay that derives from the themes, not from a rigorous melodic or formal principle outside the work’ (1994:59–60).
conception that “all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic” (1994:xxix). A contrapuntal reading – unlike a univocal reading – implies “a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts” (ibid.: 59). Contrapuntality thus means that the narrative of the empire loses its privileged position while the agency and resistance of the colonised – as “there was always some form of active resistance” (1994:xii; italics in original) – become relevant.

Looking at Balkanism contrapuntally means that the narratives of the Balkan people ‘against which (and together with which)’ the Balkanist discourse acts are not lost from sight. My way of proceeding, inspired by Said, is that of examining Bulgarian political cartoons first as individual narratives on hot topics within the Bulgarian society and then of showing them as part of the power relationship entangled by the Balkanist discourse. As Said, “I do not believe that authors are mechanically determined by ideology, class, or economic history, but authors are, I also believe, very much in the history of their societies, shaping and shaped by that history and their social experience in different measure” (1994:xxiv). Accepting the Saidian urge for contrapuntal readings in view of “intertwined and overlapping histories” (ibid.: 19), this article aims to examine the interplay between local aesthetic forms, namely Bulgarian political cartoons, and the Balkanist discourse. It should be emphasised that its goal is not to discover the Balkanist discourse in Bulgarian political cartoons but rather to read these aesthetic forms contrapuntally, that is, through the lens of Balkanism.

The contrapuntal reading of Bulgarian political cartoons through Balkanism also makes sense in view of previous scholarship which demonstrated both the existence of a Balkanist discourse as a Western construction (Goldsworthy 1998; Todorova 1994, 1997) as well as the use of it by the Balkan people themselves (Bakić-Hayden 1995; Bakić-Hayden and Hayden 1992; Razsa and Lindstrom 2004), including the Bulgarians (Kambourov 2003; Kiossev 1999). Inspired by this body of work, which is preoccupied with the critical study of the Balkanist discourse, this chapter sets out to examine how the relationship ‘Europe’–‘the Balkans’ is articulated in the context of Bulgarian political cartoons depicting the last leg of the country’s ‘journey’ to Europe and the role played by Balkanist representations and interpretations in such narrations. The ‘journey’ or ‘motion’ metaphor has framed the EU and NATO accession discourses in all the Central and Eastern European countries. In Bulgaria, the ‘road to Europe’ metaphor has

3. This chapter includes only those cartoons which picture the last phases of Bulgaria’s ‘journey’ towards Europe. In a previous publication (Curticapean 2008), I have examined the role of Balkanism in Bulgarian political cartoons depicting the country ‘on its way’ towards Europe.
however a much longer history. At the end of the nineteenth century, it signified the departure from the ‘old regime’, that is, the Ottoman Empire. It then returned in full force at the end of the twentieth century to mark the break with another ‘old regime’, this time the communist one (Ivanov 2001; Iordanova 2000: 4–9).

The cartoons collected for this study were published by central Bulgarian newspapers and their authors are: Chavdar Nikolov (known mainly for his editorial cartoons for Novinar, but his cartoons are also printed in Vsekiden), Hristo Komarnitzki (Sega), Racho Rachev (Trud) and Ivan Kutuzov (Dnevnik).4 They appeared on the pages of the Bulgarian newspapers between April 2004 and October 2005, at a time when the country’s EU accession date was not yet decided.5 As this point it is important to spell out that this is not a study about Bulgaria’s EU accession. In other words, I do not seek to unveil the grounds on which the EU accession was advocated, who supported and who opposed EU membership or any other details of the accession process. I am also not attempting to (re)tell the (hi)story(ies) of EU accession by reconstructing the political events with which particular caricatures engaged, though political cartoons can certainly be approached as historical or sociological records of a certain historical period (Edwards 1997: 23). Instead, I interrogate Bulgarian political cartoons depicting the country’s EU accession through the ‘journey’ metaphor with the purpose of documenting the boundaries of Balkanism and their inflections as membership of the EU became perceived as getting closer. Therefore, instead of following the chronology of Bulgaria’s EU accession, the analysis conducted in this chapter follows the logic of the ‘journey’ trope: from peeking through the EU wall to waiting at the gate and encountering Europe.

Before proceeding to the actual analysis, a methodological note is due. All the cartoons gathered in this chapter are underpinned by the ‘journey’ or ‘movement’ metaphor, while metaphors are conceptualised here as condensed, open-ended narratives. Metaphors, as key elements of discourses, produce political identities and they do so in particular ways. First, metaphors produce identities by telling a story in a very concentrated format; in that sense, they function as condensed narratives. Second, these narratives are not completely spelled out. The spelling out of the full story is done by the audiences, which draw on their implicit knowledge

4. The names of the newspapers for which the cartoonists were working during the period under analysis are mentioned in brackets.

5. On 15 June 2004, the last two negotiation chapters (“Competition” and “Miscellaneous”) were provisionally closed. At this time, 1 January 2007 was proposed as the date of accession but a so-called ‘safeguard clause’ was included in the “Miscellaneous” chapter permitting the delay of membership by one year. The Treaty of Accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the EU was signed on 25 April 2005 in Luxembourg.
of the historical, social, political and cultural context – including the power relations that govern it – to do so. From this standpoint, a metaphor is comparable to an unfinished film: it encourages viewers (or readers) to look for and supply those elements which have remained only suggested.6

6.1 Peeking on the other side of the wall

Kutuzov’s caricature illustrated here in Figure 1 was published in Dnevnik soon after the 1st of May enlargement when eight formerly socialist countries became members of the EU. At the time of the publication of the cartoon, the EU accession negotiations were still in process,7 but Bulgarian cabinet members were expecting that all the negotiation chapters would be provisionally closed by the end of June (Nacheva, 20 May 2004).

Figure 1. Ivan Kutuzov in Dnevnik, 19 May 2004; reproduced by permission of the artist

6. In linking metaphorical narrations with unfinished films, I was inspired by Detenber and Byron’s (1996) suggestion that the still picture offers incomplete information. Edwards (1997) has similarly drawn on Detenber and Byron (1996) to establish a link between the editorial cartoon, as a still image, and an unfinished film (see 59–61).

7. Four chapters, namely regional policy, finance and budget, agriculture and competition policies, still needed to be closed for the EU accession negotiations to be provisionally completed.
Kutuzov’s cartoon accompanying an article entitled “Elections and eurointegration” features a donkey peeking through a hole on the other side of the wall. The solidly built brick wall marked with the EU symbol ties in with the conventional metaphor ‘EU is a fortress’ (El Refaie 2005). Verbal references to EU integration and elections – parliamentary elections were to be organised in Bulgaria in a year’s time – put forward a reading on the cartoon in national terms and accordingly suggest that the donkey in Figure 1 metaphorises Bulgaria. Even though it has not yet found the entrance and consequently does not have access to the building, the donkey is by now close enough to see what is going on on the other side of the wall. Operating a metaphorical mapping between a donkey peeking through a wall and the process of European integration, the caricature seems to imply that, in spite of being very close to the EU, Bulgaria’s accession is not to take place in the immediate future.

In making a political commentary on the EU accession process, Kutuzov’s cartoon is also articulating a story about Bulgaria, which he is imagining as a donkey. Whether this metaphorical characterisation draws on Balkanism is far from a settled matter. To start with, it is worth mentioning that even though in some contexts the donkey can constitute a conventional metaphor – in US party politics, for instance, originating in a cartoon drawn by Thomas Nast, the donkey has become a conventional metaphor for the Democrats – in a Bulgarian context it does not constitute a common trope. This being said, two alternative paths of interpretation are opening up. Both, I suggest, are imbued with self-irony, yet they are not equally ingrained with Balkanism.

In (Western) European culture, a hierarchy that purports to be natural has been articulated since the time of Thomas Aquinas to justify social inequity. In its elaborated form, it has been referred to as ‘The Great Chain of Being’ (Lovejoy 1936). Its pervasiveness in Western European thinking has been illustrated by Lakoff and Turner (1989:160–213). Significant for our interests here is that this ‘order of dominance’ that Lakoff dubbed ‘moral ordering’ (Lakoff 1996:81–84) marks nature – animals, plants and natural objects – as subordinated to humans and gives people authority over them. It also makes people morally responsible for the well-being of those they have authority over.

Kutuzov’s donkey in Figure 1 is saddled for riding or load-carrying, but the human figure responsible for its behaviour is absent from the picture. In the absence of a human presence, the donkey’s gazing through the hole can be interpreted as wild, untamed conduct. A human driver would have known how to guide the donkey towards the entrance and through the entrance into the fortress. The metaphorical mapping of the cartoon favours the establishment of a link between the absent driver and the Bulgarian political leaders. By following this chain of
interpretation, we reach the understanding of the cartoon as criticism of the Bulgarian elites for a lack of (proper) leadership.

But does this narrative resonate with the *Balkanist* discourse? If animals are inferior to people, as the hierarchy of the ‘The Great Chain of Being’ has it, then the metaphorical mapping between Bulgaria and an animal cannot but have a pronounced self-ironic or even self-deprecating flavour. The flavour is even sharper, as the metaphorical correspondence is with a donkey, an animal that people in their patronising attitude have invested with an underserved reputation for stubbornness and low intelligence. From this perspective, the image of Bulgaria as a donkey is certainly self-ironic without being necessarily *Balkanistic*. *Balkanism* always relies on a Balkan inferiority vis-à-vis Europe, an element which is missing when the interpretation of the cartoon relies on ‘The Great Chain of Being’.

Deeper cultural familiarity with Bulgarian rural life, however, leads to a slightly different path of interpretation. This alternative reading maintains an ironic flavour, but self-irony derives in this case from a different source. In rural Bulgaria, donkeys are a common appearance. The creature in question is the most commonly used work animal\(^8\) and hence represents a crucial component of the Bulgarian rural economy.\(^9\) According to Barzev, donkeys are the preferred work animals in Bulgarian villages because they do hard work and can survive unfavourable conditions (2000:234). Donkeys are used by Bulgarian farmers to cultivate small individual plots and for the transportation of various loads (e.g. agricultural products, grass, wood and building materials) and people (*ibid.*). So important are donkeys in rural Bulgaria that a museum specially dedicated to these animals was opened in the southeastern town of Gurkovo in autumn 2005. The museum exhibits over a hundred donkey photos, accessories and carts. A donkey cart race, event that enjoyed notable popularity during the previous century, marked the opening of the museum.\(^10\)

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8. The largest number of donkeys in Bulgaria, up to 69% of all work animals, was registered during 1975–1990, a period characterized by the collectivization of agricultural production. In the post-communist period marked by political and economic changes that resulted in the redistribution of land, the number of donkeys has registered a slow decrease to 65% of work animals in 1995 (see Barzev 2000:233).

9. Donkeys are used in all the regions of the country but their use depends on the nature of the terrain. Donkeys pull carts and carry packs in the mountainous and semi-mountainous villages of Bulgaria, whereas in the plains they are driven and are used for land cultivation (Barzev 2000:234).

Donkeys are traditional inhabitants of rural Bulgaria and the donkey in Kutuzov’s cartoon can be read as a metaphor for ruralness: embodied by the donkey, Bulgaria is reduced to a rural society. Rural Bulgaria is a symbol of what Bulgarians generally appreciate as a disadvantageous status vis-à-vis the Western European countries in terms of modernisation of the agriculture. In connection with this aspect, the donkey in Figure 1 brings to mind the ‘Europe of the cart’, a trope that Western Europe has frequently applied to describe Eastern Europe and the Balkans (Braudel 1993: 385–386). Needless to say, if Kutuzov’s donkey is understood as a metaphor for rural Bulgaria, then the overall tone of the cartoon is not only self-ironic but also Balkanistic.

The next cartoon reiterates the trope of ‘peeking on the other side of the wall’, only that the main character in this case is the ‘Everyman’, not the Bulgarian donkey. Standing on a small chair, the ‘Everyman’ is pictured examining the state of affairs on the other side of the eurowall. Kutuzov’s caricature thus plays on the theme of wealth discrepancy between the eurozone and Bulgaria. Given the sharp discrepancy in terms of the average income between Bulgarians and residents of the eurozone, a commentary on this issue does not necessarily mark out ‘Bulgaria’ as inferior.

The immediate context of the publication of the caricature reproduced in Figure 2 is represented by the signing of the treaty of accession to the EU on 25 April 2005, event which the article headline – “Between the strong centre and the empowered periphery” – hails as one of empowering significance for peripheral Bulgaria. The pictorial description of the ‘Everyman’ operates in concert with the empowering tone of the linguistic message: Bulgarian masculinity is not accompanied here by any compensatory inferiorities. Hence, Kutuzov’s cartoon reproduced

Между сила центъра и овластената периферия
‘Between the strong centre and the empowered periphery’

Figure 2. Ivan Kutuzov in Dnevnik, 28 April 2005; reproduced by permission of the artist
in Figure 2 can be read as more than a neutral commentary on the wealth discrepancy between Bulgaria and the eurozone: even though the ‘centre’ remains strong, the periphery emerges as ‘empowered’ by recent events.

The caricature in Figure 3 was published ahead of the French referendum on the EU constitution. The latest polls were indicating that a majority of the French planned to vote ‘no’. In Bulgaria, the focus on the results of the French referendum was on whether a negative outcome of the referendum would delay the country’s accession to the EU. Alongside Romania, Bulgaria had already signed the treaty of accession to the EU earlier that year but the ratification of the agreement by the 25 parliaments of the member states was only in the beginning. The vote on the EU constitution was therefore expected with declared anxiety by most of the politicians and also by the population at large.

In a media interview, Bulgarian Foreign Minister Solomon Passy made clear that “no ratification is guaranteed or automatic – so, any obstacles such as the French referendum could have an effect on the ratification of the membership of Bulgaria and Romania in the European Union”.11 Putting things in perspective, he however expressed the thought that the “European integration is a very big idea and a geo-political process” that “can be protracted” but “cannot be stopped”.12

11. Solomon Passy, Minister of Foreign Affairs, interview with Radio New Europe, “The News at 13:00h” program, 26 April 2005. I downloaded the Bulgarian state officials’ statements and media interviews from the official websites of the ministry of foreign affairs, presidency and government. The documents were downloaded in June 2005, before the parliamentary elections. The printed documents are in my possession and can be obtained upon request.

12. Ibid.
The Bulgarian press echoed worries that Bulgaria’s EU accession will be delayed. Titles such as “Old Europe struck off 2007” (Dnevnik, 26 May 2005) splashed across the pages of Bulgarian newspapers in anticipation of a negative outcome of the referendum.

Explaining that Bulgaria and Romania’s treaty of accession was so drafted as to take into account the possibility of a vote out of the constitution, Bulgarian Minister of European Affairs, Meglena Kouneva, was situated somehow outside of the trend of linking Bulgaria’s EU accession with the uncertainties and worries in the EU that the referenda were likely to reflect. She stated that “the non-acceptance of the Constitution is not a threat to the year 2007” and furthermore placed Bulgaria and Bulgarians is an active position assuring that “2007 is a secure date for us as long as we make the effort”.

Commenting on the impending French referendum, in Figure 3 Ivan Kutuzov depicts an infuriated cock looking down over a fence at a male lion. The animal metaphors carry obvious political connotations. The cock or le coq gaulois is a familiar national symbol of France. The lion figures on the Bulgarian national emblem and on the coat of arms and functions here as a metaphor for Bulgaria.

Art historian E. H. Gombrich pointed out that “heraldic beasts derived from coats of arms and national emblems” (2001 [1963]:136) populate an impressive number of political cartoons. Regarded as the King of Animals and traditionally associated with bravery, strength and courage, the lion is a common appearance in heraldries. However, the heraldic-inspired metaphor of the ‘lion’ lends itself to more than one use. It can be employed in different contexts – precisely as can any verbal or pictorial metaphor – to convey very different stories. As Gombrich writes: “In one context we may want to convey the idea of nobility traditionally associated with the King of Beasts, in another its ferocity, in a third, maybe, some ludicrous aspect as illustrated in the story of the lion fearing the crowing of the cock” (2001 [1963]:12–13).

The lion is supposedly expressive of the bravery and majesty of the nation for which it stands. But could the Bulgarian lion in Figure 3 embody such high ideals? The answer is anything but positive. Kutuzov’s lion has very good reasons to fear the cock if not for its crowing then certainly for the size and strength it displays. The tinny and skinny lion in Figure 3 stands no chance in a confrontation of forces.


14. Ibid.

15. Apart from being a national symbol, the lion also appears on the logo of the Union of Democratic Forces of Bulgaria party.
with the mighty cock. As animal metaphors carry obvious gender connotations, the encounter between the lion and the cock can be seen as a confrontation of masculinities. By Western standards, Bulgarian masculinity is found unsatisfactory. Or, if you prefer the metaphoric language, in comparison with the cock, the lion is too small, too skinny and too weak.

Kutuzov’s cartoon not only displays the gap between the country’s national symbol and the ineptitude at realising it, but does so by measuring the country’s preferred image against a European norm, a norm that is set from the inside of the Bulgarian society, though it is obviously connected with Balkanist distinctions between ‘Europe’ and the Balkans.

With the next section we move to the next phase of the journey to Europe, the ‘waiting room’.

6.2 Locked gates, closed doors and doors left ajar

In most instances, references to ‘geese’ – mentioned in the article headline as well as figuring in the picture – would constitute an unexpected and perhaps perplexing starting point for a story on EU accession. Not so much so when the story is about Bulgaria and is told, or rather drawn, in mid-December 2004. To begin
with ‘the facts’, the poultry industry is a big employer in Bulgaria and a significant proportion of world (including the EU) imports of goose meat and liver originate from this country.\footnote{16} Adding to this, in December 2004, not long before the publication of this cartoon, several cases of bird disease were reported on premises with backyard poultry (subsistence farming) in Southern Bulgaria, in the village Radino. It is common knowledge that a disease of any kind triggers the imposition of limitations on poultry trade. For Bulgaria, a ban on poultry exports, and especially those of specific products such as goose meat and liver would mean a big hit for the industry with the most undesirable consequences for employment. To further complicate the situation, the news of the outbreak of the disease in South Bulgaria came in the midst of elevated worries that the virus causing bird flu outbreaks in Asia might spread to Europe and provoke a human pandemic. Waiting for the completion of the laboratory tests, the worst was feared.\footnote{17}

Turning now to EU-related matters, mid-December 2004 was deemed as a crucial time from the point of view of accession. Only days ahead of the publication of the cartoon, following the EU summit held in Brussels between 16 and 17 December, April 2005 was confirmed as the prospective date for the signing of the EU accession treaty. All the negotiations chapters had been provisionally closed earlier in 2004. According to the report, EU accession would follow in January 2007, “provided that it [Bulgaria; my note] continues its efforts to that end and completes in a successful and timely way all necessary reforms and commitments”.\footnote{18} The same report also mentions that the EU “will continue to monitor closely Bulgaria’s preparations and achievements, including the effective implementation of the commitments” and that “[s]afeguard clauses will provide for measures to address serious problems that may arise before accession or in


the three years after accession”\textsuperscript{19}. The conclusions of the EU summit were documented carefully in the Bulgarian press, and the Bulgarian state officials received them positively.

The caricature in Figure 4 relies on all these events to convey, I suggest, a much more profound story about Bulgaria and Bulgarianness. In the wide-shouldered, dark-haired, moustached man wearing a long coat, we recognise a character familiar among Bulgarians, Bai Ganio.\textsuperscript{20} Only that this time around, instead of his precious vials of delightfully scented rose oil he carries a dead goose. The bird’s long neck is clenched in Bai Ganio’s robust hand. Bai Ganio’s journey to the EU has by now come close to the end, and here he is, standing in front of the EU gate. Yet the prospect of getting inside looks, at least for the moment, rather grim. A sizeable lock secures the EU gate against any intruders, and nobody is there to invite our Bai Ganio in.

The first impulse might be to restrict the interpretation of the drawing in Figure 4 to the recent, at the time of publication of the cartoon, discovery of bird disease in Bulgaria and fears of an EU ban on poultry exports with severe consequences for the industry and employment. Yet, I propose that the cartoon is also telling about Bulgaria’s EU accession. On top of it all, engraved in the drawing, is also a story about Bulgaria, for it is not only the dead goose that is kept outside the fortress but also the man carrying the bird, Bai Ganio. Staring at the secluded gate, he slowly learns a bitter lesson: he is simply not welcome inside the EU fortress!

I propose here an interpretation of Bai Ganio in national terms. Aleko Konstantinov’s Bai Ganio used to carry vials of pleasantly fragranced rose oil and thus serve the ‘Europeans’ by providing them with a much desired product. In Figure 4, Kutuzov’s replica of Bai Ganio carries instead a dead and infected bird. Man and goose are, unsurprisingly, not welcome on the other side of the gate! Not only that this time around the dirty, smelly and unpolished Bai Ganio has nothing precious to provide to ‘Europeans’, but his offer, the dead goose, could pose serious health risks for the ‘insiders’. And how stupid can he be if he has ever imagined that he could sneak in with a diseased bird? The lock will be kept on the gate for as long as needed. Or, in EU vocabulary, safeguard (note the metaphor!) clauses

\textsuperscript{19.} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{20.} Bai Ganio is the main character of a series of short stories published at the end of the nineteen century and authored by the Bulgarian writer Aleko Konstantinov (1863–1897) known in Bulgaria simply as Aleko. Bai Ganio, the literary character, is a Bulgarian trader of rose oil (traditional Bulgarian merchandise) who travels through ‘Europe’ to sell his products. According to Maria Todorova, Bai Ganio ‘is the one literary name and the book that every single Bulgarian knows and has read’ (1997: 39).
“will provide for measures to address serious problems that may arise before accession or in the three years after accession.”

The bird’s sickness cannot be completely divorced from Bai Ganio’s unhygienic practices, of which we are aware from Konstantivov’s novels. *Balkanist* discourse is played out loud. Bulgaria’s embodiment as male does not translate into an active position here: Bai Ganio’s access is denied, for he does not have a key to open the gate lock. It is Bulgaria’s reflection in the European mirror that we witness in Kutuzov’s drawing, yet the standard is not set from the outside. The narrative is told by a native, a Bulgarian cartoonist, though it certainly draws on Western descriptions of the Balkans.

Kutuzov’s caricature reproduced in Figure 5 was published in *Dnevnik* on 25 April 2005, the same day when the Bulgarian (and Romanian) political leaders were signing the EU accession treaty in an official meeting in Luxembourg. The cartoon in Figure 5 resembles pictorially the previous caricature: it portrays a man in front of what appears to be a closed gate. Yet, a couple of words cleverly inserted within the picture change the narrative altogether: the exclamation ‘Open Sesame!’ likens the cartoon to the fascinating story of *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*.

Ali Baba, the tale has it, is a poor man who happens to learn about a treasure hidden in a cave by a group of forty thieves. The treasure is protected by magic – to get access into the cave one has to pronounce the magic formula ‘Open

![Figure 5](image-url)
Sesame’. Learning the enchantment, Ali Baba manages to enter the cave and eventually turns into a wealthy man. In Kutuzov’s version of the story, Ali Baba’s part is played by the ‘Everyman’. Holding the Bulgarian flag, he stands in front of the EU cave and utters the magical command that would free his way to all those riches hidden inside. The metaphorical mapping seems to proceed according to the following logic: the ‘Everyman’-‘Bulgaria’’s solution for prosperity is the EU, just like Ali Baba’s portal to wealth was the cave.

Like for many other cartoons analysed in this study, the relationship of the caricature 5 with the *Balkanist* discourse is far from black-and-white. To start with, it is without doubt that the narrative which springs from Kutuzov’s cartoon rests on the oppositional binary poor-wealthy: ‘Bulgaria’-the ‘Everyman’-Ali Baba is a poor woodcutter lured by the EU cave which amasses all kinds of riches. In addition, the ‘Everyman’-Ali Baba’s dwarfing in comparison to the EU gate suggests a sort of diminishment or even lack of capabilities. The trope of ‘impeded entry’ frames the cartoon in a similar way to Figure 4.

Yet, familiarity with the tale of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves twists this line of interpretation and brings in elements that subtly challenge Bulgaria’s apparently passive stance. For Ali Baba-the ‘Everyman’ has learnt the magical phrase ‘Open Sesame!’, which gives him access to the treasure lurking inside the cave. The ‘active’-‘passive’ duality of Balkanism – with the former term linked to ‘Europe’ and the latter to the ‘Balkans’ – is inverted. The prospect of a wealthy future lies in short sight, and the overall tone of the cartoon is ultimately positive.

During and in the aftermath of the EU membership negotiations, the ‘Energy’ chapter, and in particular the clause for decommissioning the oldest two units (reactors 3 and 4) of the only Bulgarian nuclear plant at Kozloduy spurred a lot of

“Energy Chapter”

Figure 6. Hristo Komarnitzki in Sega, 25 April 2005; reproduced by permission of the artist
controversy within the Bulgarian society. The government agreed to close the two units by the end of 2006 for safety reasons under what was perceived as intense pressure from the EU. In the period of almost one year between the provisional closing of accession negotiations (mid-June 2004) and the signing of the accession treaty (25 April 2005), several voices within the Bulgarian society argued for the reopening and renegotiation of the ‘Energy’ chapter.

Opposition parties and nuclear lobbyists, in particular, overtly insisted on the necessity of maintaining the reactors for economic reasons. It was claimed that, in the absence of alternative energy resources (such as oil resources), by closing down two of Kozloduy’s four reactors the country would render itself dependent on the import of energy. On the other hand, the Bulgarian government maintained that the country’s EU accession in 2007 hinged on closing the units and accused the opposition parties of using the issue domestically for gaining popular support before the parliamentary elections to be held in June 2005.

Meglena Kuneva’s interview on national radio in mid-June 2004, after the provisional closing of the EU negotiation chapters, is illustrative of the government’s position. Referring to the reopening of the ‘Energy’ chapter, the Minister of European Affairs said: “if we open the chapter, these same critics who are telling us now that it is absolutely imperative to renegotiate these issues would simply eat us alive if we delay the EU membership of Bulgaria by even one day”. A sense of urgency in joining the EU derives from the cannibalistic imagery that she used. Her dialogue with the national radio reporter, during the same media interview, also brought forth the perceived impossibility of further negotiations regarding the closing down of the two units. Referring between the lines to the opposition politicians, Kuneva stated:

Let’s not talk certain things in the country, simply for the captive audience, while being perfectly aware abroad what the situation is, but to be reluctant to say it at home.

[Question:] And the situation is, Mrs. Kounева, if we are to be honest to the end, that there is no way in which we can fight for units 3 and 4 of the Kozloduy NPP, if we are not prepared to risk even one additional day spent waiting to join the European Union. Can we put it like that?

[Answer:] I think that it is exactly so.


23. Ibid.
The Bulgarian state officials were arguing that the closing down of the two nuclear reactors was an EU requirement that had to be followed in view of Bulgaria's EU accession and not a measure that the government itself considered necessary. On the contrary, as it transpires from another interview with the Bulgarian Minister of European Affairs Meglena Kouneva, the government shared the opinion that the Kozloduy power plant, and nuclear power in general, constituted a necessity for the country. Following the discussions in the European Parliament on the approval of Bulgaria's EU membership held on 13 April 2005, Kouneva expressed her disappointment that none of the MEPs who previously visited Bulgaria and "suggested that the Government should intervene in the matter" spoke out during the public debate in the European Parliament in defence of Bulgaria's nuclear power plant. "We in Bulgaria", she said, "have no doubts about Kozloduy NPP. Yet, what is the point of saying how good our nuclear power plant is when those same people [MEPs; my note] keep silent about it". Alluding also to the plans of building a nuclear power plant at Belene, she continued: "we have a high opinion of our nuclear power – we like it, develop it and we will continue the same way".24

As the verbal text of Komarnitzki’s caricature makes clear, Figure 6 addresses the same thorny issue of the ‘energy chapter’. The publication of the cartoon coincided with the signing of Bulgaria’s EU accession treaty in Luxembourg, event which officially foreclosed any possibilities of renegotiating the situation of the Kozloduy nuclear power plant. Out of a multitude of possibilities of commenting on this issue, the image metaphorically suggests that the ‘energy chapter’ is a trap that the EU/Europe has intentionally set for Bulgaria. Furthermore, accessing the EU building, implies Komarnitzki, is impossible without getting entrapped. By holding the EU responsible, the caricature in Figure 6 plays on the ‘victimisation narrative’.

Moreover, and more relevantly from the point of view of this study’s research question, in articulating its story about the ‘energy chapter’ the cartoon, I suggest, challenges the Balkanist imagery. The locus of this challenge is the male body of the EU/Europe.25 The image of the EU/Europe as a white-haired man wearing a suit and a tie reflects notions of aristocratic masculinity. As Mosse and others following him have convincingly argued, physical characteristics of the male body have a symbolic meaning, for a man's posture and appearance are believed to

24. Meglena Kouneva, Minister of European Affairs, national media interview, 13 April 2005.

25. In drawing the EU/Europe, Komarnitzki was probably inspired by the physical appearance of Geoffrey van Orden, who was the rapporteur for Bulgaria in the European Parliament and regularly informed the MEPs on the country's progress in fulfilling EU membership requirements. I, however, suggest a generic interpretation of the man in the picture, for there is no complete overlapping of physical traits (van Orden, for instance, does not wear glasses).
reflect his moral qualities. Even though both vital youth and older age can reflect manly qualities, nations are most often represented as middle-aged or possibly old in order to stress the “self-control, maturity and dignity both of the men and of the nation” (Valenius 2004: 40).

The caricature in Figure 6 is marked by a tension between, on the one hand, the EU/Europe’s older age and gentlemanly appearance supposedly symbolising maturity and wisdom and, on the other, the EU/Europe’s actions, which reflect far from courteous qualities. The EU/Europe character is falling short of demonstrating gentlemanly manners and respectable behaviour. His presence in front of the door is masked as a welcoming gesture while actually he embarks in setting up a trap that can hardly be avoided by a newcomer. Even though ‘Bulgaria’ is actually missing from the picture, and therefore a direct comparison with the EU/Europe is impossible, I suggest that the cartoon in Figure 6 challenges the Balkanist imaginary. The challenge stems from the exposure of the EU/Europe as a fraud: courteous and generous at the first sight but in reality self-interested, calculative and ultimately deceiving.

The image in Figure 7 relies on the ‘waiting room’ metaphor which had been very common in referring to Bulgaria and Romania after the 1st of May 2004 round of enlargement, when eight formerly communist countries acceded to the EU. In fact, the cartoon was published in Trud only a day after this event. In the picture, Bulgaria and Romania are represented through the national flags sitting next to each other on a bench in what appears to be the EU’s ‘waiting room.’ The EU door is slightly open, and a person sticks an oversized nose and pointed lips through it and briefly reassures the two candidates: “wait here, they will call for you!”

“Wait here, they will call for you!”

Figure 7. Racho Rachev in Trud, 2 May 2004; reproduced by permission of the artist
Rachev’s commentary in Figure 7 is intertextually linked with concerns expressed within the Bulgarian society vis-à-vis the development of the country’s accession negotiations after the 1st of May EU ‘big bang’ enlargement. Ultimately, these concerns were related to a potential deferral of Bulgaria’s EU accession. Four negotiation chapters were still to be closed and the EU expansion from 15 to 25 countries was expected to further complicate and slow down the pace of negotiations (Nacheva, 29 April 2004).

I suggest that in commenting on Bulgaria and Romania’s potential accession to the EU, Racho Rachev’s cartoon resonates with the Balkanist rhetoric on two different levels. First, the two candidates do not seem to be treated with much respect or consideration: through a door left ajar they are quickly and somehow disrespectfully told to continue their waiting. Moreover, they are not even informed on how long their wait will last. Secondly, I propose that Figure 7 plays on the Balkanist discourse in that it does not grant Bulgaria and Romania any agency in shaping their EU accession. Their future is, from Rachev’s perspective, entirely in the hands of the EU, who will ‘call’ them in when ‘they’ decide that it is the right moment. In addition, the representation of Bulgaria and Romania as inanimate objects (that is, flags) – whereas, by comparison, the EU takes a human shape – amplifies the disparity between the two parts regarding the manifestation of agency.

Needless to say, the candidate countries, on the one hand, and the EU, on the other, were not equally or similarly situated in deciding the development of the accession negotiations and the accession date. Their relation was decidedly asymmetric in the sense that the EU was positioned such that it could shape the ‘field of possibilities’ (Hayward 2000) for the accession countries. In spite of this, there had been a range of alternatives for depicting Bulgaria and Romania’s potential EU accession that would have granted the two candidates more agency in shaping their future.

Yet Figure 7 assumes that Bulgaria and Romania’s invitation to the EU, if and when it will happen, will be an act of grace from Brussels (Dawson and Fawn 2001: 3) and that the accession countries have no role to play in the process. I therefore appreciate that Rachev’s pictorial comment on Romania and Bulgaria’s EU accession is infused with Balkanism not because of its emphasis on the EU’s position of authority, but rather because of the complete effacement of the agency of the accession countries.

The next cartoon is underpinned by the ‘teaching and learning’ trope that, according to Kuus (2004), framed both NATO and EU enlargement rhetoric. The ‘teaching and learning’ metaphor does not assume a total erasure of the agency of the candidate countries. Instead, it locates “the candidate countries in a liminal space, neither developed nor underdeveloped, neither learned nor wholly
ignorant, in the process of becoming mature Europeans” (Kuus 2004:476; italics added). French President Jacques Chirac’s comment that the candidate countries behaved childishly when their foreign policy options differed from that of France and of some other ‘older’ EU countries is a good illustration of the presence of this trope in the EU rhetoric of enlargement.

The ‘teaching and learning’ metaphor also had a strong position in Bulgarian official rhetoric of EU accession. It activated a whole vocabulary of ‘homework’, ‘tests’, ‘inspections’ and ‘evaluations’. Below are just a couple of examples:

When you know that you will have an *inspection* or that you will have 27 inspections, as Bulgaria will have within six weeks, then you will make sure to do your *homework*.26

there will be a dialogue again, not to say a *test*, on the issues that are very important to us: what is Bulgaria’s preparation with respect to the legislation, with respect to the administration, with respect to the absorbing of the pre-accession funds, i.e., how we are preparing for 2007, when that European Association Agreement would be replaced by the membership treaty. … In other words, it will be *tested* in practice to what extent the policy of each ministry is sustainable.27

Examples such as those above perpetuated the notion that ‘Bulgaria’, as a unitary actor, is an immature person who needs ‘Europe’s’ teaching and advice. This imagery is underpinned by a broad *Balkanist* discourse which ultimately rests on the assumption of a collective *self* placed in an inferior position vis-à-vis an elevated ‘Europe’.

Komarnitzki’s cartoon published in *Sega* activates the ‘teaching and learning’ framework by picturing Bulgarian President Georgi Parvanov and Prime Minister Sergei Stanishev as youngsters returning from ‘School Europe’. Both of them wear red ties and Stanishev carries a red backpack: the red colour codifies their link with the Bulgarian Socialist Party, the post-cold war successor of the Communist Party. On the school’s doorsteps, candidly smelling a flower, is the President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso.

Unlike the aforementioned linguistic examples of political rhetoric, which assumed a unitary Bulgaria “passing tests and inspections” and “doing homework”, in Figure 8 the ‘teaching and learning’ trope is used in relation to a particular

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27. Interview with the Bulgarian Minister of European Affairs Meglena Kouneva, *Nova TV*, “Hello, Bulgaria”, morning show, 22 June 2004; emphasis added.
social category: the Bulgarian political elites, metonymically represented by the president and the prime minister. In Komarnitzki’s caricature, Stanishev and Parvanov are reduced in status from adults to child-like persons who go to school and do their best to be ‘good students’. They are so successful in their student roles that they are advised to continue for “another one, two or three years”. The Bulgarian politicians’ childishness is seen in relation to Barroso, who is the only adult in the picture. Figure 8 thus uses the common framework of ‘teaching and learning’ to poke fun at the Bulgarian political elites. As such it resists the ascription of the trope with its implicit Balkanist overtones to the whole Bulgarian society.

The last cartoon included in this section proposes a glimpse beyond the door at the EU table where Bulgaria and Romania are expected to join the other EU members.

The immediate context of the publication of Rachev’s cartoon reproduced in caricature 9 is constituted by European Commission’s announcement, through the voice of the European Commissioner for Enlargement Olli Rehn, that it will send ‘warning letters’ to Bulgarian (and Romanian) governments over shortcomings in the implementation of reforms. Bulgarian officials rushed to assure the public that the formal ‘warning letters’ to be sent by the Commission were not related to the ‘no’ votes in the French and Dutch referenda on the EU constitution. The double ‘no’ vote was already expected to add pressure on the EU leaders to reconsider the direction and speed of European integration. A third ‘no’ was anticipated from the next country to hold a referendum on the issue of the European constitution, namely Ireland. The European Commissioner for Enlargement Olli Rehn was quoted by the Bulgarian press saying that even though the ‘enlargement
Alina Curticaean

Blues’ among Europe’s public’ played a role in the referenda, “[r]umours of the death of EU enlargement policy’ were ‘evidently exaggerated’.”

Bulgarian Minister of European Affairs Meglena Kuneva additionally explained that the ‘warning letters’ were part of the formal monitoring process designed to evaluate the adoption and implementation of the EU legal system after the signing of the accession treaty. “We are not surprised at all”, she said. “The European Commission will do this every three months, once or twice every half an year.” In a similar vein, Deputy Foreign Minister Gergana Grancharova declared: “It is a routine practice for Brussels to send formal warnings and the announcement of Olli Rehn [concerning the sending of the ‘warning letters’; my note] has nothing to do with the rejection of the EU draft constitution in France and the Netherlands.”

Rachev’s cartoon published in Trud comments on these stringent issues by picturing the EU table with chairs reserved for Bulgaria and Romania. Only that, as in some sort of a childish game, thumbtacks are placed on both their seats. Figure 9 thus dispels any illusions of fair or kind-hearted European partners. Instead they emerge as infantile and mischievous, shaking the Balkanist discourse to its foundations.

Figure 9. Racho Rachev in Trud, 6 June 2005; reproduced by permission of the artist


30. Ibid.
The last section of this chapter takes the ‘journey’ trope a step further by depicting a series of exciting encounters between ‘Bulgaria’ and ‘Europe’.

6.3 Exciting encounters

The cartoon reproduced in Figure 10 was published only days after first the French and then the Dutch voters rejected overwhelmingly the proposed EU constitution in national referenda organised on 29 May and 1 June, respectively. Turning from the political situation on which the cartoon comments to Figure 10, we are witnessing here one of the few direct encounters represented in cartoons between the EU and the candidate state(s). The EU is anthropomorphised as female and Bulgaria and Romania as male, yet expectations regarding traditional gender roles and power relations are overthrown by a miniaturising of the male candidate countries in comparison with the female EU.

In Komarnitzki’s caricature, Romania and Bulgaria appear to display the physical characteristics of adult men. Both of them are moustached and dark-haired. In spite of the visual representation of adulthood, the cartoon infantilises Bulgaria and Romania. The reference to childishness comes from a number of directions. Small size – not size as such but in relation to the EU – has already been mentioned. Another reference comes from the implication that the EU woman admonishes Romania and Bulgaria as one might scold a child. The reasons behind her reaction are not difficult to guess. Bulgaria and Romania have misbehaved and covered their white shirts with dirt. The EU, in turn, is visually represented as a generously proportioned blond woman. She wears an impeccably clean, though old-fashioned, white-collared blue dress. Fitting her outfit, a blue cap adorns her head. Her facial features are masculinised. Altogether she is far from an attractive presence. The EU woman is old, but her force does not yet show any signs of withering away.

The cartoon reproduced in Figure 10 obviously (re)plays a number of Balkanist-related oppositional binaries – ‘powerful’–‘weak’, ‘clean’–‘dirty’ in such a way that the first term of the binary is linked with the EU and the second with Bulgaria and Romania. Yet the narrative is far from black-and-white. The EU is pictured as mature and powerful, but she is equally old and unattractive. A lot more can be said in relation to the masculinisation of the EU woman’s facial features. But before turning to this aspect, the older age and old-fashioned attire deserve some consideration too.

The image of ‘Europe’ in Figure 10 brings to mind the term ‘Old Europe’ that the US defence secretary Donald Rumsfeld used in January 2003 to refer to the
European countries that did not support the US invasion of Iraq, and specifically to France and Germany. Since its introduction, the expression has become very popular among politicians and academics alike. Like any metaphor, however, ‘Old Europe’ is ambiguous and it can be and has been used to construct various, sometimes even antagonistic positions. If initially understood to mean ‘sclerotic’ and ‘old-fashioned’, it was occasionally appropriated with pride in relation to a perceived position of wisdom and higher moral integrity. To give but one example, shortly after Rumsfeld introduced the term, in his address at the UN Security Council on the situation in Iraq, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dominique de Villepin ended his speech with the following remark:

This message comes to you today from an old country, France, from a continent like mine, Europe, that has known wars, occupation and barbarity. A country that does not forget and knows everything it owes to the freedom-fighters who came from America and elsewhere. And yet has never ceased to stand upright in the face of history and before mankind. Faithful to its values, it wishes resolutely to act with all the members of the international community. It believes in our ability to build together a better world.\(^\text{31}\)

Needless to say, the EU character in Komarnitzki’s cartoon does not resonate with this image of Europe as ‘old’ yet ‘wise’ and ‘moral’. On the contrary, it comes closer to the picture of Europe as ‘old-fashioned’. In addition, the tension in the representation of Romania and Bulgaria – they are adult-looking yet treated as

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children – alludes to a potential complication of the original story. Indeed, a visual cue cleverly inserted into the image brings to mind a potential link between the story in Figure 10 and a political event that took place two years before the publication of the cartoon. I am alluding here to the comments that Jacques Chirac, then president of France, made in February 2003 vis-à-vis a letter supporting US position in Iraq that the so-called ‘Vilnius group’ had signed earlier.

The pictorial element that likens the cartoon in Figure 10 to Chirac’s statement is represented by the facial features of the woman embodying the EU. As I have pointed out above, her face is masculinised. Familiarity with Komarnitzki’s caricature style turns this initially unknown face recognisable. The EU woman is no other than the then French president Jacques Chirac! Recognising and accepting this connection puts Figure 10 in a new light and leads to a turn in the interpretation of the cartoon. It ultimately involves a radical challenge of the hierarchical relationship between Bulgaria and Romania on the one hand and the EU/Europe on the other.

To point out the similarities between the cartoon in Figure 10 and Chirac’s statement, it is worth quoting the French president’s statement at length:

This group [the Vilnius group, my note] includes five candidate countries, the three Baltic countries, Slovenia and Slovakia, two candidate countries whose candidature has been deferred, Romania and Bulgaria, and three countries which haven’t yet got candidate status, i.e. Croatia, Macedonia and Albania.

I shall nevertheless make one comment … As regards the candidate countries – I’m not talking about countries which aren’t candidates – honestly, I think they have behaved somewhat irresponsibly. Because being a member of the European Union nevertheless requires a minimum of consideration for the others, a minimum of consultation. If on the first difficult issue you start giving your point of view irrespective of any consultation with the entity you want to join, then that isn’t very responsible behaviour. At any event, it’s not very good manners. So I believe they have missed a good opportunity to remain silent.

Let me add that, quite apart from the not-being-nice or childish aspect of that initiative, it’s dangerous. It mustn’t be forgotten that several of the EU Fifteen are going to have to ratify the enlargement through referenda. And we are very well aware that, already, the general public, as always when it’s a matter of something new, have some reservations about the enlargement, don’t always understand exactly why it’s in their interest to approve it. So, obviously, an initiative like the one you’re referring to can but strengthen, among the general public in the Fifteen – and particularly in those countries which will be ratifying through referenda – a feeling of hostility. And it needs only one country to hold a referendum which fails to ratify the enlargement for it not
to go ahead. So these countries have both shown a certain *lack of manners* and been somewhat reckless of the risks of falling too quickly into line with the US position.\(^{32}\)

Asked why he draws a distinction between the candidate countries and EU member states, Chirac continued:

> Because some are candidates and the others are already in the family. After all, when you’re in the family you have more rights than when you’re asking to join, when you’re knocking at the door. You understand, I’m not criticising anyone. But that isn’t good manners. And you included Romania in your list. I think that Romania and Bulgaria were particularly irresponsible to get involved in that when their position is already very delicate with respect to Europe. If they wanted to reduce their chances of joining Europe, they couldn’t find a better way.\(^{33}\)

In February 2003, Chirac characterised the candidate countries as “not-being-nice” or “being childish”, criticised them for lack of “good manners” and dubbed their comportment “irresponsible”. He furthermore noted that those already part of the “family” have more rights than those “knocking at the door”. Had it been published in February 2003, Komarnitzki’s caricature in Figure 10 could have easily been accepted as a comment on the French president’s declaration, as both Chirac’s speech and Komarnitzki’s cartoon bring to mind the imagery of admonishing misbehaving children. Being published more than two years after this event in relation to the negative vote of the French and Dutch on the EU constitution, the cartoon in Figure 10 seems to suggest that the rejection of the treaty represents a similar sort of scolding for Bulgaria and Romania.

The connection between Komarnitzki’s caricature and Chirac’s statement does more than just enhance the meaning of the cartoon. It adds another level by making more clear who is laughing and who is being laughed at in Figure 10. The cartoon is satiric, but the main target of irony here is neither ‘Bulgaria’ nor Bulgarian politicians. Not that we would not laugh at Komarnitzki’s picture of Bulgaria and Romania; their description invites at least a smile. Yet, here the target of satire is the French president and the EU/European community, which Chirac is imagined to embody. The debunking of the EU/Europe is achieved by ascribing female characteristics to the French president.


\(^{33}\) *Ibid.*, emphasis added.
Feminist scholarship has long argued that states and nations are gendered institutions. Addressing the relationship between nationalism and masculinities, Enloe writes that “nationalism typically has sprung from masculinised memory, masculinised humiliation and masculinised hope” (1989:44). In a similar vein, Nagel argues that the scripts of ‘the making and unmaking of states’ “are written primarily by men, for men, and about men”. In these scripts, she continues, “women are, by design, supporting actors whose roles reflect masculinist notions of femininity and of women’s proper ‘place’” (Nagel 1998:243). Within nationalist projects, women thus assume the roles of mothers and nurturers – the ‘vessels of the nation’. Men, in turn, are cast as protectors not only of their women (mothers, daughters and wives) but also of the nation. According to the hegemonic masculinity that organises the nationalist project, ‘real,’ ‘manly men’ are warriors and guardians; they must be prepared to sacrifice themselves. Rejection of the roles ascribed leads to a questioning not only of men’s loyalty but also of their masculinity.

Unsurprisingly, ideals of political leadership tie in with features of hegemonic masculinity, which informs the metaphors of war, sports and other metaphors used to describe political leaders. If ideal masculinity is conceived in opposition to what is feminine, then ascribing female/feminine characteristics to a male leader is an efficient way to ridicule him and his capabilities for leadership.

Figure 10 presents the French president Jacques Chirac as a blond, ponderous and old woman. At first sight, the blond hair seems to be just a complement for the blue attire, designed to remind the viewer of the colours of the EU flag and thus, together with the ‘EU’ inscription on the cap, mark the woman as the embodiment of the EU. However, with all the stereotyping of blond women that is going on, picturing a woman as blond cannot but play down her intelligence.

The burlesque feminisation of Chirac in Komarnitzki’s cartoon functions, in Burkean terms, as a ‘comic corrective’ (Burke 1984). This debunking or diminishment directed at powerful persons (the French president) and institutions (the EU that the French president is imagined to embody) functions to reduce the status of those initially in positions of authority, and the original hierarchy is

34. See e.g. Banerjee (2003) on the imagery of the aggressive male warrior in Hindu nationalism.

35. For more on the gendering of sports/war metaphors and the uses of these metaphors in politics see e.g. Edwards (2007), Jansen and Sabo (1994), Segrave (1994), Semino and Masci (1996).

ultimately challenged. As much as we might loathe it, the subversion of the hierarchical relationship between the EU/Europe on the one hand and Bulgaria (and Romania) on the other derives from the burlesque feminisation of the French president resting on a gender power relation that the cartoon leaves unchallenged. In political terms, the idea of women as ridiculous characterisation is certainly informed by the hegemonic masculinity which is structuring the domain of politics in Bulgaria as elsewhere.

Komarnitzki’s cartoon in Figure 10 presents a challenge to the hierarchical oppositions that characterise the Balkanist discourse, a challenge which derives from a power relationship which privileges male and masculine over female and feminine within the domain of politics. The meaning conveyed by the cartoon, however, depends upon the recognition of Jacques Chirac’s face and upon familiarity with his ‘admonishing’ of the candidate countries for perceived ‘irresponsible’ and ‘childish’ behaviour more than two years before the publication of the cartoon. In the absence of the identification of these references, it is more difficult to perceive the satirical flavour and to detect the challenge to Balkanism that the cartoon subtly articulates.

The next caricature continues the series of exciting encounters between Bulgaria and the EU/Europe.

The immediate context of the publication of Nikolov’s cartoon reproduced in Figure 11 is constituted by the first anniversary of Bulgaria’s NATO membership. On this occasion, Deputy Foreign Minister Gergana Grancharova underscored that NATO membership increases “Bulgaria’s political authority across the rest of

Figure 11. Chavdar Nikolov in Novinar, 2 April 2005; reproduced by permission of the artist
the world” 37. In a similar vein, Bulgaria’s Minister of Foreign Affairs declared in a media interview:

Bulgaria is even a state without complexes, a state which holds itself as if … by the way, we hold ourselves as if we are a member country, a founding state of the Alliance, and this one year during which we have been part of it does not make us members that are not so good as those who founded it 56 years ago. 38

The sense of empowerment which transpires from the above quotations is echoed with a satiric twist in Figure 11. In terms of pictorial composition, Chavdar Nikolov’s caricature reminds us of Ivan Kutuzov’s cartoon reproduced in Figure 3. However, there are a number of significant differences. Whereas in Kutuzov’s case, Bulgaria and France, embodied by the lion and the cock respectively, are separated by a fence, in Nikolov’s cartoon Bulgarian and EU representatives, metonymically represented, are spying on each other through a keyhole in the EU door.

If in Figure 3 the hierarchical arrangement privileges the EU member, France, Figure 11 depicts a symmetrical relationship. The only difference between the EU and the Bulgarian representatives is in terms of age: the Bulgarian man is younger than his EU counterpart, a characterisation which resonates with the increasingly popular distinction between ‘Old Europe’ and ‘New Europe’. The effect of Nikolov’s caricature is to ridicule both parts involved in the accession process and, in so doing, to challenge the superior position of ‘Europe’ vis-à-vis Bulgaria on which Balkanism ultimately rests.

With the next two cartoons signed respectively by Hristo Komarnitzki and Ivan Kutuzov, we return to the sphere of the Balkanist discourse. Their publication date coincides with the public release of European Commission’s monitoring report on Bulgaria’s (and Romania’s) preparedness for EU accession. The accession treaty signed in April 2005 envisaged accession on 1 January 2007, but it also included a number of ‘safeguard provisions’ under which membership could be postponed by one year if Bulgaria (or Romania) was to be “manifestly unprepared to meet the requirements of membership in a number of important areas”. 39

The Commission’s monitoring report released on 25 October evaluated the state of preparedness for accession on the basis of political and economic criteria and the requirement to adopt and implement the EU acquis. It noted that the

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38. Interview with Bulgarian Foreign Minister Solomon Passy, Bulgarian National Television, Channel 1, “Denyat Zapochva” (“The Day Has Started”), April 4, 2005.
areas in which Bulgaria was ready or could be ready by the envisaged accession date covered ten out of twenty nine chapters. Fourteen chapters were marked as in need of ‘increased efforts’ and five chapters were singled out as containing ‘issues of serious concern’ in the adoption and implementation of the EU legal order. These five areas included company law, services, agriculture, regional policy, and justice and home affairs. The Commission did not recommend the enforcement of the safeguard clauses at this stage but underscored that it continues its various monitoring activities until accession using “all available instruments, such as warning letters, peer reviews, monitoring missions carried out by the Commission services and the structures of the association agreements.”

Presenting the report to the media, Dimitris Kourkoulas, head of the delegation of the European Commission to Bulgaria, underscored especially the issues of organised crime and corruption. “Very serious concerns exist about the high level of organised crimes in Bulgaria, which so far has not been on the political agenda. The frequent contract killings of people linked to organised crime groups represent a significant challenge to the rule of law”, he said. Moreover, the state of affairs in Bulgaria affects directly the EU countries: “Some kinds of organised crimes, such as trafficking human beings, currency and document counterfeiting, which originates within Bulgaria affect EU member states directly.”

Both Komarnitzki’s and Kutuzov’s reflections on the report are underpinned by disease metaphors of the contagious variety. While Figure 13 pictures Bulgaria as a ‘bad apple’ falling into the EU, amid fears of a mass outspread of the avian flu disease in the EU Figure 12 depicts Bulgaria and Romania as infected birds. Of the two cartoons, Komarnitzki’s pictorial composition is particularly interesting.

While the EU had indeed already banned poultry imports from a number of countries, including Romania, after outbreaks of the deadly virus strain were confirmed, no cases of avian flu had been reported in Bulgaria at the time of publication of the cartoon. Instead, two EU member countries, Sweden and the UK, had announced cases of bird flu. While Swedish authorities later informed that the virus on its territory was not of the deadly type, results from the UK were still

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40. Ibid.


43. Ibid.
expected. In addition, dead birds were found on the territories of Germany and Slovenia, and tests were being conducted to investigate whether these birds were carrying avian flu or not.44 In spite of the state of facts, the only infected birds in Figure 12 are Romania and Bulgaria. The hens inside the ‘Europe’ house look perfectly healthy though quite scared of the prospect of being united with the two diseased outsiders.

Disease metaphors, particularly those of the contagious variety, are pervasive in the discourses of othering. As Deborah Stone puts it:

Cults, communism, in fact any movement or set of ideas one wants to condemn, are said to ‘spread’. Members and advocates ‘infect’ others with their ideas. …

Disease metaphors imply a story about deterioration and decline, and about struggle for control between humans and nonhumans ‘germs’. If a social process is conceived as contagion, then a ‘cure’ of any single inflicted entity will not stop the phenomenon, and harsh measures may be needed to isolate the carriers and ‘stamp out’ the disease … The disease label discredits opponents and implies the moral rightness of treating them as less than human.

(1988:120–121)

In both Figure 12 and Figure 13, however, it is the collective self and not a threatening other that is marked out as infected. Harsh measures, maybe even quarantine, are needed if the contagious disease is to be eradicated. In the absence of extreme actions, the local infection threatens to turn into a European pandemic. Both narratives codify belonging to Europe as health and both are equally overlaid with Balkanism.

6.4 Conclusions

This chapter has investigated ‘images in use’ and the relationship between images and power by examining the role of the Balkanist discourse in those political cartoons which depict the final leg of Bulgaria’s journey to Europe. These caricatures picture Bulgaria reaching the EU’s wall, waiting at its gate or encountering the EU/Europe personage. All the cartoons analysed in this chapter rely, to a smaller (such as Figures 1 and 2) or larger extent (such as Figures 12 and 13), on Balkanist binary oppositions such as ‘developed’–‘underdeveloped’, ‘civilised’–‘barbarian’, ‘rational’–‘irrational’, ‘controlled’–‘violent’. Roughly half of them, though, open up to interpretations that challenge the Balkanist discourse from which these verbo-pictorial compositions initially drew to articulate their stories. In most of these cases, the defiance of Balkanism results from direct challenges to the superior position of ‘Europe’ vis-à-vis Bulgaria. Thus, Figure 6 suggests that the EU/Europe character is self-interested, calculative and ultimately deceiving, and in Figure 9 the European partners emerge as infantile and mischievous. Figure 10, then, feminises the EU/Europe character, and Figure 11 ridicules both parts involved in the EU accession process and in so doing challenges the superior position of ‘Europe’ on which Balkanism ultimately rests.

In two other cases, the cartoons’ propensity for challenging the power and authority of the Balkanist discourse is more fragile but nevertheless present. In
Figure 5, for instance, the man embodying the Bulgarian national community triumphs against all odds in his EU accession quest by a simple yet effective trick: uttering the magical phrase ‘Open Sesame’. Figure 8, then, resists the ascription of the infantilising ‘teaching and learning’ trope to the whole Bulgarian society and uses it instead to poke fun at the Bulgarian political elites.

Even in those cases where the EU accession stories are ingrained with Balkanism, the situation remains unsettled. It is the power of irony’s doubleness (Hutcheon 1991; Scholes 1982:77) to contest the singleness associated with the authority of the dominant discourse. In the words of Robert Siegle: “reflexive irony undoes the search for a center [of single meaning; my note] by bending that search back around its starting assumptions” (1986:18). The oscillation between two mutually contradicting meanings or readings that self-irony encourages prevents both the confirmation and the total rejection of the dominant discourse. Instead the position that is offered is that of contestation of Balkanism by working within the dominant discourse yet undermining its claims to authority.

Although the analysis in this chapter has been based on political cartoons, the findings can be extended beyond the sphere of cartooning because cartoonists must tap into familiar narrations that their readers can access with ease. As DeSousa and Medhurst put it, “the cartoonist taps the collective consciousness of readers and [thereby] affirms cultural values” (1982:85). Political cartooning as a form or popular culture constitutes one of the media that “societies use to shape themselves as community through fact and fiction” (Neumann and Nexon 2006:15). Treating political cartoons as indicative of wider societal discourses, I contend that even though the strong position of Balkanism in Bulgarian EU accession narratives cannot be denied, Bulgarians do find alternative strategies to overcome it. In the context of political cartoons, such strategies range from opening up to interpretations that undercut through self-irony the Balkanist hierarchy that privileges all that is European over all that is Balkan, to more overt challenges to and indifference towards the Balkanist distinctions.

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CHAPTER 7

The politics of visual representation

Security, the US and the ‘war on terrorism’

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The verbal activation of mental images in security discourse is a most elusive dimension of the political use of images. The ‘productive’ effects of security discourse concern the sense of collective safety and the re-orientation of fear and aggressiveness from ‘us’ to ‘them.’ The anamorphic analysis of the mental imagery of the ‘war on terrorism’ is the analytical ground or the ‘oblique perspective’ from which questions concerning who gets what, when and how can be addressed. The political role of visual communication goes beyond the morphological characteristics of the images and the processes of material production, distribution and consumption, but reaches deep into the human mind as a form of ‘invisible technology’ capable of subverting the perception of the social world.

Security is always understood in a particular way – through the already existing or imagined threat, the dangerous ‘other’. The presence of the mental imagery of the evil ‘other’ in political communication not only allows the reconstruction of the public sphere of ‘us’, but also enables success in the competition for control over the distribution of certain values in the same public sphere. To make particular representations of security reality politically relevant, a political actor must formulate, visualise and make attractive or convincing such abstract concept as security. The metaphoric language and conceptual political metaphors used by a political actor help the audience to understand and experience one thing in terms of another (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 5, 115; see also Lakoff 1991a, web document). However, metaphorical descriptions of the ‘other’ as evil and demon-like and of ‘us’ as noble and knight-like not only act as representational tools in the explaining of the abstract concepts of ‘security’ and ‘insecurity’; more importantly, the use of these conceptual metaphors evokes mental imagery in the imagination of the audience, which is also reflected in the ‘images in use’ of popular culture. For example, in parody pictures combining Apocalypse Now, Star Wars or James
Bond movie posters with political figures of the day, the metaphoric dichotomies of DARKNESS-LIGHT, GOOD-EVIL, HUMAN-INHUMAN are clearly exposed: “George W. Bush presents Apocalypse Now”, “Tali Wars: America strikes back”, “The World Has Had Enough”, “Bush 007” or the editorial cartoon “St. George and the Dragon”. Although the criticism in these satiric and parody pictures is concentrated on the Bush administration and its wars, these images in use reflect very precisely a particular mental imagery in use – that of the basic oppositions of good versus bad and ‘us’ versus ‘them’, which govern our thinking on security. In this thinking structure, security and insecurity are understood and experienced as a fundamental juxtaposition between ‘us’ and the ‘other’, and in this juxtaposition the ‘other’ is always a demonic figure against which the knight-like figure of ‘us’ is fighting.

In this chapter, I propose a critical analysis of security anamorphs in George W. Bush’s rhetoric on the eve of the war on terrorism. My aim is also to pave the way to a different kind of International Relations’ security research by presenting visual aspects of metaphoric security anamorphs used by a political actor to make certain foreign political actions (the war on terrorism, for example) possible and acceptable. In the next section, I will give and explore examples of verbal metaphoric expressions used in political communication to pinpoint and highlight the existence of a basic GOOD-EVIL opposition. My aim, however, is not to study the structuration of security understanding in terms of otherness metaphors. Rather, I aim to investigate what kind of mental imagery this verbal metaphorical structuring evokes in our minds and how this metaphoric structuring at the same time

1. I am following Lakoff and Johnson by using upper case when referring to CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS and by using lower case and italics when metaphorical expressions of conceptual metaphors are referred to and quoted.

2. As I prefer not to put forward the specific mental imagery in use evoking the metaphoric juxtaposition of ‘us’ and the ‘other’, I would rather not expose these sample pictures here, but only mention the sources, where these outbursts of mental imagery in popular culture can be seen. The parodied Apocalypse Now poster can be seen on this web page: http://politicalhumor.about.com/library/images/blbushapocalyksenown.htm, accessed September 20, 2009.


distorts our understanding of security. While the analysis of verbal metaphors only or the analysis of the structuration by metaphors is not able to reveal the connection of verbal metaphors with mental imagery in use and further with the actual images in use and the systematic distortion that the use of metaphors inherently contains, I will in the second and third part of the next section propose an anamorphic approach and a tool of security anamorph to show how the metaphors-we-live-by contain in themselves a genetic code of distortion, which influences the mental imageries that these metaphors evoke, and which is also expressed in images in use, both in those supportive of governmental policies as well as in critical ones. In section two, I will then use the proposed approach and tool to explore the continuity and change of metaphoric distortion from verbal metaphors through mental imagery to the visual images in use to which I referred on the first page of this chapter – that is, I will explore with the help of the anamorphic approach how these metaphors of the ‘other’ and of ‘us’ work as images in use.

7.1 From verbal to visual communication

7.1.1 The construction of mental imagery

Articulation of security and arguments about security are located within the realm of political argument and discursive legitimisation in the environment of communication, where the security speech-acts are made and the securitisation move takes place (Williams 2003:512). The environment of communication is now even more structured by televisural media and by the importance of images. In this environment, security speech-acts are inextricable from the image-dominated context in which they take place and through which the meaning of ‘security’ is communicated (ibid.: 525–526). The result is that

… while it is often the case that the rhetorician will focus on linguistic texts, on words themselves, in an increasingly media-saturated environment, ignoring visual imagery provides less and less satisfactory work (Dauber 2001:209).

Here, again, another duality is made visible, the duality between words and images, as if they participated separately from each other in the construction of meanings. If we consider that words are not ‘only words’, but are always tightly accompanied with the mental imagery these words provoke in our minds – that the words, combined into associative chains, always carry with them the visual aspect; for example, the phrase “Santa Claus is coming into town” is accompanied with a series of mental images (red-coated happy old man with reindeer-pulled sleigh full of presents) as is the phrase “they have attacked America because we are
freedom’s home and defender” – this juxtaposition of words and images in the construction of meanings disappears and new research paths can be opened.

Michael C. Williams states that “it is not the word ‘security’ that is indispensable to the specific nature of the speech-act (though it often may play a vital role) but the broader rhetorical performance of which it is a part” (Williams 2003: 526). It may be added that one essential element of that performance is the ‘drawing’ of lively (though invisible) associative mental images with words into our imagination. It is thus not only a rhetorical performance, but a rhetorical-visual performance of securitising. Also the Copenhagen School\(^8\) stresses that: “It is important to note that the security speech-act is not defined by uttering the word security. What is essential is the designation of an existential threat requiring emergency action or special measures and the acceptance of that designation by a significant audience.” (Buzan et al. 1998: 27, emphasis added). Therefore, the speech-act of securitisation is not reducible to a purely verbal act or a linguistic rhetoric, but is a broader performative act, which draws upon a variety of contextual, institutional and symbolic resources for its effectiveness (Williams 2003: 526). An essential part of that performative act is, again, the aspect of visuality, the ability of words to provoke images in our minds\(^9\) even though not all of the words have a referential in the physical world. It is precisely because there is no referential in the physical world for ‘security’, ‘insecurity’ or ‘terrorism’ that the opportunity for employing

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8. Copenhagen School of security studies (a group of scholars, working on security and centred on ideas of Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde), was named by their home city, the Danish city of Copenhagen. They introduced sectoral security thinking, which includes economic, political, environmental and societal dimensions of security. Copenhagen School also developed the securitisation theory, aimed at analysing specific security speech-acts through which threats become represented and recognised and issues treated as security issues, thereby giving the speech-act maker the right to claim the usage of whatever means he sees necessary to overcome these threats.

9. Allan Paivio (1986) gives an influential account of the emergence of such mental imagery by proposing a ‘dual coding’ theory that explains how we think in terms of imaginal and verbal codes. There are two kinds of codes, imagens and logogens, which we use to store experience and information. Any experience we have is classified either as a non-linguistic (pictorial) or linguistic (verbal) event depending whether an imangen or logogen is activated. In further processing imagens, of course, activate imagens, but they can also activate logogens. Logogens, too, have the same power: they can activate other logogens, which results in a chain of words, and they can also activate imagens. Action within one system can cause activity in the other system: words arouse other words, or they arouse images. Paivio’s notion that more than just language accounts for how we think is also important for my argument on security understanding – words are pictures, too, and imagery of security connected so essentially to the verbal expressions on security is at least as fundamental as language.
metaphors and metaphoric mental imagery arises. As a result of the control of mental imagery, achieved through repeated and unchallenged associations, the opposition of security/insecurity and respective differentiation of ‘good guys/evil guys’, is legitimised. Moreover, it can be argued that these associations remain unchallenged because of the established juxtaposition of good versus evil, which creates a vicious circle: if we are good, we cannot be evil, so we are not evil, because we are good. And correspondingly: if they are evil, they cannot be good, so they are not good, because they are evil.

‘Security’ emerges as simulacrum of reality and is mediated through further metaphoric visualisations of evil and threatening terrorism and terrorists, which help to ‘securitise’ security. Ultimately, in the politics of visual representation, metaphoric visualisations (mental imagery in use) are essential for the securitisation of security. Thus, a security speech-act is never purely about speech or words only, because in the securitisation attempt the security rhetorician uses a specific characteristic feature of rhetoric, the metaphoric function of words performed in the political rhetoric, to achieve his goal. Presenting abstract security by means of metaphoric visualisation (for example, “America as the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world”10 presents the United States through the metaphors of LIGHT IS GOOD and THE UNITED STATES IS LIGHT; “justice demands that those who helped or harboured the terrorists be punished – and punished severely”11 states that JUSTICE IS A PERSON and JUSTICE IS A JUDGE; “freedom and democracy are under attack”12 says that FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY ARE TREASURES; “attack designed to tear us apart”13 claims that COMMUNITY IS A WHOLE and WE ARE WHOLE) allows the association of incompatible things and the separation of the inseparable.

It is thus important, in the case of security, to study verbal metaphors, metaphoric rhetoric or images in the use of the other (pictures, photos, movies, cartoons, etc.) not only separately, but essentially as belonging together through mental imagery in use (verbal metaphors evoke mental imagery, which is reflected in images in use). It is important to try, in the analysis of security rhetoric and security policy, to highlight these specific imaginative mental images that security speech-acts provoke in our minds in order to understand how the abstract conception of security is visualised through the category of the ‘other’ and how this

specific imagery further works as a source of action and organised violence (on the connection between metaphors and action, see Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 156–158). The politics of the reorientation of collective insecurity against the external enemy has to be analysed in terms of how specific imagery affects the inclination and orientation of collective, organised violence (see, for example, Lakoff 1991a and 1991b, web documents) and how the ‘other’ is used as a symbol to project the accusation away from self and to rage at the ‘immorality’ of the enemy (Lasswell 1950: 38–41). For example, some metaphoric utterances that activate specific security imagery in our minds – “terrorists are hiding in shadows”,14 “hunting them down”,15 “doing whatever it takes to smoke them out of their holes”;16 etc. – are all specific visually-touched performative security speech-acts, which not only draw a clear line between acceptable/us and non-acceptable/them, but also ‘draw’ a picture of the ‘other’ into our imagination (TERRORISTS ARE MONSTERS hiding in the dark). Moreover, these mental images are very specific, because they state that THE UNITED STATES IS A PERSON, THE UNITED STATES IS A HUNTER and TERRORISTS ARE PREY (“hiding in shadows”, “hunting them down”, “smoking them out of their holes”) through which the war on terrorism (a modern version of medieval witch hunts or church inquisition) makes sense. By using the metaphors THE US IS A HUNTER and TERRORISTS ARE PREY together with metaphorical expressions of war (“they [attacks] are acts of war,”17 “winning this war that has been declared on America”;18) President Bush creates a strong mental image of a just war while conceptualising the strategy of the United States and assigning specific roles to the US army and the terrorists. It can be argued metaphorically that “the scenario is written, main roles are distributed, so let the play start”.

As these metaphoric speech-acts connect acceptable to ‘us’ and non-acceptable to ‘them’ in successful chains of meanings, it follows that every time ‘they’ is uttered, it automatically connotes to non-acceptable and is defined as ‘evil’. In the same way, when ‘us’ is uttered, it connotes to acceptable and is automatically defined as good. Finally, all of ‘them’ start to mean the same as ‘evil’, and ‘us’ means always ‘good’, whatever the nature of our deeds is. In further processing

of security understanding, the duality of good/evil also starts to mean security/insecurity, which then allows ‘us’ to use even most extreme and violent means against ‘them’.

7.1.2 Mental imagery in use: Structuration and distortion by metaphors

On 12 September 2001, on the very next day after the 9/11 attacks, President Bush gave a speech in which he stated:

> The deliberate and deadly attacks which were carried out yesterday against our country were more than acts of terror. They were acts of war. This will require our country to unite in steadfast determination and resolve. Freedom and democracy are under attack. The American people need to know that we’re facing a different enemy than we have ever faced. This enemy hides in shadows, and has no regard for human life. This is an enemy who preys on innocent and unsuspecting people, runs for cover. But it won’t be able to run for cover forever. This is an enemy that tries to hide. But it won’t be able to hide forever. This is an enemy that thinks its harbors are safe. But they won’t be safe forever. This enemy attacked not just our people, but all freedom-loving people everywhere in the world. The United States of America will use all our resources to conquer this enemy. We will rally the world. We will be patient, we will be focused, and we will be steadfast in our determination. This battle will take time and resolve. But make no mistake about it: we will win.

(Bush 12 September 2001a, web document, emphasis added)

This speech was more than just a description of what has happened and what will come in the future – the rhetoric used in this speech constructed effectively categories of ‘other-evil-enemy’ and ‘good-us,’ thus recreating a metaphoric division that not only structures our thinking on security, but structures it through distorted mental images that produce a representation of essential opposition (WE ARE GOOD, but OTHER IS EVIL). By stating that “freedom and democracy are under attack” and that the enemy who has attacked ‘us’ (that is, the people of freedom and democracy) is “a different enemy than we have ever faced”, so that the use of “all our resources to conquer this enemy” is needed, this rhetoric also created a special political space, where this specific ‘other’ is always against ‘us’ and, therefore, must be destroyed. Moreover, not only was the division between ‘us’ and ‘them’ recreated in this rhetoric, but through vivid metaphoric descriptions of both sides (roughly generalised as WE ARE GOOD, THEY ARE EVIL) special metaphoric implications emerged. It became clear that ‘they’ are not only evil and a threat to ‘our’ security but, defined as evil and a threat, ‘they’ always represent insecurity. As a result of such metaphoric visualisation, abstractions of ‘security’ and ‘insecurity’
now have faces – distorted mental images of ‘us’ representing security and ‘them’ representing insecurity.

By visualising security through a dangerous ‘other’, the political actor follows specific patterns of duality that are deeply embedded in political communication. These patterns are one part of the system of representation within which these visualisations function and on which it depends what these visual security representations represent and how they represent what they are supposed to represent (Block 1983: 511). According to these patterns, the identities of national self (‘we’) and the international other (‘they’) are constructed and reconstructed by means of metaphorical language. The existence of such patterns in political communication means that there are “certain things that are typically done and not done” in this competition for the distribution of values and power in society (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 7). For example, ‘us’ is typically described in positive terms and never in negative terms while the ‘other’ is described mostly in negative terms and hardly ever in positive terms. Based on the juxtaposition of ‘us’ and ‘them’ and connected either to ‘us’ or to ‘them’ in that juxtaposition, the concepts of security and insecurity – which are mutually constitutive in the sense that one cannot be defined without the other – are transformed into representing the opposites. Moreover, the abstract concepts of security and insecurity are turned into vivid mental visual imagery of security or insecurity (or mental imagery in use) by connecting ‘security’ and ‘insecurity’ respectively with ‘us’ and ‘them’ and describing ‘us’ and ‘them’ through metaphorical comparisons, e.g. “we’re the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world”\textsuperscript{19} (THE UNITED STATES IS LIGHT) or “this enemy hides in shadows, and has no regard for human life”\textsuperscript{20} (TERRORISTS ARE DARKNESS, DARKNESS IS EVIL). This is, at the same time, intensive building of the identities of ‘us’ and ‘them’, which takes place in a way that presents ‘us’ in a positive and ‘them’ in a negative light.

Thus, by reforming the mutually constitutive nature of security and insecurity through the metaphoric polarisation and moralisation (see Lundsten and Stocchetti 2005: 26–27; Lundsten and Stocchetti 2006: 147–148; Stocchetti 2007: 233–234), the political actor maintains the discursive duality – the juxtaposition of the national ‘self’ with the foreign ‘other’. Polarisation presents the concepts of ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘security’ and ‘insecurity’ as mutually exclusive categories, and the moralisation of this discursive duality is achieved through the rhetoric of ‘good vs. evil’, which not only assigns to the duality a highly moral nature, but

\textsuperscript{19} Bush, September 11, 2001a, web document, emphasis added.

\textsuperscript{20} Bush, September 12, 2001a, web document, emphasis added.
justifies the use of even the most extreme means, like war, in the name of security, whether national or international.

Hence, being at its simplest a rhetorical separation of who are we and who they are, this duality structures all security thinking. By stretching, elongating and reforming the mental imagery of words,21 these binary representations of us/them and security/insecurity form conceptual systems of thinking on security that I shall call here ‘security anamorphs’. As descriptive but distorted metaphoric images of assumed security reality in international relations, these security anamorphs or juxtapositions of secure/insecure, good/evil and us/them are redesigned and reproduced again and again in political communication. Because of the value status assigned to security anamorphs through a moralisation process, the anamorphs are used then as justifications for the use of extreme and violent means against the insecure/evil/other. Thus, it is not only through language or linguistic expressions that political spaces of security and insecurity are created, but more importantly also through mental imagery of otherness, which the use of metaphoric language inevitably creates in human minds. It is not only words through which the political spaces of ‘us’ and ‘them’ are constructed and reconstructed by political actors. It is also through activation of mental images, which preserve and control these conditions that support such politics of visual representation – it is the politics of visualisation of fear, which allows the control and distribution of values of safety and security in these political spaces (Stocchetti 2007:224).

These anamorphs are distortions, and the acceptance of political actions taken and the political space created is thus based on illusion and simulacrum. The anamorphic approach, which focuses on the aspect of visual representation, makes it possible to see this essential connection of visual mental representation with metaphoric language and verbal metaphoric expressions. Not only do the metaphors that we live by structure our understanding of security but, more importantly, metaphoric language together with mental imagery visualise and produce distorted representations of security reality and thereby create further functional distortions, which then come to be realised in images in use (pictures, cartoons, movies, posters, etc.). The anamorphic approach is able to unveil this systematic distortion contained in a specific political discourse and its metaphors while a pure metaphorical, rhetorical or visual analysis would fail to do this. This

21. By visual imagery of words, I mean mental images in use, pictures-in-the-head or internal representations that we create in our imagination unwittingly as a part of all communication. (See also Block 1983:506–507 for the definition of mental images as representations; see also Paivio 1986:23 for another account of mental images as mental representations that can be viewed by an inner eye.)
approach allows us to understand how and why security is made so meaningful to us and what informs public opinion, political actions and decisions, moves in security policy and foreign policy, as well as scholarly theorisations on security. I am also suggesting that as long as the connection of verbal discourse and conceptual metaphors with mental imagery, which is also to be reflected in pictures (images in use) of the ‘other’, is not considered as the basis of security understanding and the creation of political spaces, we are missing something of potential importance. If it is taken for granted that the evoked-by-metaphors mental imagery of the ‘other’ and the anamorphic process of visualisation of security through the ‘other’ are of no significance for the established paradigms of visual analysis, we are throwing the baby out with the bathwater and with it the possibility to see that what we consider as the true representation of reality (also including pictures, photographs and images portraying the ‘other’), is actually a distorted-by-metaphors representation of something, which has its roots in verbal security discourse.

Conceptualising security in terms of the ‘other’ indeed influences the shape ‘security’ or ‘insecurity’ takes for us, the way we talk of it and, ultimately, the way we act towards others in matters of security (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:7), but the idea of metaphoric structuration does not help us unveil the fact that the process of explaining something in terms of something else (that is, using metaphors) produces necessarily distorted mental imagery. Metaphoric structuration pretends at giving a true explanation and representation of reality, in which we sincerely believe, but at the same time it blinds us to see that this representation is distorted because of the move of “explaining something in terms of something else”. Adding the tool of anamorph to the analysis of mental (visual) imagery in use that metaphoric (verbal) language creates and that (sometimes, but not always) is transformed into pictures, cartoons, movies or other visual objects helps us reveal this inherent genetic code of distortion of political metaphors relating to security discourse and to the discourse of the ‘other’. This is also to suggest that if the basic thinking of how security is to be conceptualised in political communication does not change, the policies and actions in matters of security will not change either. Understanding and perceiving security and insecurity in terms of the threatening ‘other’ only – that is, solving the dilemma of conceptualising security by choosing from the two security-related lemmas the negative ‘exclude-the-other’ and leaving the positive ‘include-the-other’ (on security dilemma, see Booth and Wheeler 2008:3–6) – will thus necessarily lead to a security paradox. The metaphoric mental imagery evoked by conceptual metaphors of the OTHER IS EVIL kind structure our understanding of the other, and the entailments of these metaphoric images (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:9) – because of the evilness of the other, the other does not belong to us since WE ARE GOOD, thus the
OTHER IS A THREAT; because the other is a threat, the OTHER IS INSECURITY – compel actors to do whatever it takes for the sake of one's own security, thus generating an all-round struggle for survival, which leads to greater insecurity (Wolfers 1951: 42).

As the cohesion of the in-group ('us') is achieved by a negative representation of the out-group ('them' or the 'other') through the social categorisation, depersonalisation and dehumanisation of the members of the out-group (see Tajfel 1974: 66–67; Tajfel 1981: 241–243), the same dividing practices can also be pointed out in the politics of visualisation of security. By asking how the terrorist ‘other’ is created, how the divide between ‘good us’ and ‘evil them’ is made and how then ‘security’ and ‘insecurity’ are connected to ‘us’ and ‘them’, I will try to answer questions of what security anamorphs or mental visual representations of security are emerging from these dividing practices, and whether the categories of security and insecurity are really mutually exclusive, as it is presented in the rhetoric of President Bush. I argue that while the oppositional and divided categories of security and insecurity are, instead, two sides of the same coin, this division between them works only when these two categories are disjointed or presented as essentially in-group vs. out-group characteristics. When the mutually constitutive relationship between security and insecurity is not described in a clear way – by showing that the opposition of security and insecurity is possible only through the discursive use of the category of threat/other, which is rhetorically connected to ‘insecurity’ – this socially constructed juxtaposition of ‘us’/security and ‘them’/insecurity continues to create a special political sphere of ‘safe ours’ and ‘dangerous theirs’. In such a situation, the distorted visual representation of security justifies the use of extreme means as natural and normal.

7.1.3 What is a security anamorph?

The word anamorphosis comes from the Greek language, ‘ana’ (again) and ‘morphoun’ (to form), meaning the reforming of a visual image by stretching or elongating it so that viewed from the fixed eye position22 (Topper 2000: 118) the image appears distorted, but viewed from an oblique angle (the projection point of the anamorph) it appears undistorted. While the term ‘anamorphosis’ describes the process of reforming, the term ‘anamorph’ describes the outcome of that process – a reformed imagery. Leonardo Da Vinci called anamorphosis ‘accidental

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22. Fixed eye position means viewpoint at eye level. When looking straight forward at the wall, where a picture hangs at eye level, the picture appears undistorted (e.g. a circle is round and not oval). Fixed eye position is thus the projection point, which is considered as the normal viewpoint.
perspective’, because it was largely the consequence of a misunderstanding or an intentional misuse of linear perspective, where the work is designed to be viewed from the front (from the fixed eye position), whereas in anamorphosis, the work is designed to be viewed from an oblique angle (Behrens 1987:277).

To give a pictorial example of such anamorphic obliqueness, I present here two photos I have taken of a combined pedestrian/bicyclist street of Helsinki. Both photographs show the same route sign for bicyclists, but viewed and shot from two different angles. The photograph on the left shows the sign from about two or three metres away, from an oblique angle (that is, from the projection point of the sign from which the sign is meant to be viewed). Viewed from this oblique angle, the shape of the bicycle seems normal and the proportions of the bicycle are correct (just as it seems normal, according to President Bush, to reach security by waging a war on terrorism). In the photograph on the right, the sign is viewed from the fixed eye position (from which the sign is not designed to be viewed, but which is our normal angle of viewing). I shot this second picture standing on the sign and turning my camera as if I was lying in the air horizontally (parallel with the street). Viewed from our normal, fixed eye position, the bicycle is distorted: the wheels are not round but elliptic. A bicycle of this shape is probably not suitable for riding. In the same manner, one can ask if our world is safer in these times of war on terrorism or do we feel more secure by waging a war on terrorism or has this war really increased our security?

Hence, ‘anamorph’ is a term, which I borrow from art history and which I apply here metaphorically to security discourse and its metaphors. Security anamorph is the result of the process of security anamorphosis, in which security is visualised and our understanding of security is structurated through the use of metaphoric language and metaphoric concepts. Anamorphosis works mostly

Figure 1. Photographs of a route sign for bicyclists shot from two angles
in the same way as the metaphoric structuration of thought, but it has one basic feature of its own, which makes it different from metaphoric structuration and which allows a more delicate and detailed analysis by enabling the analyst to see through and beyond metaphors. That feature is the inherent distortions contained by the metaphors—we-live-by of political or security discourses. This DNA code of distortion of metaphors is the move of “explaining something in terms of something else” or, put briefly, “this is not what it is, THIS IS SOMETHING ELSE”. The anamorphic approach thus helps us not only to see what political metaphors do (explain something in terms of something else), but how they work at different levels (verbal and mental as well as visual). In metaphoric structuration, some aspects of the comparison are highlighted and others hidden (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 10–13; see also Lakoff 1991b, web document) and this can be revealed and analysed by the analysis of metaphors, but the basic distortions that are an inherent part of metaphors remain invisible, and the revealing of these is enabled only by anamorphic analysis. Moreover, the projection angles of anamorphs expose these distortions at once, because when viewed from a different angle the picture is distorted. While metaphoric structuration connects the metaphoric concepts we use to specific values we cherish and through this also to different cultural groups, it does so without questioning the value of these cherished values or without asking how it is possible that one group is valued as more human than the other group. The same mechanism works only partially through the angles of anamorphs. Indeed, the consideration as to which angle is given priority is partly a matter of the subculture in which one lives and partly a matter of personal values (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 22–23). At the same time, however, the task of giving priority to one of the angles exposes both of them, and the dilemma of choosing between them makes one aware of both angles and the inherent distortions. As an analogue, the anamorphosis is here, too, used metaphorically to describe the relativity of vision and the subjectivity of human experience (Topper 2000: 115). Moreover, the analysis of the metaphoric mental images in use, which participate essentially in the meaning-creation, is in itself a reforming action. Thus, I call my analysis the ‘anamorphic’ analysis of security imagery, because it is a reforming analysis of already distorted imagery of the security/insecurity duality.
7.2 Continuity and change in the mental imagery of US security discourse

The analysis of 41 main statements and speeches,\(^\text{23}\) delivered between 11 September and 8 October 2001\(^\text{24}\) by President Bush,\(^\text{25}\) shows that there are different rhetorical communication or interaction strategies that President Bush uses. In his attempt to present a special representation of security reality to create the particular public sphere of ‘us’ President Bush went through symbolic negotiations with the public at three levels. At national level, he addressed his speeches and statements to the nation of the United States (including the Joint Session of Congress), and the name of the persuasion strategy was the ‘great nation’. At a combined national-international level, President Bush addressed his speeches and statements to the national and international audience, including the Islamic/Muslim communities. At that level, the strategy was called ‘all peace-loving people’. At the third (operational) level, the national specialists’ level (groups of state, governmental and administration specialists like the Air Force, Pentagon, the House of Representatives and the Speaker of the House of Representatives, President Pro Tempore of the Senate, small group of Congressional leaders, FBI, CIA, airline employees, FEMA, US Department of State and Department of Labour), the strategy was ‘this is war and we will win’. The third group is for analytical reasons separated from the national level because of the special rhetoric that was delivered to this particular audience. For example, the Air Force, CIA, FBI and Pentagon needed as much assurance about the national extraordinariness as did the larger national audience, but they needed less assurance about the security or strategic measures taken (or planned) by the Bush administration to accept the official juxtaposition of security/insecurity or the duality of ‘we are good/they

\(^{23}\) I analysed these materials for the first time in 2002–2003 for my master’s thesis, completed for the University of Tampere. In 2002–2003, all speeches and statements concerning the terrorist attacks and the following war on terrorism were electronically archived at the Web site of the International Information Programs (http://www.usinfo.state.gov/topical/pol/terror/poltexts.htm) of the US Department of State, and at the White House Web site (http://www.whitehouse.gov). The first one of these resources does not exist any more, as a result of which I use here only those statements and documents that are available at the White House Web site (http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/nationalsecurity/archive.html). Last accessed October 7, 2009.

\(^{24}\) First offences of the war on terrorism (military strikes in Afghanistan) begun on 7 October 2001, and on 8 October, the order to create the Homeland Security Office was signed by President Bush.

\(^{25}\) Though not written by President Bush, these speeches and statements were delivered or signed by him.
are evil’. The larger public audience at home and abroad, containing much more critical thinking, and being perhaps more doubtful of this kind of mind-making, was asked to trust the Bush administration, but considerations of the strategies or other measures taken against terrorists and against governments that support terrorists were not revealed to them.

The following disillusionment with the security/insecurity duality representations in the rhetoric of President Bush does not mean that I am denying what happened on 9/11 or claiming that terrorist attacks do not matter or that there are no terrorists. Terrorist attacks did happen, these attacks do matter, and there are terrorists in many countries. However, the actual existence of the al-Qaeda network, the leadership of this network by Osama bin Laden, the attacks on the Twin Towers and Pentagon, and the plane crash in Pennsylvania function only as reality constraints on the construction of plausible representations of different situations in political communication. These constraints are, however, loose constraints, and may therefore allow multiple and totally different representations from different viewpoints. By stressing the importance of different viewpoints, the aim is to highlight the fact that the security/insecurity duality is socially created (see Berger and Luckmann 1991: 33–34, 51–52). It is but one possible interpretation and representation of reality. Therefore, it is the meaning of that special ‘American’ security/insecurity duality presentation articulated by President Bush that is discussed and challenged here, not the possible physical existence of that duality. My analysis is an analysis of the construction of a particular duality in a particular discourse by particular associative connections. It is aimed at questioning whether ‘we’ are good and peace-loving people, who have the duty to protect the world from evildoers and bring security to the world or simply human beings, with both good and evil in us, and indeed, the ones who have send ‘our boys’ to kill others and to be killed themselves in the name of peace and security. One may also wonder whether the humanitarian rhetoric did not hide ulterior motives of securing the access to oil resources, securing a power position in world politics or keeping world markets working. My analysis asks, therefore: what are these metaphoric images of security/insecurity duality, presented to us as correct representations of security reality, and how are these pictures used to justify organised violence? Are ‘we’ really so ‘good’, and are ‘they’ really only ‘evil’, so that eventually this disjunction justifies all the killing and destruction we have witnessed since the beginning of the war on terrorism? How is it that these security anamorphs are accepted so easily and unquestionably? Why is the public willing to accept this discourse and the roles assigned by the discourse? For what reasons do doubts over such distribution of roles or of such characterisations not rise? These meanings connected to security anamorphs seem natural and accurate descriptions of
reality, but they are nevertheless constructed socially by metaphoric and visual means and by connecting them to deep cultural resources.

7.2.1 The visual construction of security

The duality of security/insecurity is created through representations that design, or perhaps it is better to say draw and paint, in our minds images of specific threats, which require specific emergency action or security measures. Through this lively and frightening but yet invisible mental imagery it is easier for the audience to understand and accept something as a threat, and then accept any security measures to overcome that particular threat. How is this move made? Here, the processes of articulation and interpellation of subjects offer an explanation. Articulation refers to the production of meaning out of extant cultural raw materials and linguistic and visual resources that are already extant within a culture (that is, they already make sense within that culture, for example, the extraordinary nature of American nation and Manifest Destiny, the beacon for freedom and democracy) by combining them to produce contingent and contextually specific representations of the world (Weldes 1996:284). For example, metaphoric expressions like "America is freedom's home and defender" (STATE IS A PERSON, STATE IS A CONTAINER) or "this is a monumental struggle of good versus evil" (IDEAS ARE PERSONS, OPPOSITION IS WAR) or "we will lead the world to the victory" (VICTORY IS A PLACE, LEADING TO VICTORY IS A JOURNEY) are part of the cultural context of the United States and thus make sense to people in the country. Interpellation is the creation of identities or subject-positions in social relationships and the recognition of individuals with these identities or subject-positions. For example, when a speaker salutes "all hard-working scholars here today" in his opening speech at an academic conference and you are in the audience, you would recognise that salutation to mean yourself, too. Interpellation is thus the process by which you recognise yourself to belong to a particular identity, to 'hard-working scholars'.

The drawing or design of a representation of threat – the process of articulation – serves as fixing work that fixes the meaning through establishing, by selection and combination, a chain of equivalences (Hall 1985:93). Selection and combination is based on cultural, linguistic and visual resources that are still in existence within a culture and make sense within a society – concepts, terms, ideas, pictures, images, metaphors, analogies, memories, symbols, etc. For example, an activity that mankind has performed since its birth, that is, killing, is connected to another idea – democracy – in an attempt to make an associative chain: “… we see terrorists … they will never be allowed to kill the spirit of democracy" (Powell
This association-making attempt through the metaphor of IDEAS ARE PEOPLE raises in my mind funny cartoon-like images and curious questions. What is killed by killing the spirit of democracy? How do you actually kill the spirit of democracy? How do you stop somebody from killing the spirit of democracy – killing something that is just an abstraction, an imagination, a phantasm, an idea? Or the metaphoric expression that I have quoted many times – “we’re the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world”\(^\text{26}\) – creates the associative chain “America is beacon, beacon shows light in the darkness and guides ships/planes to safety, thus America guides freedom (and the world) to safety”, which makes sense in the American cultural context because of the mental images of ‘America is democracy’ (as well as, for example, ‘The Statue of Liberty represents what America stands for’, ‘The Statue of Liberty is a beacon that shows light’, ‘The Statue of Liberty shows light to freedom and democracy’, ‘The Statue of Liberty is American’, ‘America shows light to the world’) and because these images are a deep-rooted part of cultural resources.

In the association-making process, cultural resources are selected and combined to produce contingent and contextually specific representations of the world to which then particular meanings are given. By the repetition of linguistic-visual associations, these different cultural resources come to seem as inherently or necessarily connected, and the meanings they produce seem natural and accurate descriptions of reality (Weldes 1996:284–285; see also Lakoff and Johnson 1980 for metaphoric structuration and coherence of the representations). The duality of security/insecurity is thus created and temporarily fixed by establishing chains of connotations between different linguistic and visual elements. Freedom is connected to the United States by describing the United States as the ‘brightest beacon’ for freedom and democracy, following that this particular association also necessarily connects the United States with the ‘good’ guys, because freedom and democracy are never considered in connection with evil or ‘bad’ guys. The beacon shows light signals to ships in order to keep them safe, and the United States is described as doing the same favour to freedom and democracy. Pointing the right way and keeping freedom and democracy safe is considered as something very positive, a good job. As a result of such associative chain of ‘us’-making, the uttering of ‘the United States’ simultaneously carries with it particular meanings, which inherently connote to good, freedom and democracy. In this way, different terms and ideas come to connote one another in the associative chains (Hall 1985:104). However, these chains of associations, established between linguistic-visual elements, are conventional and arbitrary. The linkages, which connect

\(^{26}\) Bush, September 11, 2001a, web document, emphasis added.
elements together, can be broken, and therefore the representations can be questioned and rearticulated:

An articulation is thus the form of the connection that can make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time. You have to ask, under what circumstances can a connection be forged or made? (Hall 1986: 53)

Under what circumstances, then, are categories of security and insecurity separated from each other, turned into mutually exclusive concepts and, as a result, the ‘other’ associated with insecurity? In order to be successful, the articulation of representations needs to be accompanied by the process of interpellation, through which the acceptance of specific representations is achieved. By hailing individuals successfully into proposed identities or subject positions, specific power relations and interests entailed in them are naturalised (Weldes 1996: 287). The interpellation of subjects is the other important part of the creation of the security/insecurity duality. It means that the depiction of social relations creates specific identities, which carry with them different ways of functioning in the world. Concrete individuals come to identify with those presented subject positions and with the representations in which they appear, following that these representations make sense to them.

President Bush assured American people that “America was targeted for attack because we’re the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world”.  

Other assurances were aimed at achieving the same goal: “The resolve of our great nation is being tested. But make no mistake: We will show the world that we will pass this test.”; “The freedom-loving nations of the world stand by our side. This will be a monumental struggle of good versus evil. But good will prevail”;  

“In every generation, the world has produced enemies of human freedom. They have attacked America because we are freedom’s home and defender. And the commitment of our fathers is now the calling of our time.”

These metaphorical expressions work as another kind of structuration for the understanding, meaning-creating and identity-building, presenting at the same time specific inherent visualisations of particular cultural values and moral commitments of the nation. ‘Passing the test’, ‘monumental struggle’, ‘freedom’s home’, ‘defender’ and ‘commitment of our fathers’ belong to the religious discourse and all refer to the religious cultural

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context of the United States and connect events of today to the past, to ‘our fathers’, thus creating the specific identity of the ‘defender’ and assigning a specific sacredness to that role. Moreover, they are not only assigning the role of ‘defender’ to the United States (the metaphors are THE US IS A PERSON and THE US IS A DEFENDER) and giving her nimbus (the metaphor is PASSING THE TEST IS A PROOF of suitability and acceptability), but they are also making that role a responsibility of the United States because of the “commitment of our fathers.”

These kinds of assurances are but one piece of the specific circumstances under which the security/insecurity duality is articulated. The articulation is based on accepted cultural identity or subjectivity – us (good) against them (evil) – which leans on the historical and rich repertoire of the national destiny of Americans. The essence of this destiny is that the people of the United States feel it is their mission to extend the boundaries of freedom to others by imparting their idealism and belief in democratic institutions to those, who are capable of self-government and excluding those, who are not. Drawing from such a divided world view, the articulation of the security/insecurity duality makes sense to Americans and is for that reason accepted as the correct representation of reality.

7.2.2 Objectification, classification and subjectification

The analysis of the speech acts of President Bush reveals three dividing practices (objectification, classification and subjectification), by which three different dualities are created: the duality of us/them, the duality of good/evil and the duality of security/insecurity. These dualities also form the three different stages of the security anamorphosis. The anamorphosis of security starts with the separation of ‘us’ from ‘them’ by describing what and who ‘we’ are and, as a consequence, creating the category of the ‘other’. At that stage, the articulation is addressed to the domestic audience, which consists of two target groups: a large group of nation and a small group of security specialists and the high policy establishment.

The duality of us/them is the starting point for the whole duality-making process. By the successful separation of ‘us’ from ‘them’, the basis is also laid for other duality representations. The category of the ‘other’ is created by designing a strong image of ‘us’, the interpellation of which helps create and develop other associative chains (see, for example Tajfel on shared interpretation of in-group/out-group dichotomy, 1981: 242–243). Therefore, it is important to approach this part of objectification with the following questions: What kind of imagery, what pictures? ‘We’ are good, but what does that mean? What does ‘good’ look like? What characteristics are given to ‘good’? How is ‘evil’ described?
From the speeches and statements of President Bush comes up a particular pattern of duality-making. At the first stage of duality-making (us/them), designs of representations are addressed to the American nation. The divide between us and them is made by constructing discursive objects (us) and discursive relationships (‘we’ are ‘good’) out of cultural raw materials and linguistic resources that are already accompanied with specific metaphoric visual imagery, which in turn starts to create new metaphoric visual images and meaningful associations. Used cultural resources are those that already make sense within American society. From the speeches and statements of President Bush emerge three kinds of culturally coloured plots of ‘us’-making that are used to design a duality and to make separation and designed identities seem natural. These plots are Great Nation, which refers to the extraordinariness of Americans;\(^\text{31}\) Manifest Destiny, which refers to the destiny of Americans as a people chosen by God to fulfil His aim;\(^\text{32}\) and Mission, which refers to the particular divine mission of Americans to spread freedom, democracy, peace, security, etc. to the world.\(^\text{33}\) All three plots refer to a widely held underlying belief that Americans, the ‘chosen people’, have a divinely inspired mission to spread the fruits of their democracy, market economy and free enterprise to the less fortunate.

From the metaphoric expressions in the speeches of President Bush emerge specific metaphoric concepts that refer to the plots of cultural identity of the American nation: AMERICA IS BEACON (“we’re the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world”\(^\text{34}\) refers to Manifest Destiny and Mission), THE AIM IS SACRED (“America and our friends and allies join with all those who want peace and security in the world, and we stand together to win the war against terrorism”\(^\text{35}\) and “our responsibility to history is already clear: to answer these attacks

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34. Bush, September 11, 2001a, web document, emphasis added.

35. Ibid.
and rid the world of evil” and “the commitment of our fathers is now the calling of our time” refer to Manifest Destiny and Mission), WE ARE GOOD (“our resolve for justice and peace” and “we defend freedom and all that is good and just” both refer to the plots of Great Nation, Manifest Destiny and Mission), WAR IS A TEST (“nation is being tested” and “we will pass the test” refer to Great Nation, Manifest Destiny).

By stressing these traditional understandings, specific identities and subjective positions – which are attractive, refer to history, make sense and are easy to accept – are created and recreated. The actual divide between us and them is created by describing who we are and what we do, and who they are and what they do (for social categorisation and comparison see Tajfel 1981:254–259): “this enemy hides in shadows, and has no regard for human life. This is an enemy who preys on innocent and unsuspecting people, runs for cover”, “our country will, however, not be cowed by terrorists, by people who don’t share the same values we share, by people who are willing to destroy people’s lives because we embrace freedom”, “this is America. This is who we are. This is what our enemies hate and have attacked. And this is why we will prevail”. By combining and recombining cultural materials, new descriptions and direct accusations, and repeating successful combinations, contingent and contextually specific representations of the world are made to seem inherently or necessarily connected. At the same time, the meanings they produce come to seem natural, as an accurate description of reality.

At the second stage, classification takes place. ‘Good’ and ‘evil’ are separated and connected to the first duality in such a way that they appear as qualities that are specifically either ‘ours’ or ‘theirs’, and not at all as inseparable and being both present in ‘us’ as well as in ‘them’. At this stage, the audiences are the nation, the group of specialists and a large group of international society, in which one

37. Ibid.
39. Ibid.
40. Bush, September 11, 2001b, web document, emphasis added.
41. Ibid.
44. Bush, September 15, 2001a, web document, emphasis added.
subgroup (Islamic/Muslim society) is pointed out separately, e.g. “Islam is peace”\textsuperscript{45} “war is not against Muslims”\textsuperscript{46} “war is not against Afghan people”\textsuperscript{47}

‘We’ is connected with ‘good’, which is done through the description of the acceptable behaviour of ‘us’: the association-making chains are ‘freedom is good & this is struggle of good versus evil & good will prevail’ and ‘all freedom-loving nations are by our side’, thus ‘we are good & we will win’ (“The freedom-loving nations of the world stand by our side. This will be a monumental struggle of good versus evil. But good will prevail”\textsuperscript{48}).

Also the metaphors of AMERICA IS A HUNTER, TERRORISTS ARE PREY are repeated again in connection with the metaphoric expressions of war and victory: “now is an opportunity to do generations a favour, by coming together and whipping terrorism; hunting it down, finding it and holding them accountable”\textsuperscript{49} “we will find those who did it; we will smoke them out of their holes; we will get them running and we’ll bring them to justice”;\textsuperscript{50} “we will rid the world of the evil-doers”.\textsuperscript{51}

At the same time, ‘they’ are connected with ‘evil’, because of their non-acceptable behaviour: “it’s a widespread organization based upon one thing: terrorizing; they can’t stand freedom; they hate what America stands for”;\textsuperscript{52} “it’s barbaric behaviour. They slit throats of women on airplanes in order to achieve an objective that is beyond comprehension. And they like to hit, and then they like to hide out”;\textsuperscript{53} “these terrorists don’t represent peace. They represent evil and war”\textsuperscript{54}

The target audiences of such rhetoric are both national and international publics. As a result of adding the duality of good/evil to the duality of us/Them, the category of the ‘other’ strengthens as the basis for security perception and understanding. Connections are made by describing the good deeds we do and the evil things they do. For example: “We’re fighting for liberty and freedom, a way of life that is so essential for humankind, mankind to be able to realize their full

\textsuperscript{45} Bush, September 26, 2001a, web document.
\textsuperscript{46} Bush, September 28, 2001, web document.
\textsuperscript{47} Bush, September 29, 2001, web document.
\textsuperscript{48} Bush, September 12, 2001a, web document, emphasis added.
\textsuperscript{49} Bush, September 13, 2001c, web document, emphasis added.
\textsuperscript{50} Bush, September 15, 2001b, web document, emphasis added.
\textsuperscript{51} Bush, September 16, 2001, web document, emphasis added.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{53} Bush, September 17, 2001a, web document, emphasis added.
\textsuperscript{54} Bush, September 17, 2001b, web document, emphasis added.
potential”,55 and “terrorism knows no borders, it has no capital, but it does have a common ideology, and that is they hate freedom, and they hate freedom-loving people”56. These ‘drawings’ give us a particular picture of both, of us and of them. ‘Us’ is great nation, powerful, sad and angry but compassionate. ‘Us’ has high ideals, respects human rights, fights for liberty and freedom, and does everything possible to bring peace and security to the world. ‘Us’ will fight until justice is done, until the war is won. ‘Us’ is doing everything it takes to defeat and destroy terrorism. What about ‘them’? There is nothing good in ‘them’. ‘They’ are pure evil, traitors to their own faith. ‘They’ hate everything that is ‘ours’: freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other. ‘They’ want to overthrow governments, killing not merely to end lives, but to disrupt and end a way of life. ‘They’ sacrifice human life to serve ‘their’ radical visions. ‘They’ are bad, very bad.

The representation of the duality of security/insecurity is, thus, created by the stretching, elongating and reforming security anamorphs – these special visions, which consist of images and meanings that we connect to security and insecurity. Security anamorphs are not constant; they are born again every time security is considered because of the changing situations in world politics as well as in domestic politics. However, there is something unchangeable in security anamorphs, and that is the basis of all security/insecurity duality representations – the ‘other’. The security rhetoric of President G. W. Bush on the eve of the war on terrorism creates a recognisable pattern. The divide is based on the threat/other. Secure and insecure are then connected to these divided poles, secure to ‘us’ and insecure to ‘them’. How is that divide articulated? What cultural resources are used in the design of the security/insecurity duality? What kind of reformed imageries, security anamorphs, then emerge? How can these reformed imageries of duality be reversed?

At the third stage, security and insecurity are divided as well, in the same manner as was done with the good/evil duality. As a consequence of this move, ‘us’ appears as the subject of security, the one that brings security to the world, and ‘them’ appears as the subject of insecurity, the one that plunges the world into chaos. The representations created at this stage are addressed both to domestic and to international audiences. Associative chains of we/good and they/evil are already made. These newly made fresh chains are combined with the old well-known religious cultural plot of “struggle of good versus evil”57 and the newer one

of “all freedom-loving people”. The duality of security/insecurity is represented through that combination – new security anamorphs (we/good/freedom-loving versus they/bad/freedom-hating killers) are born: “this enemy attacked not just our people, but all freedom-loving people everywhere in the world”, “freedom-loving people understand that terrorism knows no borders, that terrorists will strike in order to bring fear, to try to change the behaviour of countries that love liberty”, “the terrorists’ directive commands them to kill Christians and Jews, to kill all Americans, and make no distinction among military and civilians, including women and children”. Moreover, this war no longer concerns only America; it concerns the whole world. The same way as in the beginning of this chapter, I would like to end my analysis with an example of the speech of President Bush, where he expresses the metaphors WAR IS JUST, WAR IS SACRED:

This is not, however, just America’s fight. And what is at stake is not just America’s freedom. This is the world’s fight. This is civilisation’s fight. This is the fight of all who believe in progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom. … The civilised world is rallying to America’s side. They understand that if this terror goes unpunished, their own cities, their own citizens may be next. Terror, unanswered, can not only bring down buildings, it can threaten the stability of legitimate governments. And you know what – we’re not going to allow it.

As a result of these worded security anamorphs, every time ‘security’ is invoked, it simultaneously carries with it, among other characteristics, the meaning of ‘us’, ‘good’, ‘peace-loving’, ‘freedom-loving’, ‘civilisation’, ‘tolerance’, ‘pluralism’, etc., drawing particular imagery in our minds. Security and insecurity, articulated through and connected to us/them and good/evil, constitute a complete representation of the American security imagery and the US security subject position of the 21st century. The divided imageries of “us/good/secure” and “they/evil/insecure” together combine into a powerful security anamorph. That anamorph presents us with a picture in which the illusion of mutual exclusion pretends to be the correct representation of reality – security is made visual, but nevertheless, it is a simulacrum.

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62. Ibid.
7.3 The political role of mental imagery in use: The polarisation of security discourse through the verbal manipulation of mental imagery

Throughout this chapter, I have argued that words are not only words, but at the same time pictures, too. Metaphors are not only words or verbal expressions, but they are at the same time mental images in use, and very often these mental images in use are realised as visual images in use. Thus, WORDS ARE METAPHORS ARE IMAGES.

Based on my analysis of the security rhetoric of President Bush, I now draw conclusions to support my argument. Firstly, words carry with them a metaphoric visual characteristic; words can and do provoke images in our minds. This visual aspect of words connects thoughts with the physical world in two ways: first, it helps us to understand our lives, the things and events that happen in it; second, it produces visual pieces of art (e.g. cartoons, images, pictures, drawings, movies) and encourages different visual expressions of our worldviews, beliefs, fears and anxieties (e.g. photoshopped and parodied pieces of popular culture that I referred to in the beginning of this chapter). Thus, words with mental imagery in use not only help us to create meanings but also to express them visually. Secondly, metaphorical use of words inherently involves a code of distortion. Thus explaining security in terms of the ‘other’ produces mental imagery in use of the security/insecurity duality, in which mutually constitutive ‘security’ and ‘insecurity’ are presented as mutually exclusive categories. Exclusion is done by connecting the conceptions of security and insecurity separately to different associative chains created around metaphorically distorted explanations of us and them, good and evil, so that each of them can represent only one of the poles. Again, these metaphoric explanations and mental imagery of security find their way into the images in use. Thirdly, these metaphoric meta-metamorphoses (HUMAN IS A MONSTER, SECURITY IS HUMAN or the metamorphosis of mutual constitution to look like mutual exclusion) all refer to security anamorphosis – the distortion, stretching, elongation and reformation of mental imagery in use – thus indicating that the representation of the security/insecurity duality is a security anamorph and that the images in use informed by such a dualistic security anamorph are but end products, the visual analysis of which is not complete without the analysis of the words and processes that created them. Moreover, as a consequence of such dividing practices of the security anamorphosis of 9/11, a divided world is created, a world in which one side is good, without even a little bit of evilness, and other side is essentially evil. In this divided world, even the most extreme means, justified when used against the ‘other/evil/enemy’, seem natural and acceptable. While usually it is not acceptable to kill another human being, in
this divided world killing of the ‘evil other’ seems to be normal, because in the security anamorphosis this ‘other’ is not presented as human, but as ‘the inhuman other’, which legitimises and justifies war against him.

By the design of the special presentations of security reality, the opposition between security and insecurity was created in these games of illusion. By connecting security and insecurity separately to good and evil, to us and them, the mutually constitutive relationship of security/insecurity was at the same time hidden, and a new public sphere was constructed in the political communication. The process of selecting and combining different but rich cultural resources, in order to create special separate associative chains that assure the correctness of the security/insecurity duality representation, was hidden by pointing separately to security and insecurity as blinking beacon lights in connection with us or them. While these blinking lights (metaphors) usually grab all the attention in the traditional analysis of metaphors, the distortion in the explanations of secure versus insecure – that is, the mutual constitutiveness of security/insecurity, the notion that the description of something as ‘insecure’ needs the concept of something as ‘secure’ and that the acceptance such concepts is socially negotiated – remained in shadows. However, this notion of mutual constitutiveness was there all the time. Even when ‘secure’ is not articulated aloud, but left for the audience to realise by giving only hints (for example, by describing something as insecure compared to us), this descriptive action is essentially based on the mutual constitutiveness, for it is not possible to conceptualise ‘security’ without ‘insecurity’. A coin has to have two sides. Therefore, the very act of creating the security/insecurity duality – simultaneously with the rhetorician’s attempt to assure the audience that this duality really exists and is not his novelty invention – is a rhetorical-visual illusion-making show in which metaphors not only create mental imagery, but work as images in use.

References


Primary research material


CHAPTER 8

The politics of identity and visuality
The case of Finnish war children*

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During World War II, Finland evacuated 70 000 to 80 000 children to other Nordic countries. This forced displacement has had long-standing effects on individuals’ and communities’ sense of belonging. In my article, I ask how the spatial trauma of the early childhood displacement becomes visualised. What kind of embodied practices and visual narratives of displacement are found among Finnish war children? Embodied spatial experiences are sought in war child Pekka Suokas’s childhood drawings from the years 1944–1945. The collective dimension of spatial belonging is analysed in the visual narratives and practices of war children. I conclude by discussing how the visual representations aim to challenge the hegemonic national identity discourse of the Finnish war.

8.1 The war and the children in Finland

During the Winter War (1939–1940) and the Continuation War (1941–1944) in Finland about 70 000–80 000 children were sent to Sweden, Norway and Denmark (Kavén 2003:15; Knuuttila and Levola 2000:20; Sandelin-Benkö 2004). These so-called war children were relocated in foster families and in children’s homes. Most of these children returned to Finland after the war, but an estimated 7 000–15 000 remained in their foster families, part of whom through adoption, some with other arrangements and also some against the will of their biological parents (Kavén 2007; cf. Knuuttila and Levola 2000: 30–31; Sandelin-Benkö 2004:48). In this article, I analyse the experience of spatial belonging of those war children who eventually came back to Finland. During the last 15 years, these Finnish war children have founded national and local associations. This socio-cultural networking

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shows that their role in contemporary Finnish society is still valid. Thus the focus of this article is not historical, but it glides between several socio-temporal scales: the past, the present and the future. The main interest is in the multiple practices in which individuals and communities use images to express their spatial belonging. Particularly, the politics or the intentions behind this kind of visual communication are discussed.

The Finnish war history also includes other massive evacuations, which partly explains why such a controversial displacement of some Finnish children was done. During both wars, Finland had to cede areas to the Soviet Union. Evacuations were conducted in these districts and the nearby areas affected by the war. In the end, the Continuation War resulted in more than 430,000 evacuees forced to resettle within the redesigned boundaries of Finland (see Figure 1). Many of these evacuees were children or youths.

However, Finland was not the only country where children’s evacuation schemes were deployed. In fact, this was a common practice in many countries during World War II (Schweitzer, Andrews and Fawcett 1990; Parsons 1998). For example, 1.5 million English children were sent to the countryside and about 17,000 were sent abroad. The topic was highly sensitive in England, particularly after one of the vessels carrying war children and their escorts sunk in the 1940s (Parsons 1998). Sending unaccompanied children and youths to other countries was also an extremely controversial issue in wartime Finland (Kuusisto-Arponen 2008b). On the one hand, it was argued that this was in the best interest of the children, done for their safety but also to spare them from witnessing the cruelties of the war. However, there was evidently more behind this humane wish than just the best interest of a particular child. More dramatically, this plan was part of the survival strategy of a small nation: to send at least some of the children to safety. As the Finnish historian Ilona Kemppainen argues, family relations in wartime Finland were not only a private but foremost a national matter (Kemppainen 2006: 163). When men were at war, women had to take care of the many issues of daily life on the home front, which of course included the raising of the next generation of Finnish citizens (Kemppainen 2006: 169). Some contemporary commentators argued that being at home even during the war was best for the children because then they did not have to depart from their mothers and siblings. There is no doubt that the decisions concerning the children’s physical and cognitive safety were difficult. For example, when the threat of the invasion of the Russian army was at its highest during the offensive of summer 1944, the number of Finnish children sent to Sweden peaked again.

Retrospectively, the war child operation was discussed in varying tones. Sending Finnish children abroad was not only considered in a nationalistic manner. Quite the contrary, parents were even blamed of betraying the Finnish nation.
Post-war Finland was eccentric in many ways. Typical of post-war Finnish society was the silence about wartime experiences. This was due to the fragile and peculiar geopolitical situation of Finland. The lost war cost Finland areas of national territory and heavy war reparations paid to the Soviet Union. Citizens were constantly influenced by the nationalist rhetoric and atmosphere that emphasised loyalty to the Finnish nation. One had to sacrifice oneself for good of the nation and show that, in spite of many losses, one still was ‘an honest citizen’ (cf. Malkki 1992: 32). This meant hiding one’s experiences and feelings of displacement and childhood separation. Most importantly, these multilayered political processes silenced ordinary families. Many wartime memories were actively ‘forgotten’ (Kuusisto-Arponen 2007, 2009). A wider discussion on wartime experiences in Finland broke out only in the early 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Paasi 1996, 1998).

The early childhood experiences of separation and the years spend abroad deeply affected the lives of these war children. For example, recent studies conducted on war children have observed the persistence of many psychological and health related problems (e.g. Tennant et al. 1982; Birtchnell and Kennard 1984; Foster et al. 2003; Pesonen, Rääkkönen and Heinonen et al. 2008). In this article, my interest is in the sense of spatial belonging and how this has been affected by displacement. These war-related spatio-temporal fractures in children’s everyday life created a ‘spatial trauma’. Spatial trauma means long standing emotive-spatial changes in the children caused by the loss of significant ties of belonging. On a collective scale, spatial trauma is best illustrated in the dynamics and the politics of remembering. This politics is twofold. First, the politics of collective memory describes the competition for the social control over the nature and the legitimacy of selective memories. Second, this controlling also occurs within the war child community. Thus, it is interesting to analyse closely what is remembered and what is not, and how these ‘forgotten’ experiences on some occasions come to surface and are implemented in the collective identity project.

War children experienced major social and spatial changes without having the resources or capabilities to handle these (Kuusisto-Arponen 2008c). Often these events and experiences were not easily described by words, but they were restored as bodily memories. I argue that the physical and linguistic isolation of these children made visuality the most important if not the only effective form of communication for the reconstruction of the individual experience of those times and places. More importantly, as my case study among Finnish war children illustrates, these experiences were and still are expressed through many visual narratives rather than through language.

The aim of this article is to offer some reflections on a distinctive and very important use of images whose political role is often underestimated. First, I
discuss the elements of spatial belonging and the role of the visual in these. Second, I illustrate the embodied experiences of spatial belonging and collective forms of spatial identity politics among war children. Here I ask what is, in fact, the visual politics of spatial belonging. Embodied experiences are analysed through the drawings of Finnish war child Pekka Suokas.\(^1\) Several other visual

\[\text{Figure 1. The numbers of war children and Karelian evacuees}\]
examples, such as movies and photographs, are also used in order to illustrate how war children’s collective identity politics is reconstructed and made credible in the wider public sphere.

These different empirical materials show how social context and the agency define the use and the focus of the ‘images in use’. For example, Pekka’s drawings are given different meanings by the author himself, by the researcher and by the Finnish war child community. Drawings are images in use and take part in several social negotiating processes. For Pekka, the communicative strategy is to create a coherent spatio-temporal narrative of his early childhood. As a researcher, I use the same forms of visual communication as a standpoint of awaking the hidden meanings and struggles of Finnish children’s emotional experiences of the war. The wider Finnish war child community, instead, aims to define its role as part of the national narrative of Finnish war history. Moreover, the community’s communicative strategy relies on the visualisation of the displacement: ‘you see, you believe’. Therefore, my article utilises several frameworks through which the scales of belonging are illustrated: visualised subjective space is also a site of socio-cultural and political struggle and vice versa.

8.2 Spatial belonging and its visual representations

Spatial belonging is a fundamental human need. As Tim Cresswell (2004: 11) argues, “place is not just thing in the world but a way of understanding the world”. Places never just exist, they are imagined, reproduced, experienced and constantly on the move. Place is a crucial part of everyday life politics. Thus, place is always lived through and emotionally charged.

For Edward Relph (1976), “the essence of place lies in the largely unselfconscious intentionality that defines places as profound centres of human existence”. Humanistic tradition in geography emphasise the role of meaningful places which are formed in a dialectical relationship between place and people. Relph (1976: 34) stresses that “people are their place and a place is its people”. This early humanistic view was sometimes criticised because of its rather static conception of place. Nowadays the existential place relations are viewed as constantly evolving and being in a state of flux (e.g. Hetherington 1997, 1998). I also argue that places are never the same and that they come into existence through multiple practices of writing, imagining and experiencing the place. Moreover, the feeling of spatial belonging is created through several placings and spatial relationships (cf. Hetherington 1997). The experience of a place is subjective, but there is an inherent intersubjectivity in spatial belonging. Spatial belonging is constructed in the dynamics of the self, community and place.
I also suggest that spatial identity politics is never based only on topological places but on several non-topological emotions, memories and affects (see also Derrida 1995). Therefore, visual images and imageries do not only just exist in space, but these also create alternative spaces and places. I argue that the different forms of visuality are often applied for the reconstitution of individual and collective spatial belonging, particularly in conflict or war situations. Thus, the visual memories of varying spaces and places are the key in understanding war children's affective spatial belonging.

Pauli Tapani Karjalainen (2006: 83) has said that the memories of times and places (re)construct the self. What if these memories are forgotten or partly faded? What if there has been no collective narrative to cling to? Further, Kevin Hetherington has pointed out that identity is not only achieved through identification with groups of individuals but also through performative repertoires that are expressive and embodied (Hetherington 1998: 17–18). Forced displacement changed this socio-spatial dynamic. People were torn away from their places. This created, I argue, fractures in the experiencing of spatiality. These fractures are much deeper and long-standing than often thought (Kuusisto-Arponen 2008c). They affected the imageries of individuals and collectives.

Because war children often travelled alone and their siblings were relocated in different host families, these children have had many faded memories of their years abroad. Some children were also evacuated at a very early age (3 to 5 years old). One of the most drastic changes in Finnish war children's lives was the change of language. The children left as native Finnish speakers and arrived in a different linguistic environment. These war children had no words to describe what they were experiencing. The same happened when they returned to Finland – they had to learn to communicate again. The fragments of spatial experiences and belonging were stored in the bodies and the minds of these children. This created social and spatial confusion in children's experiences and memories. Many bodily and mental reactions, such as bedwetting, muteness and depression, were documented in war children's behaviour. However, I disagree with some studies that use war children's situation as an example and aim retrospectively to find the children's (conscious) political agency in these acts (cf. Kallio 2008). On the contrary, I emphasise that, at the time, war children had very few resources for handling and conceptualising these socio-spatial shifts consciously, even at the level of everyday life. Instead, emblematic of many of these children at the time of war was that they behaved in a manner common to any traumatised child (e.g. Terr 2003; Poijula 2007). Traumatisation in this context refers only to the time of evacuation because many former war children have said that now, as adults, they do not feel that they were traumatised during the evacuation. Interestingly, however, many war children have developed, what I call, a spatial trauma (Kuusisto-Arponen 2008c).
By spatial trauma I mean the fractures of the self and the place which began to define the latter spatial experiences and imageries in war children's lives. Not all fractures in spatial belonging evolve into a spatial trauma. In order for this to develop, a significant psychophysical experience that is restored in the corporeal memories is required. If there are many drastic changes in everyday spatiality during childhood years, there is a greater chance that some signs of spatial trauma will occur. One crucial element in the development of a spatial trauma seems to be the child's knowledge of language. Only when this skill is achieved can one create narrations on times, spaces and events. The language development enables the child's conscious time-space conception (cf. Poijula 2007: 70–71). However, the crucial notion here is that the spatial ties of a child begin to develop long before (verbal) narration is possible. Spatial trauma occurs exactly because young children have no tools or abilities to understand socio-spatial changes (Kuusisto-Arponen 2008c: 16–17). Therefore, the fractures in spatial ties of belonging go easily unrecognised and even ignored by the adults and other caretakers. This has led, among Finnish war children, to many silent hurts. Thus, I argue that visual memories and imageries are the keys to understanding the role of these early but extremely fragile and significant ties of belonging. The signs of spatial trauma in personal and collective practices are further analysed through empirical examples.

8.3 Reconstructing social identities: Visual politics and spatial belonging

Pekka Suokas was five years old when he and his two years older sister were sent to Sweden in 1944. His family originated from the region of Karelia and had been evacuated twice during the war. The last evacuation journey started from Käkisalmi in the early summer of 1944. Pekka's family was relocated to Kannus in Ostrobothnia. His father was in the war and the family had five children: Pekka's older sister, and two pairs of twins, of which Pekka was one. After long discussions, the parents had decided that Pekka and his older sister were to be sent to Sweden.

For my study, I chose Pekka's experiences because his is “the ordinary story” among Finnish war children. Pekka had to leave behind many homes during the evacuation years, he felt confused about these social and spatial changes, and then he had to adjust to a totally new language and culture in his foster home in Sweden. He had a good foster family and was well cared for. Exceptionally, in comparison to many other war children's situation, Pekka and his sister lived in the same family. This eased the adaptation and relieved homesickness. Still, the return to his home in Finland presented its own difficulties. Longing for the Swedish foster parents and playgrounds had to be concealed. In addition, Pekka’s
biological mother did not want to talk about wartime experiences and the reasons behind her choice to send two of her children away. For many years, Pekka had tried to recall what it was like in Sweden and what kind of issues he and his sister lived through. He had many memories from here and there, but much was also forgotten.

In the year 2001, Pekka’s biological mother died and from the attic of her house a trunk was found. This trunk contained all the wartime correspondence of his parents. His mother had kept these letters from the front line and Sweden as treasures even though she never mentioned their existence (Kuusisto-Arponen 2007). Among this correspondence were Pekka’s drawings that he had sent home during the years 1944–1945. These drawings opened up an entire section of his childhood. Many forgotten and fleeting memories suddenly returned.

The childhood drawings and the interviews2 with Pekka are the main materials of the analysis of embodied practices. The different formats and production times of the empirical data support the theoretical idea of the non-linear and atemporal nature of the displacement experience. This extraordinary empirical material made it possible to simultaneously analyse the different (a)temporal, spatial, visual and narrative forms and social processes of early childhood displacement. Visualisation and narrations also illustrate how Pekka’s agency and communicative strategies have altered during the years. However, the politics behind these efforts remains quite unchanged – to bridge the fractures of incoherent socio-spatial life history.

Following Karin Kukkonen’s analysis (see Chapter 3 in this book), I propose that Pekka’s drawings should be viewed in two different ways. For Pekka, these drawings were maps of reality. They visualise some of the aspects of reality that were important to him during the years of World War II. However, in an analytical sense Pekka’s drawings should not be seen as maps or mirrors of reality but rather as simulacra. The latter only reproduce reality but ultimately hide it (Kukkonen 2011:63). This definition of visual image fits well with the idea of non-topological spatial ties and experiences of Finnish war children. Drawing is ‘copying’ real life, but it can never be an accurate illustration of that emotive-spatial moment. As a researcher I cannot interpret all the meanings of those images, and neither can Pekka. Pekka’s map is also partial. The originary moment remains unreachable, but the visual image can be viewed as what Derrida (1995) names a secondary impression of khora. This is the sign of the moment of a place that occurred on a faraway day of Pekka’s early childhood. This moment is faded and thus only partially revealed in the visual image or the narration.

2. I have conducted two interviews with Pekka (in 2006 and 2007) and I have also had Pekka’s short memoirs, which he wrote in 2005.
These dual dimensions of the same drawing are important because of their distinctive political aspects. As partial maps of reality, Pekka’s vivid drawings were a crucial part of Pekka’s survival. Through his drawings, he could handle unfamiliar situations, symbols and the multiple cultural boundary crossings in his everyday life. The drawings as simulacra reveal some dynamics of the issues and the moment, but simultaneously much is hidden. What is ‘seen’ in the drawing depends on the time and the context of interpretation. And what is ‘seen’ is never the whole reality but one politicised interpretation of a moment in the past. In the following, I am going to analyse Pekka’s drawings as simulacra in order to illustrate some aspects of the emotional geographies of everyday life and their intertwined nature with the past and present socio-spatial ties of belonging.

Pekka’s early childhood was filled with constant journeying: Karelia, Ostrobothnia, Sweden and back to Finland. This journeying is visualised in many of his drawings (see Figures 2 and 3). As Inger Birkeland (2002) points out, journeying is based on a symbolic understanding. In Pekka’s thoughts, cars are symbols. The five-year-old boy was fascinated by cars. Pekka travelled through many places, and in his symbolic scheme cars illustrate the different spatial ties he carries in him. At the time of drawing, these spatial dimensions were not consciously thought of by Pekka. The unconscious spatiality is also present at the time of the interview, 62 years later in 2007.

When I ask Pekka what these cars are, he says:

In our neighbourhood there was a driver who owned a bus.
A-K: Do you mean back home in Finland?
Pekka: No, in Sweden.
Pekka: When I saw this particular letter and the drawing, you know what, I had a kind of special experience, I remembered what the smell in the garage was. So, I remembered the smell, it came to my mind right away. I felt it very strongly. Thus, I had to make a trip back and see if it is still there. And yes it was, the smell too. Those drawings brought many things back to my mind. (PS, 12 June 2007)

In a more detailed discussion of this drawing, Pekka says he does not know what the other cars are. Neither do I, but I am sure that these cars have spatial relations to different important places in Pekka’s childhood. However, it is impossible to guess whether the truck (left bottom corner) on which the small boy is sitting refers to Malmköping or, for example, to the evacuation from the Karelian home. In an analytical sense, this ambivalence does not matter (see e.g. Derrida 1995: 116). Even though Pekka’s active memories of the drawing are fragmented, I argue that all these events of place that the different cars represent are part of Pekka’s spatial ties. His sense of belonging is based on all of these experienced, lived, remembered, forgotten and recalled memories of place.

Figure 2 shows how the linguistic confusion began to unravel. In the drawing, there are two words. Aura is Finnish and means plough. Bil is Swedish and means car. These were probably written by Pekka’s older sister. She had already learnt some Swedish, and it was important that the brother did too. The multifaceted social and spatial contexts are amazingly intense in these drawings. Like Figure 3 shows, the train trips with foster father are explained with two Finnish words pysäki (station) and konduktöörinvaunu (conductor’s wagon). The army
tank refers to Finland, and the Swedish princess describes the important social topic discussed in the foster home. These overlapping socio-spatial and emotional moments in childhood created a distinctive rhythm in war children’s life. Experiences of being constantly on the move were “drawn” in the bodies and the minds. This led not only to varying subjective feelings but also to collective identity narratives of searching the sites of belonging.

During the years of journeying and boundary crossings, Pekka created a particular mindscape. This is a mixture of the past, the present and the future. More importantly, as Figure 4 shows, even in childhood years this was consciously thought of and constructed.

A-K: Is this the home in Finland?
Pekka: No, it relates to when I talked with my sister … And when they wrote us from home as well, that they are constantly trying to find us a home. Our family was evacuated, and they searched for a new home for us all over Finland. So they told us in the letter that here and there there is this house and they also tried to find one through newspaper ads. This is what they had found and these wishes they had.

A-K: So this place does not exist?
Pekka: Yes, it does not exist, but actually it was here … in my mind [points at his head]. This is a kind of idea what the home could be then.

(PS, 12 June 2007)

The drawing that Pekka has named ‘My home’ is a constellation of the moments, places and rhythms of life (see Figure 4). At the time of drawing, it was impossible to describe it with words. Visualising it made much more sense to a small child.
As Pekka’s case illustrates, the place identity and existential spatiality are formed in the overlapping temporal and affective dimensions. The drawing of the home is also an image of a place that does not exist and thus it not a map of reality but a simulacrum.

In a study of the identity politics and spatial belonging of war children, the role of visual imageries should be taken seriously. The different scales of action are equally crucial in this kind of analysis. Particular to war children’s spatial belonging is the constant pendulum between belonging and longing. This search for ‘the place’ carries on through life. Personal emotions and memories are linked with the construction of the collective historical awareness. The same symbols or images are used in varying contexts, but their usage and the ‘politics’ desired differ. For example, on a personal level, tracking the phases of the war child years functions as a way to achieve personal healing and to construct one’s own life history. In the collective visual narrations, these same sites of leaving and returning are used as visualisation of separation process. In the former, the question is about the inward looking life politics; in the latter, the aim is to create identifiable emotions that could be recognised by the wider society. This is one way of creating outward looking collective identification and reciprocal recognition. Moreover, visual imageries are effectively used by ‘outsiders’ and for commercial purposes. This makes (spatial) identity politics even more complicated.

The childhood displacement experience created rootlessness among war children. Often this was and still is felt as an unexplained anxiousness and a silent longing for something that is impossible to describe to others. This kind of spatial trauma among Finnish war children is quite common, even though through later social ties and their own families these people have learnt to cope with these feelings. Finnish war children are not alone, similar difficulties in spatial identification have been reported in the UK, for example (Fethney 1990/2000; Parsons 1998; Kuusisto-Arponen 2008c). Collective formation of spatial belonging also became a challenge for these displaced children.

8.4 Images and community: Identity politics and the reconstruction of collective memory

The sense of place and belonging are often created in the acts of collective identity politics both discursively and visually. In the case of Finnish war children, visual narratives have become dominant due to the years of social silence and fragmented memories. Visual practices enable the breakaway from a linear understanding of time and the past. Equally, they do not necessarily have to lean on consistent and hegemonic narratives of the past. Therefore, it has become
possible to utilise fickle and non-narrative emotions and memories in collective identity politics. Fragmentation of the memories can then be a building block rather than a threat.

For many years, war children had hidden their experiences. Therefore, collective identification was also long impossible. War children's social memory has evolved only during the last fifteen years. Many reasons behind this turn can be pinpointed: social interest on war history and particularly the emotional side of the past increased after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It became socially acceptable to speak about wartime difficulties. Also war children themselves lived through many major changes in the early 1990s. Many witnessed the death of their biological parents. The death of the mother, in particular, often raised such questions as “who am I?” and “where are my roots?” Retirement from working life also increased free time and enabled the search for the ‘hidden’ childhood years. However, the most important factor in collective identity politics was the foundation of self-organised peer groups. First, these peer groups functioned as a crucial part of personal healing. The silent stories were finally told and heard by contemporaries. Second, the organised activities and collective recalling raised the question of how to construct a solid foundation for collective identification.

Identity politics is always a two-way process of searching for inner cohesion and similarity and looking for acceptance from other people. The historical and cultural awareness of war children's experiences became a wider social issue through two films: Erja Dammert's documentary *War Children* (Sotalapset, 2003) and Klaus Härö's film *Mother of Mine* (Äideistä parhain, 2005), based on the novel by Heikki Hietamies. However, the media interest these films created was received in contradictory ways among the war child community. Single sad cases were generalised to describe the whole war child phenomena. Not all war children wanted to be portrayed as victims. They argued that the variety of experiences was lacking in these visual art works. Nonetheless, they did have influence on the publicity of the Finnish war child evacuation, and this was in any case highly appreciated by the war children. Finally their wartime experiences were acknowledged. This example clearly illustrates how different agents apply distinctive communicative strategies and how the power to define desired visual narratives in identity politics is often unevenly distributed.

Along with the appreciation of individual life stories, war children wanted to establish communal memory and finally find and define their own cultural place in Finnish society. I argue that these collective forms of place identity are just evolving among Finnish war children. Interestingly, many of these practices aim at the preservation of memories of a place and are performed through the visual. Collective practices are clearly focused on the memories of journeying and places of leaving and returning. For Finnish war children, harbours and railway
stations are the sites of collective memory (Kuusisto-Arponen 2008b). These were the places where relatives were left behind and the first step into the unknown was taken. Therefore, commemorative plaques have been erected at railway stations in cities such as Tampere and Helsinki (see Figure 5). For the war child community, these plates testify that the displacement really took place. Visual images are
used as maps of a hidden and silenced past that took place at these sites. Marking
the important stages of the journeying also creates a feeling of coherence, even if
many memories in between these stages might be fickle. This illustrates that the
fragmentary nature of war children’s spatial belonging is also inherent in the col-
lective level. Visual narratives enable this kind of ‘storytelling’ where plot holes or
atemporality are not seen as threats to identity politics – as often is the case. As my
case study illustrates, the memories of times and places need not be chronological
in order to become a source of collective identification.

Visualising spatial belonging and cultural identity takes many forms. Another
example typical of any displaced community or individual are the sacred objects
that ‘tell’ the story of what these people are and where they have arrived. Many
war children have their own ‘travelling objects’ as treasures of their past (see Lury
1997; also Sheller and Urry 2006: 218). These are, for example, photographs, war-
time documents found in war archives, letters, old clothes and other symbolic
objects of displacement. They are not just personal items but also objects that
have become symbols of the whole community. Most of the war children can
also recall common feelings and likeness through other people’s travelling objects.
These represent the varied spatialities and social environments so familiar to war
children. Local war child associations have organised exhibits in which the most
important travelling objects are displayed. These too have attracted a lot of atten-
tion among the Finnish public.

The examples described above show that the collective sense of belonging is
sought through many practices and levels. Visual practices and narratives cre-
ate a sense of unity that alleviates the confusion in the sense of place at personal
level. Collective identity politics and the search of sense of place are always politi-
cal processes. The scale of politics varies from inward looking life politics to the
challenging of the historical awareness of Finnish war history. Thus the study of
identity politics should always be sensitive to its socio-spatial context – in the past
and the present.

Neither are visual narratives innocent. In fact, visual identity politics plays
with imageries and these can be sometimes unconsciously and more often con-
sciously used misleadingly. For example, media attention might begin to dictate
what should be at the core of communal identity politics. Identity politics is about
selecting and excluding. These choices evidently exclude some stories which are
not considered suitable for the identity construction of the time. However, the
choices made should appreciate and honour the ‘real’ emotive-spatial tracks and
realities of the community. Otherwise this kind of identification remains partial
and the sense of unity short-lived.

The identity efforts of Finnish war children are varied and constantly evolv-
ing. The visual politics emphasises the wider inclusiveness and recognition in
comparison to narrative forms of identity politics. The visual politics among Finnish war children does not refer only to sad memories, but the aim is to create a generic and holistic understanding of how forced displacement affects children. What kind of emotional geographies come into existence when home is left behind and journeying begins? This work they have conducted proves that Finnish war children are not an isolated curiosity of World War II.

8.5 Visual communication and the request for national inclusiveness

Spatial belonging has an important role for individuals and communities. The sense of spatial belonging does not necessarily refer to any specific topological place but several places and multiple experiential dimensions. War children’s experiences are exceptional in Finnish society. In the early 1990s, the decades of silence ended and the request for national inclusiveness was raised by the war children. They searched for answers to questions concerning their social identity and their place in Finnish society. Moreover, they wanted to challenge the national monolithic narrative of the Finnish wars and open up discussion on the emotions of war. This, I argue, is important because fractures in one’s spatial identity are often viewed as fractures in oneself. The war years left a deep impression on Finnish society. Even though today these traces are not concealed in the same way they were sixty years ago, they do still influence our society. This means that ‘healing’ through open discussion is still needed in Finnish society.

Visual practices and images have played an important role in war children’s identity politics. The lack of coherent oral narrative led to an intuitive search for other means of identity construction at both personal and collective levels. Visual narratives seem to be able to bridge the gaps in personal memory and collective historical awareness. But there are downsides to visual identity politics as well. Like the film example showed, visual imageries quite easily bring up issues which are emotionally shocking but do not tell the whole story. This kind of one-sided storytelling and ‘victimising’ of war children can turn against itself. Important in visual identity politics is to understand who uses visual images, how they are used and in which social and spatial contexts this is taking place. None of these agents or visual practices are innocent.

The many ways of visualising spatial belonging among war children show that the early childhood displacement has had drastic impacts on people’s and communities’ everyday life. Thus, I argue that the children’s emotive-spatial geographies of war should be taken seriously. In the contemporary world, many million children experience the same kind of spatial and social confusion every year due to war or conflict situations. Psychological interventions are more effective nowadays, but
attention is quite rarely paid to the spatial imageries and belonging. This means that reconstruction of the memories of the past, the present and the future is left incomplete. Everyone involved in this fragile reconstruction process should take the visual imageries of war children seriously, not least because of the hidden power of reconciliation and the politics that lies in them.

References


CHAPTER 9

Visual politics and celebrity humanitarianism
How colonial culture is revitalised in the West*

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This chapter turns towards the aesthetics of contemporary celebrity humanitarian action and examines critically the imaginaries Bob Geldof’s and Bono’s representations open towards Africa. I argue that despite their intention to bring about economic changes for Africa, the spatio-temporality of their imaginaries repeat the colonial violence by elaborating on colonial imaginary. The chapter concludes that celebrity humanitarianism, as a form of cultural governance, is also of crucial importance to the study of international relations. Consequently, the intention of the chapter is to act as an invitation for future research on the relationship between imaginary violence and celebrity humanitarianism – and the global politics of this activity.

I represent a lot of people [in Africa] who have no voice at all … I now represent them. They haven’t asked me either. It’s cheeky but I hope they’re glad I do, and in God’s order of things, they are the most important.

Bono discussing his involvement in the Jubilee 2000 campaign (Assayas 2005: 249)

Here are the things I saw. Or felt. Or things that popped into my head that my make sense or may not. The ramble around like a TV show – which is the way it should be. Snapshots of the mind. I hope they will give you a sense of experience and the place. If you ever get the change, go there …


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Introduction

Through their actions aiming at eliminating extreme poverty and preventable diseases in Africa, contemporary Irish musicians Robert (Bob) Geldof and Bono (Paul David Hewson) form today a visible and celebrated centre in the world of humanitarianism as ‘political activists’, ‘celebrity diplomats’, ‘global Samaritans’ and actors who, to quote former World Bank President Paul Wolfowitz, “rock the establishment”.¹ The necessity and importance of celebrities’ humanitarian actions in Africa is often perceived by journalists, Western NGOs, citizens and politicians as well as political researchers as ethical action aiming at a more human, co-operative and peaceful global world. Kofi Annan, for instance, has argued that celebrity humanitarians “help instill in young people the values of understanding, solidarity, respect and communication across cultures … so that those values come to them naturally for the rest of their lives” (Katsigeorgis 2002). Several western NGOs agree. As Phil Bloomer, head of advocacy for Oxfam UK has argued, celebrities “give a face and voice to all those people with no faces and no voices. When a celebrity talks, people listen; there is no better messenger” (Ford and Goodale 2005).

Lately, also political scientists have acknowledged the role of celebrities in endorsing humanitarian causes. According to Andrew Cooper (2008), several ‘celebrity diplomats’ have been enormously successful in mobilising, channelling and mediating their causes into international public policy. Cooper’s rather confident view of the prospects and effects of celebrity diplomacy is however not shared by all. Criticism has emerged of celebrities’ legitimacy and accountability in humanitarian politics, as well as of the effectiveness of the aid policies they promote in Africa (Dieter and Kumar 2008; Richey and Ponte 2008; Moyo 2009; Easterly 2007). This current debate on celebrities’ humanitarian actions’ suitability and accuracy leaves, however, important questions with regard to celebrity humanitarianism still unasked. These questions are not ‘what-and-who’ questions, but rather about how celebrities act and represent the African poor to global citizens and what kind of truths celebrities, with their representations, create themselves. In effect no specific empirical research exists on their humanitarian representations of Africa. In consequence, the scope of celebrity ‘politics’ has remained inside the defined limits of mainstream political science and its imagined political world. It seems that since their campaigns are fundamentally moral, doubting the rightness of their humanitarianism seems difficult if not impossible (Douzinas 2007: 19) – not only for the general public, but also for academic researchers.

With an interdisciplinary departure and methodology in mind, in this chapter the aim is to conceptualise alternative ways to feel and think about celebrity politics by emphasising something which in previous research has passed with too little attention. This relates essentially to the current academic difficulty to recognise the power relations of celebrity humanitarianism that are constitutive of and construct the world around us. The main effort of this chapter is thus to counter and problematise the repeated arguments of naturalness, universal human vocation and the beneficiary ‘opposition’ of celebrity humanitarianism. It is argued that the mimetic mainstream approaches of political science with their preoccupation with finding the truths of real have not paid enough critical attention to the ways in which these celebrity humanitarian mediations and representative practices constitute and shape knowledges, truths and realities – ways of seeing, knowing and understanding. Subsequently, the important roles of images, spectacles, imaginaries and sensibilities these representations construct in the contemporary highly visualised global spheres have not been adequately addressed.

Indeed, the public use of images is never politically neutral or socially irrelevant – images have both agency and purpose that establish their meaning (Stocchetti, in this volume). Today the political battles for control and legitimacy in postmodern societies are increasingly fought through visual communication – over the uses of images (Stocchetti and Kukkonen, in this volume). To begin to think how celebrity humanitarian imaginaries operate and engage with these visualised political contexts requires a new line of inquiry – engagement with and elaboration of the alternative thought-worlds that unsettle the familiar perspectives of where and what we take politics to be (cf. Walker 2010). In specific this demands a critical attitude or sensitivity to the humanitarian imaginaries, which themselves operate as political practices that produce human orders, subjectivities and their differing essence.

Specifically, this calls for a different way of thinking and seeing – an engagement that treats the humanitarian images and sensibilities not as appearances but as processes that constitute thought-worlds, commonsensical and ambivalent settings. Furthermore, the objective is to exemplify what it means to think about images politically (cf. Shapiro 1999). This means recognising that visibilities belong not to the dimension of language or perception but rather to the dimension of thought (Foucault 1982). In other words, to critically examine visibilities we need to acknowledge the ways how visuals organise and envelope ‘realities’ and open them up to language (cf. Foucault 2010: 45, 232–233). This means sensitivity to the conditioned and conditional actuality of visualities themselves that emerge from the intertwined relations between saying and seeing.
By acknowledging that images are normative, political and intertextual, rather than cognitive and representational, this chapter aims to think through images rather than just looking at them. To be able to critically engage with celebrity humanitarian imaginaries and thought-worlds, a rather unfamiliar or, at least till now, rarely-asked question is raised: what violence do the imaginaries and the ways of seeing and understanding in Bono and Geldof’s representations in the name of humanitarianism impose on Africa? With this unsettling question, the intention is to reveal celebrity humanitarian violent cartographies, those “historically developed, socially embedded interpretations of the space and identity” (Shapiro 2009:18) that these African discourses with their calls to common humanity and poverty-free global future perform and produce.

In order to perform this specific task, in this chapter the news stories and narratives on/by Bono and Geldof are approached as sites where political meanings and relationships, identities and societal norms are debated, evaluated, modified and shared (Turner 2004; Marshall 1997; Dyer 1998). Elaborating a critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 1995, 2003) to examine the active relations and effects of these discursive formations of African constructed ‘realities’, I have selected two British news publishers, the Daily Telegraph and the web news of the British Broadcasting Corporation, BBC News. In addition, TIME magazine, although a US source, stands as one of the leading newsweeklies both in the United Kingdom and in Europe. All three news outlets – whose articles from 2000 to August 2008 on Bono’s and Geldof’s humanitarian/Africa work are examined – have broad domestic and international circulations. Along with these media reports, three books – *Geldof in Africa* (2005), *On the Move* (2006) and *Bono on Bono* (2005) – have been included in the analysis. The first two books are written by Geldof and Bono themselves, while the last title is a collection of interviews with Bono by the journalist Michka Assayas.

9.1 The visual politics of celebrity humanitarianism

The combination of celebrities and political research, even though still scarce, is a surprisingly fruitful one. For P. David Marshall (1997: 262–266) celebrities are governmental tools of modern capitalist societies – the fundamental mechanism for constructing and maintaining the discursive linkages between consumer capitalism, democracy and individualism. Acting out as ideological texts of a ‘common man’ they provide an important integrative function in the secular capitalist Western societies (cf. Rojek 2001; Marshall 1997; Adorno and Horkheimer 2002). However, as icons and deities of the contemporary media culture, celebrities do not only have a central function in the legitimisation of capitalist economy but
are an essential part of the personalised Western politics where mediated political identities are increasingly built by cultural containment: symbol management, affections and imaginaries of being and becoming (Turner 2004; Rojek 2001; Marshall 1997; Kellner 2003). Politics, entertainment and media have become intricately interwoven, affecting both the representation practices and the legitimisation processes of Western political systems. As stated by Ruth Wodak in this book, the effects of these changes have led to the fictionalisation of politics and to the politicisation of fiction as well as to the globalisation of hegemonic Western political values through popular culture.

Today, political authority builds increasingly through emotional attachments, making aesthetic stylisation a central feature of mass politics in its mediated form (e.g. Van Zoonen 2005; Corner and Pels 2003; Wodak and Stocchetti both in this volume). Media visibilities, issues of style, image management and authenticity have become key forms of constituting and maintaining a political persona. In this new political era labelled as reflective, liquid or second modernisation (Beck 2001; Bauman 2001; Bang 2003), power works increasingly through imaginaries on individual development, life politics and moral re-education. Choosing, deciding, shaping individuals who aspire to be the authors of their lives and the creators of their identities is the central character of contemporary times (Beck 2001: 165). In these contexts, the significant role of celebrities has been widely acknowledged (e.g. Louw 2005: 172–193; Street 2001: 187–192; Street 2002, 2003). Acting as lenses of understanding (Marshall 2006: 5), celebrities through their performances and imaginaries unify, explain and shape everyday life by providing sites of belonging, recognition and meaning (Rojek 2001; Dyer 1998). As wider cultural discourses, celebrities thus not only articulate and express specific cultural norms, values and ideals, but through them imaginaries and worldviews are opened, shaped and built.

Today, visual performances of political compassion and acts of humanitarianism have become key frames through which multifarious world actors evaluate each other’s legitimacy in the current world (Aaltola 2009). The value base of this humanitarian regime draws on the principle of humanity that inspires an allegedly apolitical commitment to alleviate the suffering of people still outside universal equality. This enhancement of the properties of human beings and constructions of their future life builds on ‘transformations’ which are designed to excite novel dreams and fears. Power works through tutoring possibilities, novel appetites and unimagined desires and feelings as well as their outcomes (Dillon and Reid 2009: 44–45). This bio-governance of the liberal subjects is closely linked with cultural governance, making it a vital terrain of governmental interventions in national as well as global terrains (Dillon 2003). In these contexts, celebrity humanitarians, their representations and the imaginaries created through them are
as important as any political decisions, speeches or documents in African affairs. As Benedict Anderson (2006) has argued, nations are imagined communities, constructions of articulations and mediations. Their spatiality and temporality as well as their meanings are textual and visual constructions which set and manage their imagined borders through cognitive and linguistic imperialism. Truths about nations, as well as nationhood, are built with continuing performances and repetitions as well as excluding silences. 

Landscape paintings, maps and theatrical performances along with contemporary films and photographs have routinely participated in the articulation of nationhood with their historico-political frames and aesthetic meaning-makings (Shapiro 2004, 2009). The historical narratives of nations, their territorial spaces, the official scripts of nationhood as well as future interpretations these works have composed and mobilised have often been subject to state's cultural governance (Shapiro 2004:48–49). This governance that has been a major aspect of the modern form of management and legitimisation has not been performed solely through dominance or silencing but also through encouragement and admiration. The celebration of a nation’s essence and characteristics requires continuous symbolic management and performance (ibid.: 50–56) – circular mobilising, remembering and repetitive celebration.

Throughout the centuries, as much as with force, the Western hegemony in Africa has been built with representational practices which have aimed to shape the actions and orientations of citizens. During colonialism and imperialism, fictional narratives were at the heart of the construction and management of Africa, forming and shaping its realities with imperial and anti-imperial attitudes (Said 2003). The stories of explorers, novelists and missionaries constituted Africa through their representations as a dark continent – savage, different, dangerous – which justified the Western intervention in the name of progress, reason and civilisation. From these stories, Africa has emerged as an empowered Western continent, a helpless passive victim or a dangerous and chaotic viral ground (Mayer 2002:256–291; Sontag 2003:71) providing Western citizens with a widely shared view of their role in Africa that has demanded their action on moral, religious and national grounds. Civilising Africa was not about politics but about duty, a deed to be done (Mayer 2002:107).

Europe is, as Fanon argued, “literally the creation of the Third World” (Fanon 2001:81). The humanist idea of the Western ‘Man’ emerged through the dehumanising of the colonial other. The colonial violence which exercised itself through the “language of pure force” transformed the African native into a thing, an object of exploitation, persistently denying the attributes of his/her humanity or history. These dehumanising and dehistoricising narrations of the natives found their justification and legitimacy in the values of Western humanism and
humanity, backed up by Christian Saints, who with warmth called for justice, forgiveness and renunciation of violence. It was in these imaginary terrains of human nature and humanity that the violence of Western colonialism bred, grew and maintained itself. As Fanon argued, humanism was not only a highly politicised category complicit to the violence of colonialism, but it was also a crucial part of the ideology and legitimisation of colonialism. As a cultural practice of ‘distortion, disfiguration and destruction’, colonialism did not only impose its rule upon the colonised present and the future, but it “turned to the past of the oppressed people, emptying the native’s brain of all form and content” (ibid.: 33). Its invisible psychological violence aimed to break the natives and substitute their language, culture, traditions and being with the ‘enlightened’ humanity and Western ‘progressive’ history.

African representations have been eminently recoverable and variable and as such they say more about the nexus of European interests in African affairs than they do about Africa and the Africans (Coombes 2004: 3). The changing nature of the artificial ‘Africas’ is apparent in analyses of museums and colonial exhibitions, photographs, advertising, Hollywood movies and media images (Chouliaraki 2006; Landau and Kaspin 2002; Coombes 1994; Mayer 2002; Ryan 1997; Ramamurthy 2003; McKenzie 1986). These different representations do not simply disseminate information or reflect ‘reality’. Neither are these stereotypes merely ‘false images’ (Eisenstein 1996: 22). Rather, they can be seen as historical event-makings, as “ambivalent texts of projection and introjection … displacement, over-determination, guilt [and] aggressivity” (Bhabha 1994: 82). As power-invested enactments, they wage war on intelligibilities, producing their discursive objects, the difference and sameness, by containment and capture (Foucault 1982). This continuous and permanent war is not fought on the battlefields but silently waged through violent discursive subjugations, claims to rights, myths and history – grids of intelligibilities (Foucault 2003). In other words, liberal war and its violence do not exist outside the discursive practises which operate through complex and continuously developing forms of truth-telling (Dillon and Reid 2009: 38). In effect the modern wars are not “waged in the name of a sovereign who must be defended” but instead “on behalf of the entire existence of everyone; entire populations (which) are mobilised for the purpose of wholesale slaughter in the name of life necessity” (Foucault 1998: 137).

In effect this ongoing and universalised war is about humanity, waged in the name of a specific human through the various constructions of unworthy human lives. In these wars, the power, status and ranking of the states still depends on force but also on the perceived ability to contain and represent specific human values and liberal policies in the imagined terrains of world politics. Subsequently visuals, values and global imaginaries have become the key battlefields where the
wars on hegemonic control and power are carried out today (cf. Wodak in this book). And in this war, as during colonialism, humanitarian imaginaries and their constructed ideas of human are one of its central weapons.

9.2 The global imaginaries of celebrity humanitarianism

Robert (Bob) Geldof and Bono (Paul David Hewson) are today the most visible and awarded media celebrities acting on behalf of Africa. They met originally in 1984 when Bob Geldof initiated Band Aid, a group which consisted of leading British and Irish musicians, to record a charity single ‘Do They Know It’s Christmas’ to raise funds for famine relief in Ethiopia, followed by the Live Aid concerts in London and Philadelphia in 1985. These projects set a background for Bono’s and Geldof’s humanitarianism to be seen as neutral and apolitical. Live Aid was the “high point of [Cold War era] NGO humanitarianism” and was “carried out in the face of governmental indifference … had few political conditions attached or association with Western foreign or defence objectives” (Douzinas 2007: 6.) It took over fifteen years – till 1999 – for Geldof and Bono to emerge to their current visibility in the media as spokespersons of Africa through their involvement in the Jubilee 2000 campaign, the worldwide movement to cancel third world debt. Since then both men have been increasingly involved in various campaigns and events organised to help ease African suffering, for example, by establishing the lobby group DATA (Debt, AIDS, Trade, Africa) and the RED campaign that aims to aid African AIDS sufferers through commercial means. Their latest global involvement was to organise the Live 8 concerts (2005) in all the G8 countries as well as South Africa. These events supported the Make Poverty History Campaign message to pressure world leaders to drop the debt of the world’s poorest nations, increase and improve aid, and negotiate fair trade rules in the interest of poorer countries.

Today, Bono’s and Geldof’s actions as global ‘celebrity humanitarians’, men who represent Africa without any official mandate and appear alongside politicians and businessmen in official political conferences, events and panels and their travels to Africa, have granted them an extensive list of honors and awards from honorary doctorates to orders of liberty. This reflects the more general developments within the field of humanitarianism, where “contemporary humanitarianism is no longer the cry of dissidents, campaigners and protesters but a common vocabulary that brings together the government, the army and erstwhile radicals and human rights activists” (Douzinas 2007: 7 – paraphrasing David Kennedy). Both men have received honorary knighthoods (Knight Commander of the
British Empire) for their humanitarian work,\(^2\) been given ‘Man of Peace’ awards\(^3\) by the previous Nobel Peace Prize Laureates, as well as been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize several times.\(^4\) In 2004 and 2006, Bono was named by TIME-magazine as one of the world’s ‘100 Most Influential People’ and in 2005 became the first entertainer to receive the ‘Person of the Year’ award.

Even though Bono and Geldof do not formally participate in decision-making processes on African issues in national and international contexts, they can be seen playing a significant role as producers of knowledge, truths and facts of Africa through the performative qualities of celebrity. Many citizens perceive Bono and Geldof as anti-hegemonic heroes and charismatic truth-tellers who act against Western power elites and bring the truth and reason out on display.\(^5\) Media discourses reflect and build these assumptions. As independent, intelligent and widely influential Western men of virtue, Geldof and Bono are frequently framed in British media as men of truth and moral integrity. TIME writes that they “rock the establishment” with “passionate” and “committed” actions making them “peerless” in their actions.\(^6\) In BBC news headlines, Geldof’s actions for Africa are described with forceful verbs, such as “pushes”, “sets out”, “urges”, “unveils”, “confirms”, “criticalises” and “attacks”.\(^7\) Admired for being free of favours and obligations, he is described as “an outspoken campaigner”\(^8\) and “ragged-trousered pragmatist” [whose] “credibility is intact”.\(^9\) “The clearest example of a modern day hero … [p]olitical and empathetic, but not a politician”\(^10\), the BBC continues.

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3. The ‘Man of Peace’ award was created in 1999 by the annual World Summit of Nobel Peace Prize Laureates. The purpose of the award is to recognise individuals who have offered “an outstanding contribution to international social justice and peace”.
4. Both Geldof and Bono have been nominated three times for the Nobel Peace Prize, in 1986, 2006 and 2008, and 2003, 2006 and 2007, respectively.
As with Geldof, the wealth and the private life of Bono are often sidelined. Instead his phenomenal moral strength becomes the object of awe and applause. For example, the BBC sketches him as “a televangelist persona who talks with righteously candid words about global justice for Africa”.11 TIME writes that he is “like Superman turning into Clark Kent”.12 This ‘superhumanity’ is apparent in the cover title of the magazine, which asks if Bono “can save the world”.13 Descriptions of Bono being “a modern day Samaritan”14 and “a televangelist persona who talks with righteously candid words about global justice for Africa”15 reinforce the messianic element in media imagery. “Such is the nature of Bono’s fame that just about everyone in the world wants to meet him”, TIME continues.16 As a “card-carrying capitalist” his aim is to “market his ideas” for Africa more like “sports-shoe or cigarette companies did”.17 Realising his revolution from within the system as a business venture, rather than with “misty-eyed or bleeding-heart” help and emotionalism,18 he is, TIME concludes, “a right man at the right time”.19

9.3 Aesthetic engagements: Contemporary Hell and Eternal Home

Not only do the media discourses on Bono and Bob Geldof describe what quality and type of personality is ‘legitimately’ fit to represent Africa in the West, but also Africa and its ‘reality’ become constructed through them.20 Through the media discourses, as well as Bono’s and Geldof’s own books and documentaries, Africa

18. Ibid.
becomes imagined through two overlapping spatio-temporal discourses, referred to here as the Contemporary Hell and the Eternal Home.

The discourse of the Contemporary Hell, which depicts Africa as a poor, starving, sick, neglected and disordered place, was mostly built with words voiced in the West in relation to the economic discourses of the continent’s injustice and the political discourse on conflict and security. In his speech at the Labour conference in 2004, Bono argued that Africa was “bursting into flames”.21 In Le Monde, Geldof wrote that Africa was place of “despair … whose evidence washes ashore daily on our southern beaches”. “Africa”, he continued, “was not simply a potential time bomb of political nightmare but is unquestionably the greatest moral wound to the human corpus”, which he linked to the Holocaust.22 Also Bono linked the contemporary fight against poverty in Africa to the Western experiences and memories of WW2 by calling for “a fight against world poverty as noble as the previous generations’ battle against Nazis during WW2”.23 Like the Holocaust, he argued, today “Africa makes a fool of our idea of justice; it makes a farce of our idea of equality. It mocks our pieties, it doubts our concern, it questions our commitment” (Assayas 2006:22).

Through these constant references to Western histories, Africa became Westerners’ epoch and an odyssey (cf. Fanon 2001:39–40). According to Geldof, to deny Africa help was a “grotesque failure” and a sign of a “moral corruption”.24 To Bono it was a sinful act against God’s will. Subsequently with these interpretations the fight against poverty in Africa became directly linked to Western world history-making. As Bono argued (2006:49):

I truly believe that when the history books will be written, our age will be remembered for three things: the war on terror, the digital revolution and what we did – or did not do – to put the fire out in Africa. History, like God, is watching what we do.

In effect to make poverty history in Africa was Westerners’ action to shepherd forwards. Saving Africa was possible, Geldof argued, because “we have the plan, it is called the Commission for Africa … We have the money. It is insignificant in global terms. The cost for each citizen of the rich world will be laughably and tragically equivalent to half a stick of chewing gum each”.25 As such ending of

22. “France’s Role”, Bob Geldof’s Article in Le Monde (France), June 1, 2005.
poverty required Western actions “to change our debt, aid and trade policies and Africans to deal with issues of governance as above”.26 Only through this Western leadership and action, along with the African governments’ engagement to fight their internal corruption, the poverty in Africa could be ended.27 Even Geldof agreed that corruption also existed in the developed countries; for him, however, this was not a major problem because it “didn’t kill people” as it did in Africa.28 With different standards being applied to the corruption in the West, the corruption in Africa became depicted as the continent’s internal problem rather than a consequence of various economic or political policies and actions originating outside the continent. The colonial order, the subjugation through objectification, continued thus to move uninterruptedly from the North to the African South, justifying the need for the Westerners’ action and presence (cf. Fanon 2001:39).

For both Bono and Geldof, the political will to help Africa existed in the West, most notably in the United Kingdom. The BBC reported Bono’s speech, in which he asked Gordon Brown and Tony Blair to “finish what they started to end world poverty”,29 and described Geldof praising the talks at Tony Blair’s Commission for Africa as “radical and progressive”.30 According to Geldof, this commission came from “a serving, powerful prime minister of a resurgent economy” and was to deliver its proposals to Mr Blair’s G8 and EU colleagues with “true political bite”.31 The United States, and to a lesser degree France, also received admiration for their actions in Africa from both celebrity humanitarians. Bono was reported to “hail” President Bush’s bold long-term vision on AIDS prevention in Africa,32 and Geldof was described to have praised George Bush’s administration as “the most radical – in a positive sense – in its approach to Africa since Kennedy”.33

As Fanon argued, the colonial wars of repression were never waged against rebel sultans, everything was more elegant, less bloodthirsty (cf. Fanon 2001:51–52). Also today, the authority of the Northern governments is increasingly reassessed along the North-South axis through commonsensical arguments on societal reconstruction, backed up by narrations of moral and social responsibilities:

fairness, justice and duties (Duffield 2001; Soederberg 2006). Building on an ethical framework, this new form of governance incorporates humanitarianism and development in Africa into the security framework: the threat of its underdevelopment to instigate instability through conflict and terrorism. Through these claims, Africa becomes framed not only as a danger to the whole future of the Western civilisation but also as a continent which is lacking politics, at least politics of the right kind. Africa’s humanitarian crises become potential risks and threats to Western hegemony. As Bono argued, “there are potentially another 10 Afghans in Africa” framing Africa’s poverty not an emotional issue of compassion but in specific a financial and security issue for the West.

He also called for an effective and enduring Marshall plan for Africa: “that was where Europe felt the grace of America, in a way more than just stepping in with its military might.” “In these distressing and disturbing times”, he continued, “surely it is cheaper, and smarter, to make friends out of potential enemies than it is to defend yourself against them … Africa is not the frontline in the war on terror, but it could be soon. Justice is the surest way to get to peace”.

In his book Bono on Bono (2005), he clarified further what it was that posed a threat to the ‘safe world’:

Think back to the Second World War, think back to the United States that liberated Europe, but then rebuilt Europe … they were being strategic, it wasn’t all out of the goodness of their hearts through it was that too … This is what we need in Africa and in some parts of the Middle East – a bulwark against the extremist of our age in what I call the Hot War. This makes sense, not just as a moral imperative, but as a political and a strategic one. It is right thing to do.

This is a new era. We need tactical weapons in another sense. Take out hatred a different way. Destroy anti-American or anti-Western feeling by making sure they know who they are, working harder on the Middle East peace process, feeding people who are starving, bringing out pharmaceuticals to deal with the AIDS emergency. Africa is forty percent Muslim. (Assayas 2006: 264–265)

In effect this contemporary fight against poverty in Africa was spurred by anxieties about maintaining the inheritance of neoliberal values, economic growth and ‘liberal peace’ that the US had fought for since the Second World War, or even since the New Deal (cf. Foucault 2008: 216). Indeed, as Geldof argued to the BBC, “it was the time for the Old Economies to come to Africa … to protect

Africa through aid for trade scheme as US did for Europe after the WWII.  

These constant references to the heroic histories, duties and achievements of specific Western countries wrote not the history of Africa but that of the liberating and enlightened North: “This land was created by us ... If we leave all is lost, and the country will go back to the Middle Ages” (Fanon 2001: 40).

Acting now for Africa, Bono and Geldof insisted, was wise, strategic, moral and economical. Bono argued that it was “cheaper by a factor of 100 to prevent the fires from happening [in Africa] than to put them out” and continued that “any delay in increased funding means more lives lost and an even bigger cheque in the future”. 

The insufficient interest of European leaders in Africa had already resulted in a troublesome outcome. According to Geldof, “even with the undoubted leadership” taken by United Kingdom on Africa “in the vacuum of our [European leaders] lack of fulfilment have stepped the Chinese, who do not care about the values of democracy, transparency and accountability … [who say] we’ll give you the money so long as we have influence over your resources and your politics.”

The Telegraph reported that China’s growing interest in Africa had started a “new Cold War between China and the United States” and continued that “all the efforts of Bono, Geldof, Oxfam, and a chastened World Bank, to stop African development going off the rails again [were] being undercut at a stroke.” Not only was the Chinese attitude towards Africa “naïve” and “disingenuous”, Geldof argued, but it also had concrete effects, especially in Sudan, where “they’re [the Chinese] making the government much more arrogant in wanting to do things they have been doing so far”. As a result, he continued, “China was exacerbating some of the continent’s most difficult problems, including Darfur and Zimbabwe.”

Indeed, everything in Africa seemed to have gone badly wrong since the Westerners’ departure. Without their actions and presence Africa had fallen into “barbarism, degradation and bestiality” (Fanon 2001: 167). Through these self-referential calls for duties, the graceful and necessary hardships for Africa, the white man called himself to return to Africa, to his home.

9.4 The Eternal Home

The discourse of the Contemporary Hell, which described Africa as a sick (AIDS) and crippled (undeveloped) continent in urgent need of Westerners’ help before it took wrong role models and ideals from outside the family, overlaps with the discourse of the Eternal Home. This discourse builds predominantly on the images in Bono’s and Geldof’s books of their travels to Africa. However, while the discourse of the Contemporary Hell construed Africa as ‘apocalyptic’ and at the same time ‘unseen’, with white men taking its voice and images in Western media, in the images attached to the Eternal Home discourse, there is no misery, hostility or danger coming from Africa. As in miracles, while Bono and Geldof were visiting, and presumably for the duration of their visit, Africa became a peaceful and beautiful continent.

In the pictures of their African travels distributed by the media, the Africans are mostly women and children and almost always appear in images with Bono, and to a lesser extent with Geldof. Men are present, but compared to the smiling and active women they appear in the images more passive and emotionally restrained – nevertheless peaceful, co-operative and calm.

Also Bono’s and Geldof’s visual representations of Africa in their books tell a story of a somewhat passive and peaceful continent which has not yet reached its full development. Without any words or captions, the angles of the images, their frames, light and context make them distinctively different from the pictures taken of Western subjects or landscapes. The camera gets close to people, as if aiming to capture the smallest details, turning them into objects by symbolically possessing them (Sontag 1979: 14).

Bono’s book On the Move (2006) begins with endorsements from Nelson Mandela, President Clinton and Reverend Billy Graham – as earthly representatives of humanity, international politics and Christianity – and depicts only Africans and the writer itself. All the Africans portrayed – excluding one – are children.

In the majority of these black and white images, of these unaccompanied children stare directly into the camera or look past it. The lack of colour indicates a turn to the past, articulating and establishing Africa as a continent outside Western

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45. In total, the book includes twenty pictures, including the cover. Five of the images are of Bono.
modernity and maturity, progress and protection. In the close-up shots of children’s faces and bodies, these children show no emotions. In the images, they look blankly back into the camera from their empty and grey environments. These African bodies are not in pain or dehumanised. They are clothed and fed. Rather, their agency builds on vulnerability, innocence and isolation. However, action and emotions arise in images which display children together or with Bono. Smiles emerge on the children’s faces, action is shown with clapping hands and curious gazes towards the white man. The story unfolds: isolation creates misery; togetherness brings happiness.

Neither in Bono’s book nor in Geldof in Africa (2005) are people shown in the images named. Bono’s dedication of his book “to the little boy on page 17 … who changed my life. I can’t remember his name” (Bono 2005, front matter) refers to a specific function of these images to the predominantly Western reader/viewer. These photographs are not intended to ‘explain’ Africans. Rather, they are meant to evoke emotions, to provide Western subjects with places to reflect by laying claims to their realities (cf. Sontag 1979:15). Geldof writes (2005:7):

Here are things I saw. Or felt. Or things that popped into my head that may make sense or not. They ramble around like a TV show – which is the way it should be. Snapshots of the mind. I hope they will give you a sense of the experience and the place … If you ever get the chance, go there. It feels like … going home.

In these imaginative engagements the Western history and African topology became inseparably intertwined, unfolding Africa as a kind of Westerners’ affective experience arising from a deep conscious connection and relation with the continent’s landscapes.

In his snapshots of this embodied ‘African home’, Geldof describes the Africans in the photographs by the names of their tribes, countries or places they come from. Again, the people shown are left unnamed. Rather than subjects of their own as people capable of narrating their own life, Africans remain objects whose subjectivity – meaning and existence – gets textually built into their bodies with captions. ‘City girl’, ‘rubbish girl’, ‘Congolese mob’, ‘Nuer woman’, ‘Masai’ ‘mobile torso’ and ‘happy drug dealer’ (ibid.:76, 48, 89, 103, 163–164, 169, 120–121). Occasionally, the individuals in the images are simply named after the places they come from. The two naked children become the national symbols

46. In Geldof in Africa (2005), none of the Africans appearing in the images are named. However, in the body text of the book as well as in the TV series, names are sometimes provided. In the vast majority of the cases, these individuals are ‘Westernised Africans’ or saved from poverty. Identity becomes a mark of acceptance as one of the good and active Africans: the doctors, the priests, the workers of the NGOs or the guides.
of ‘Sudan’, a man playing a guitar gets named as ‘Kinshasa, Congo’ and a boy in colourful clothes as ‘Timbuktu’ (ibid.: 11, 93, 134). Geldof describes, sites and surveys – possesses – Africans with exhaustive textual detail on their physical characteristics. Women in Africa, Geldof writes, are “like models or ballerinas, gracefully upright … their hips propelling them forward in a lullaby sway”, a landlord in Somalia is “beautiful, tall and immaculately dressed”, and Masai warriors are “elegantly thin” (ibid.: 27, 67, 118). In contrast to this celebratory tone, the women of the Mursi tribe are described through the disapproving male gaze as: “bare-breasted … wearing animal hide round their waists … their lips … huge and pendulous. A great sagging flap of flesh hangs down like an old tyre from their bottom lip” (ibid.: 53). These racialised and sexualised descriptions freeze and capture the African body under normative inspection and scrutiny. The Western male emerges in triumph as a subject who gazes, captures, names, judges and knows the ‘natural’ African and his/her existence and actuality.

In both Bono’s and Geldof’s books, the images show only Africans and the white male authors. Nowhere in these images do we see other races or nationalities. Arabs, Chinese, the starving children, dead bodies, holocaust victims or burning landscapes, so often mentioned by Western media, do not feature in these images. Instead, Africa is portrayed as a peaceful, beautiful and rather stagnant place where the people in the countryside live as they did decades if not centuries ago. Like the Live 8 logo, which depicts Africa as an unplayable guitar floating in the air, the map at the beginning of Geldof in Africa places Africa next to Middle East but outside the Western world. The cartography shows Africa as a blank white continent where black lines indicate boundaries between the named national states, rivers and other places of interest. Colours – yellow, red and grey – are used randomly, as if to highlight places already known to the Western reader. Sahara desert, the Great Rift Valley and the Darfur region. Most of Africa, however, is still left white, an untouched, unidentified land mass. As a depthless unknown place without a certain size, place, meaning or being, Africa becomes, as Geldof names one the chapters in his book, “A Different World” (ibid.: 312). A place where the Western subject reflects on and questions himself: “what am I doing here? I don't know, I really don't know” (ibid.: 312).

In Geldof’s photographs, Africa is however colourful and bright. Africa is a “luminous continent” which is “drenched in sun, pounded by heat and shimmering in its blinding glare” (ibid.: cover text). The 319 pages of Geldof’s book are filled with images of people, things, landscapes and ways of transport: boats, camels, motorbikes, deserts, mountains and rivers. People are shown in their everyday environments: bathing, sleeping off drugs, sitting in a mall, attending Sunday masses or dancing (ibid.: 43, 49, 73, 86, 119). However, even though Geldof also writes about and shows in his pictures the faces of modern Africa – mobile
phones, satellite dishes, tabloids – his words and images build and frame the continent as a predominantly immature one. Compared to the many places Geldof writes about where “man has invariably altered the landscape”, Africa’s landscape “has forced man to adapt to it … the deserts, forests, rivers and mountains remain unchanged, immovable, inviolate” (ibid.: 100). As an exception, Africa is a “mysterious continent” where “the old spirits are strong” and where some “people have heard of white people but never seen one” (ibid.: 52, 60, 66). In the photographs, the lack of economic development and its progress gets depicted in images of country borders which are still marked by posts, mines which are deserted and rusted and old trains which are left desolate in the jungle (ibid.: 83, 186, 197–198).

Even if city life gets shown, none of Africa’s megacities, vast motorways, urban slums, middle-class houses, luxury cars, supermarkets or other signs of the economic growth Africa has experienced in the past years show up in the images. Nor does the political landscape of the continent – the parliaments, political parties and elected representatives of African nations – get captured by Geldof’s camera. Geldof’s eyes are fixed on the exceptions, the lack and the surprises, of which he writes extensively unfolding Africa is a place where “life is still about staying alive. There is no abstraction here. No fun. No irony. Just struggle” (ibid.: 308). Struggle that culminates in the failed states, such as Somalia, where the “traditional state is anarchy and the gun” and the “blatant levels of corruption that bedevil [in] many parts of Africa” (ibid.: 38). Absences of modernity and authority.

What does emerge from Geldof’s photographs, however, is an Africa that is keenly looking towards the West to follow its trends, products and advice – David Beckham, English Premier League football, Coca-Cola, rap music and AIDS education (ibid.: 61, 97, 154, 164–165, 218). It is a continent where Westerners are still crowned as kings – as Geldof himself was during his travels – to look after the African subjects to measure their progress (ibid.: 157, 225). A continent which requires a white man to be around for things to work and peace to prevail. An authority who with his presence turns even the textually “mad” and “wired” Somali private army members into peaceful individuals in images (ibid.: 354). Africa, where the white man can still mark himself as superior through images and words. “Forever black, forever white”, Geldof reflects, cementing and naturalising the differences into common sense (ibid.: 354).

And so the African story once again repeats itself. In the name of love and global justice, to give a voice and vision to Africa, the blank white African map is filled with Western emotions, wants, fears and desires. As a tilted mirror, Africa reflects back the images and truths which are carefully constructed and painted on its surface. Through its textual pain and luminous beauty, absolute and natural difference, the story unfolds, calling the Western subjects to their eternal return to their beginning and belonging. Geldof writes: “At Africa. At its totally beauty.
Spiritual and Physical. … How the ancient memory and smell of it draws you back. Draws you home” (*ibid.*: 115).

9.5 The politics of the image and the visual manipulation of humanitarianism

In our contemporary age of “war on terror” political compassion is not only directed at the suffering of distant individual bodies, but it also denotes a sentimental worry over the world order (Aaltola 2009:15). Arguably, in the recent years, “humanitarianism which started its career as a limited regulation of war has now expanded and affects all aspects of culture and politics”, turning into “the ultimate political ideology which brings together the well-being of the West with the hardships of the global South” (Douzinas 2007:5, 11).

These intertwined global levels became evident in the discourses on Bono and Geldof. Depicted as experts on development issues and the bodily culminations of correct ethics and morals, these men with deep knowledge, morals and visions were reported to guide the whole world forward to a rightful and needed fight against poverty in Africa. In these descriptions the role to build and maintain global order was assigned to the Westerners who, with their knowledge, assets and high morals, became the natural and unquestionable leaders in world politics. By repeating the old narratives from the Western past now in African contexts – the heroic actions of the British and the Americans: ending WW2, taking action against the Holocaust and abolishing slavery – Africa was framed as a specifically Western ‘destiny’ and a calling. In consequence, other non-Western countries such as China, which has been increasingly active in Africa in the past decade, along with other influences coming from outside the Western hemisphere, most specifically Islam, became framed as a grave danger not only to Africa but to the whole global humanity.

The hard words on the continent’s wars, famines, poverty, AIDS crises and orphans raised in the West, combined with the soft images when Western celebrities

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47. This does not mean that Bono and Geldof were celebrated without any criticism in the media. Their close relationships with Western politicians did invoke criticism, but this tended to be targeted at the politicians’ efforts to build themselves a favourable and ‘cool’ media image through associating with Bono and Geldof. See for example: “Is Davos our last resort? As the global economy falters, this year’s bash will be as much rescue summit as talking shop”, *The Sunday Telegraph*, January 20, 2008; “WHO’S OFF PISTE? There is no greater humiliation for the great and good than being dropped from the Davos guest list”, *The Sunday Telegraph*, January 20, 2008; “When our politicians go pop”, *The Daily Telegraph*, July 14, 2007; “Portrait of Blair as a worn down global hobnobber”, *The Daily Telegraph*, February 21, 2007.
themselves were in Africa, build a spiral and self-referential story of a helpless and catastrophic Africa requesting, with its pain, the West to help, guide and assist it to become a part of its ‘humanity’.

In these stories, Africa was, at the same time, the Westerners’ home, a place where political contradictions and contestations are erased, as well as a pain which fundamentally challenges the foundations of ‘civilisation’ and ‘progress’. Through this double capture, Africa was converted into a Western space, its hegemonic territory.

These African descriptions can be seen deriving from colonial practices whereby Western actors with their calls to moral and rightful actions in colonised countries have made their own histories (cf. Fanon 2001). The reactualisation of Western colonialism through the image of the celebrities – as opposed to the soldier, the merchant and the priest that were the icons of the older colonial culture – is evident in these celebrity discourses. In effect instead of opening new ways of understanding the Western history-making in Africa, or in the world, their perspectives end up celebrating, maintaining and repeating the mental and historical limits of colonial thought-worlds.

In these celebrity imaginaries the images depict, nowhere to be seen or heard are the African refugees who arrive to Europe’s shores alive, only to be taken into the refugee camps to wait for their return. Neither are there any references to the Western countries’ role as one of world’s leading arms traders in Africa’s ‘burning landscapes’. These immoral and less glamorous stories of Western actions and interests or the West’s own responsibility to Africa’s ‘holocausts’ are not part of these celebrity humanitarians’ history-writing and truth games. Consequently, a vast silence covers a number of issues that would question the role of the West as a rightful, neutral and heroic actor in global politics.

Consequently the mental skeletons of colonialism are still firmly in place: saving Africa through Western aid, help and trade is framed as an act of justice and fairness. As ethical action, it is aimed to transform the lives of millions of people in Africa: to help the unfortunate poor to survive, to give African children a future through basic education, to provide the HIV-infected with antiviral drugs. In these discourses, the West is depicted as an actor who does not have any economic or political interests in Africa. On the contrary, its interest in African issues is too insignificant, as both Geldof and Bono argue. Rather than their due (cf. Fanon 2001:81), the saving of Africa becomes the Westerners’ deed to be done, turning celebrity criticism into a call for increasing Western action in Africa.

The blood and the sweat of the Africans, from which this Western humanity, its well-being and its progress builds itself, is left unseen. As a result, these discourses do not only serve a purpose in maintaining and legitimising subjective Western activity in Africa, but they are also instrumental in constructing and
sustaining the cultural image of Western humanism – the myth of the humanising and liberating West. Soft speeches and gestures on moral compensations, unity, homogeneity, peace and respect. Images of Africa looking keenly towards its old masters and celebrating them with enthusiasm when they arrive. All placed in the name of the shared future of the mankind. The ‘progressive’ human history and being of the White man. The History of the Same, which today repeats itself in the celebrity humanitarian imaginaries, delimiting the ideological and political spaces for Africa to be, and to become.

The cultural specificities of nations change over time. Along with them transform also the national artifacts which form imaginations and national self-understandings (Hayward 2000) – collective memories of the glorious pasts, constructed by selective amnesias. Inasmuch as the history of nationhood has required these continuous scriptings, symbolic conversions and cultural performances (Shapiro 2004), today the global liberal order, of which humanity is a central part, also needs cultural management and legitimation. As Franz Fanon argued (2001:74) in his book *The Wretched of the Earth*, written during the Algerian struggle for independence from colonial rule:

During the colonial period the people are called upon to fight against oppression; after national liberation they are called upon to fight against poverty, illiteracy and underdevelopment. The struggle, they say, goes on.

To Fanon, the challenge of decolonised individuals was not only to overcome the visible and physical violence which the police, army or the settler placed on their bodies’ skin. Freedom was more than political and economic independence. The strength of colonialism lay not in the systematic and naked violence towards the colonised land and body but in its invisible violence targeted at the natives’ minds, their imaginations of themselves as well as the understandings of their histories, present and future. Colonialism was not a class war but a race war, which waged itself through the vast truth-claims which built on total and systematic denials, violent reorganisations of social meanings and radical restructurings of mental maps and historiographies of the colonised people. All these mental and historical limits which colonialism had, throughout the centuries, cemented into the grounds and minds of the natives were to be denounced. The ultimate liberation of the colonial countries and their citizens lay in a total replacement: the eradication of the settler as an example and an instance of comparison. It was only through these new arrangements of spaces, places, moments and mentalities that the birth of a new human, a new language, a new humanity and a new world order was to come about.

This struggle goes on, at this very moment. If we educated and affluent Westerners today alongside our celebrities, church leaders and politicians aim to make
poverty history in Africa, which human history do we write through our commemorations in the future history books and which ones do we silence? These various questions on how our Western celebrity humanitarianism violates, maintains, produces or breaks the borders of the political imagination through its ‘humanitarian’ performances are also crucial questions for political scientists to ask.

Neither we nor our celebrities nor our ways of seeing are ahistorical constructions. Our humanitarian being builds historically from the blood of the wretched Africans, their suffering and silencing. The colonial settler lives in all of us, repeating his violence through our (= Western) humanitarian gazes and words we place on Africa. However emphatically the line between the colonial settler and the contemporary humanitarian, violence and humanism, may have been drawn in the first place, it is only a thin line in the sand.

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CHAPTER 10

The economics of gay reality television

The visualisation of sexual difference in contemporary consumer culture

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This article examines the possibilities and conditions of increasingly debated 'gay visibility' and the production of sexual difference across various sites in contemporary reality television. Three reality television programs (Gay, Straight or Taken, How to Look Good Naked and Queer Eye for a Straight Guy) are used as illustrative examples of theoretical observations. These programs both rely on and constitute sexual 'truth' in the sense that they differentiate between homosexuality and heterosexuality and constantly visualize this produced difference. This way, it is suggested that although the usage of gay characters destabilizes prevailing conceptions of gender and sexuality, it can also participate in fortifying normative understandings of sexuality and gender. Also, in the context of reality television shows, (sub)cultural capital associated with only certain kind of gay characters advances gay visibility in television. The political significance of gay visibility thus becomes ambivalent if it is analysed in relation to current social and economic processes.

In a reality television show called Gay, Straight or Taken (2007), a woman tries to find a date for herself. In each episode, she spends time with three men trying to find out which one of them is 'straight', which one is 'gay' and which one is 'taken' while all the men present themselves as heterosexual and available. If the woman makes the 'right' choice and picks the 'straight' man, she wins a holiday with him. If she picks the wrong guy, he will take his partner on the trip. The women's attempts to recognise sexual 'difference' in the show are often tragicomic; shaving breast hair or having stylish shoes are thought to be signs of gayness. In various ways, sexual differences are constituted as becoming visible through appearances and consumer habits. The show thus produces a conception of sexual differences which are recognised through their visualisation. This visualisation of sexual
differences is realised through bodily management and consumption, which illustrates the power that discourses have in terms of material consequences.

The portrayals of homosexuality in reality television open up an interesting perspective to discuss sexual politics and its locations in contemporary social landscape. In order to see how the ‘gay’ images are produced and used, the political significance of gay visibility has to be analysed in a wide economic and social context. By usage we refer to the various ways in which cultural meanings are circulated, reproduced and challenged in the media. In what follows, the textual, economic and social possibilities and conditions of ‘gay visibility’ and the production of sexual difference are examined across different sites in contemporary reality television. The article at hand contributes to the ongoing societal debate on the significance of gay visibility.

We pay attention especially to the commercial dynamics involved in the circulation of gay imagery on television. The visibility of gay and lesbian characters in the mainstream media has increased noticeably during the 1990s and the ongoing decade (see e.g. Barnhurst 2007; Rossi 2007). This rapid increase in visibility is linked to changes in economic conditions and practices: in the 1990s, gay and lesbian persons were addressed as a new target audience for mainstream marketing, which led to a proliferation of gay visibility in adverts and commercials. This was soon followed by an increasing presence of ‘queer’ representations in all media (Sender 2004). In 2000s, characters defined as gay or lesbian have been visible especially in the entertainment drama and reality television programmes (e.g. Rossi 2007). The economically oriented demand for new target audiences has thus served gay visibility but as a consequence, however, the conditions for visibility have increasingly become tied to the contemporary capitalist regime.

Gay visibility has been seen as an important question in regard to sexual politics as it has been thought to indicate the sexual hierarchies in Western societies. Numerous media or queer studies scholars have, without much reserve, pointed out the diversification of gay imagery as a positive development which undermines heteronormativity (e.g. Gauntlett 2002: 90; Rossi 2003: 152–153). The increasing visibility of gay representations in the media has often been interpreted as unequivocally subversive – it has been thought to erode the heteronormativity of the society and to improve the position of sexual minorities. On some occasions, it has even been suggested that the sheer visibility of characters defined as non-heterosexual in the media would not only advance radical sexual politics but also directly improve the well-being of gay persons (see Sender 2007). Also in more demure interpretations attention has been paid to the multiple meanings attached to certain depictions and to the possibilities of employing the oppositional gaze – looking at images in a way that resists normative meaning-making (e.g. Cohan 2007). The representations of homosexuality, however, have also
been criticised for one-sidedness and stereotypicality. Our study relates to the evolving debate on the request for a more comprehensive assessment of the political significance of the usage of gay visibility (see e.g. Meyer and Kelly 2004:216; Vänskä 2007).

This chapter focuses on discussing the portrayals of homosexual men in reality television. Instead of merely celebrating gay visibility, we suggest that its relation to gender and sexuality reproduction deserves scholarly attention. Therefore, the ongoing academic debate concerning the popular discourses that emphasise individual empowerment should also be taken into consideration while evaluating gay visibility. These discourses of individual empowerment tend to leave aside the structures and the struggles for power that shape individual lives and society as a whole. In connection to this, Juha Herkmann points out that the consumer politics of an individual subject can not be the starting point for social critique because efficient critique requires a comprehensive vision of the social and political structures in a given society. Herkmann also cautions against reiterating market-oriented statements about audience taste, consumer pleasure and identity politics. (Herkman 2006:29.) As for gay visibility in media, concentrating only on the representations and interpreting them in relation to individual empowerment does not enable addressing questions of societal power. However, emancipation does not happen in a vacuum but takes place in a certain context (Lehtonen 2008:26). The emphasis on individual opportunities and choices is linked to the neoliberal ideology, in which the unequal distribution of possibilities and resources is bypassed and disentangled from the social context and political struggles (see Duggan 2003). In the context of neoliberal ideology, empowerment cannot be approached solely as freedom from structures because it can also be achieved inside and through social structures.

The analytical framework of this study relies on both Foucauldian and Bourdieuan theorisations. From a Foucauldian perspective, we analyse how the series participate in the production of ‘sexual truths’ and how the establishment of these ‘truths’ relates to questions of gay visibility. Bourdieuan approach allows us to consider promotional subjectivity and the conditions and possibilities of agency in terms of sexualised capital. Also, our point of departure is theoretically influenced by both queer-feminist media studies and political economy. A queer-feminist perspective enables an understanding of sexuality and gender as constructed and performative (see Butler 1990) – they are not given or essential but constituted by reiterating. Political economy, for its part, gives us tools to perceive, firstly, how the politics of capitalist economy are woven into the construction of sexuality and gender and, secondly, how the understanding of sexuality and gender shapes and structures the politics and the reality of capitalist economy. Culture, economy and politics, after all, cannot be separated. Rather, they are overlapping and mutually
constitutive dimensions of social reality (see Kolehmainen and Mäkinen 2009; Lehtonen 2008: 20). On the whole, our theoretical-methodological approach comes close to what Ellen Riordan (2002: 5–10) describes as feminist political economy: linking individual experiences and cultural meanings to the analysis of economical and political structures.

We have chosen to illustrate our theoretical arguments by using three different gay reality television programmes as examples: Gay, Straight or Taken (GST), How to Look Good Naked (HLGN) and Queer Eye for a Straight Guy (QE). American Gay, Straight or Taken, as mentioned before, is a dating program in which making assumptions about a person’s sexual orientation is to a large degree based on interpreting different visual signs. The other two are makeover shows, concentrating on making over women and men, respectively. Both are built on narratives of transformation, articulated in the ‘before’ and ‘after’ shots of the participants who are made over (e.g. Attwood 2005). In the British How to Look Good Naked, women with low self-esteem are ‘educated’ to love and appreciate their appearances with the help of a gay stylist. In Queer Eye, each episode consists of five gay men (‘Fab Five’) renewing one ‘straight’ man’s home and appearance. The series we use as an example is the Finnish version of Queer Eye. The title of the series refers, both in Finnish (Sillä silmällä) and in English, to erotic gazing or sexual valuation. At the same time, the naming of the series constructs gay men as having ‘eye’ in the terms of good taste (see Bourdieu 1984).

We acknowledge the reality genre as a complex one (see Aslama and Pantti 2006: 169). By ‘gay reality television’, we do not refer to any particular sub-genre of reality television but rather to different kinds of sub-genres of reality shows into which gay characters are inscribed and in which they are crucial to the format. Thus, in gay reality television, (male) homosexual characters are essential in building the drama and excitement. Following Toby Miller (1998: 13), we approach the genre of gay reality television as simultaneously textual, economic and social. Hence, the question of gay visibility on television is not only textual but becomes meaningful in relation to its economic and social context. In addition, only by taking into consideration the economic and social context of gay visibility can the social relations of power be assessed. Our examples are chosen to illustrate our contribution, but this is not to say they would be rare representatives of the whole reality genre. Similar gay characters are popular in other reality series from Playing It Straight to America’s Next Top Model.
10.1 The ‘pink’ economy

The increasing visibility of gay and lesbian persons in the media, which can be perceived in reality television too, is historically linked to changes in the field of marketing. Homosexuals as a defined group have been targets of marketing since the 1960s, but back then gay marketing was quite marginal and visible mainly in gay-oriented media such as magazines and newspapers (Sender 2004: 26–27; 2007: 89). Marketing in the mainstream media has taken advantage of a double strategy aimed at both gay and straight audiences. Double strategy in advertising refers to using hints in commercials in order to enable both queer and heterosexual interpretations. (Clark 1993: 186–201; see also Rossi 2003: 152–153.) In the 1990s and 2000s, there has been a shift to a more straightforward use of gay and lesbian images in marketing. At the same time, gay visibility has increased in all media, especially on commercial TV channels. Interestingly, the increase in lifestyle programming from the 1990s onwards (see Brunsdon 2003) seems to go hand in hand with the increasing gay visibility on television.

It has been suggested that gay people are currently seen as a particularly attractive target audience for marketing (Sender 2007: 89; Walters 2001: 238). Gay marketing is often based on an assumption of gays as trendy and youngish men whose lifestyles and consumer habits are wealthy and middle-class (Fejes 2002: 197; Walters 2001: 238). The idea of gay people as affluent and prosperous by default still persists in Western societies. The myth of ‘pink money’ is connected to the conception that gays have no children and have therefore more free time and economic resources (Walters 2001: 241–242, about the social function of myths see also Wodak in this volume). The categorisation that to a great extent defines the discourse in which homosexuality is approached in marketing can also be recognised in the depictions circulating in various media formats, such as television programmes. The characters defined as gay are most often white, middle-class, young, wealthy, trendy and stylish men. For example, in the Finnish version of the QE format, all the participants from the Fab Five to the straight guys being made over are white and of Finnish origin. The reality shows that we discuss also renew the gender hierarchies of queer imagery (see Meyer and Kelley 2004: 215): the characters defined as non-heterosexuals in reality television are specifically gay men.

There has been a lot of critique aimed at the bias in gay imagery on television. Suzanne Danuta Walters states that the representation of gays as healthy and wealthy advocates the idea that discrimination is a thing of the past. The myth of a prosperous gay minority is indeed used in the current anti-gay politics. Emphasising the idea of pink money makes it possible to present gay rights as privileges or special entitlements. (Walters 2001: 238, 241–242.) In the context of current
television programmes, gays appear more as a privileged minority than victims of discrimination (see Fejes 2002: 204). At the same time, the differences within GLBTI people are faded out of sight. Walters also points out that the portrayals of gay characters may not be constructed to serve non-heterosexuals but to constitute the assumed hetero audience as liberal and ‘cool’ (Walters 2001: 247). Thus, representations of non-heterosexuality do not necessarily undermine the heteronormative addressing of the audience (see also Pajala 2007). In what follows, we take a look at the reality television which regularly employ characters defined as gay, bearing in mind the economic and social contexts of gay marketing and ‘pink money’.

10.2 The visualised ‘truth’ of sexuality

Even though gay visibility in the media has often been interpreted in terms of progress, it can fortify the differentiation between culturally produced sexual categories. In our three examples of reality television shows, gayness is continuously represented as an object of recognition and/or knowledge while heterosexuality is constructed as a cultural norm marked with silence – heterosexuality does not compare to homosexuality in the sense that heterosexuality would be systematically ‘suspected’ or recognised from any visible traits in the series. In any case, the shows discursively promote an idea of sexuality as ‘the final truth’ (see Foucault 1990).

Indeed, all the series we examine are more or less based on the distinction between homosexuality and heterosexuality, which provides the dramatic effects and structure of the shows. GST is an American dating programme that is literally grounded upon an idea of ‘gay visibility’ as the purpose of each episode is to recognise sexual difference. The Finnish QE is based on an American format of a makeover show in which five gay characters renew one man’s appearance and home by teaching ‘straight’ men how to dress, how to throw a dinner party or how to shop ‘properly’. The show plays with skills culturally defined as feminine but mastered by gay men in the series. In the British makeover show HLGN, the gay male Gok Wan instructs heterosexual women on “how to look fantastic with your clothes on or off no matter what your body shape is”. The idea of the show is based on the empowering rhetoric of getting rid of poor body images and teaching women to appreciate their bodies. In all the shows, the role of the gay characters is more or less defined from the perspective of heterosexuality or heterosexuals.

In gay reality television, a notion of sexual truth is established by participating in and producing a discourse of sexual knowledge in which such subject positions as ‘straight’ or ‘gay’ are normalised. For example, the dates in GST usually consist
of physical activities, such as body painting, massaging, playing pool or shooting, and the purpose of the physical activity is to reveal the ‘manliness’ of the three guys. In episode 5, the female protagonist comments on one of the competitors: “Anthony didn’t seem too masculine in the water”; in episode 7, the protagonist rejects her categorisation of Vince as gay after seeing him play basketball in an aggressive way; and in episode 5, the female protagonist ends up presuming that Darren is gay because he is a good dancer. This way, gay reality television functions, for its own part, as a technology of truth (cf. Foucault 1990; Miller 1998). The deducing of a person’s sexuality in the series is tightly linked to visuality, as the notion of sexual ‘truths’ is not only produced in the series, but this knowledge production is inextricably linked to visuality. The viewers are encouraged to participate in the deduction process too. “Think you can tell who’s who?” asks the voice-over. Also, it might be noted that, in the series, the majority of men are white if the protagonist is white as well but black or mixed-race when the protagonist is of colour. The series thus produces association of coupling as dependent on one’s racial background.

In addition to GST, the ‘truth’ concerning the participants’ sexuality is constituted in other series as well. Mainly, the ‘truth’ of one’s homosexuality is represented as articulated through appearances and visual consumer culture. The basic dynamic of QE is constructed on the dichotomy between gay and straight men. This is evident from the beginning of each episode, as the ‘straight’ men appear on the screen with their name and ‘hetero’ written in big letters beneath their face. The series constantly stresses, makes fun of and accentuates the difference between gay men and ‘straight guys’. One of the reasons for the success of the format might well be exactly this display of clear boundaries between genders and sexualities. With the opposition of ‘queer’ to ‘straight’, QE underlines and fortifies the sexual ‘difference’.

In HLGN, the role given to the gay character in the series is closely tied to the management of bodily appearances. Gok Wan is represented as an expert on style, appearances and posing. His task is to tell the women how to look sexy, which clothes to choose to accentuate the bodily ‘curves’ or how to walk in order to be attractive. In general, the makeovers he conducts conform to normative femininity. “Isn’t it nice to be a woman?” Gok Wan asks after a makeover or confirms that he sees “a woman, hugely sexy”, as is the case when he looks at the made-over Rachel Richardson (episode 2 series 4). Makeovers concentrate on looking thinner: “a massive bag makes body look smaller in proportion”, he guides Clare Coxon (episode 6 series 4). Throughout the series, moving women towards a more feminine appearance is represented as the solution for the problems with their body images: for example, the participants are instructed to throw away all the clothes which could be categorised as masculine or practical. On the
homepage of the series, the participant of episode 5 (series 4) is disapproved of for crossing gender boundaries: “this super skinny babe hates her body [–] so much that she drowns it out by wearing her partner’s oversized clothes”. Tastes not corresponding to ideal femininity are portrayed as bad tastes and in this way, visible gender boundaries are maintained. The gay characters themselves can be seen as gender-normative as well – otherwise it would be no use trying to distinguish heterosexual and homosexual men in GST, for example.

In the series, women are constantly guided to see themselves as spectacles and interpellated to internalise the observing gaze concerning their appearances (see Berger 1974). The process of achieving a more positive body image involves taking steps towards an ever more public display. As the makeovers proceed, giant posters of the women's half-naked bodies are hung up in the city centre and passers-by are asked to evaluate the bodies; paradoxically, the highlight of the self-acceptance process is to parade naked on the catwalk in front of thousands of spectators. In accordance with 'post-feminist' rhetoric of choosing 'sexual subjectivity' (see Gill 2007; also Akass and McCabe 2007:126), the eroticising male gaze in HLGN is somewhat replaced by the gay gaze. However, the results for the women are in a way quite the same, as the importance of the body as a woman's property is emphasised and as self-disciplining the body is shown to result in a pleasant assimilation into the cultural ideal as well as the approval of the normalising gaze (see also ibid.: 123, 125).

The gay character shows no sexual desire towards the women but is nevertheless portrayed as the expert of feminine sexiness. This becomes understandable in the context of a reality series in which sexuality is associated mainly with bodily appearances. Female sexuality is reduced to women's feelings of 'sexiness'. These are equated with looking 'good enough', which is a condition for being desired by men. This, for its part, illustrates the privileging of the visual in our culture. In the process, desire itself becomes heterosexualised. Wan thus functions as an agent of heterosexual desire: Desire associated to him in the series is not sexual but rather a desire to style and to promote traditional gender roles and heterosexuality. He concentrates on constructing the women's bodies according to the production of the heterosexual matrix, in which genders are culturally assorted according to the heterosexual order so that they are reduced to female and male, which are seen as desiring one another (Butler 1990). Wan educates women to transform their bodies towards the polarisation of gender roles, pushing them towards 'femininity'. Thus, 'gay' desire in the show is safely placed within the heterosexual matrix, and the potential for queer desire is excluded. Wan's presence in the series has an ambivalent relation to the erosion of heteronormativity.

Throughout the series, stereotypical behaviour and appearances are mainly discussed in relation to gay men. However, also normative, even stereotypical
ideas of heterosexuality are produced implicitly in the series. In GST, ‘straight’ men are expected to show desire towards female bodies automatically in intimate situations and ‘straight’ women are expected to want attention and admiration as well as romantic gestures from men. For example, in several episodes men sing love songs to the women they have just met. Hence, the series involves the construction of heterosexual relations according to the pattern of active male subjects and passive, recipient female objects. Even though the women in the show are depicted as making a choice and could thus be thought of as subjects of choice, the options represented to them are quite limited: they have to find a ‘straight’ and available male partner – this is the only choice to be made. As such, the show constantly produces normative heterosexuality as the only possible ‘choice’ (see also Rossi 2003). Also, the gay men in the series ‘choose’ heterosexuality in the sense that they try to pass as ‘straight’. In the series, the mastery of passing is presented as a stereotype and privilege, which leaves invisible the history of discrimination and hatred that has forced gays to manage bodily appearances in order to blend in and appear as ‘normal’ (Dyer 2002).

Whereas in HLGN the women are moved towards femininity, in QE the image that the Fab Five create for the ‘straight’ man is closely tied to heterosexual masculinity. Although the format itself may stabilise the hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity that it involves (see Di Mattia 2007:134), the makeovers can still be considered quite gender-conformable. The makeovers in the programme are repeatedly said to “bring out the man”, and the compliments given to the participants after the makeover are often tied to maleness and masculinity: “now you are a man” or “now you look like a real man”. Also the style that is chosen for the participants is explicitly masculine: it is, for example, pointed out that every man has to have at least one proper suit. “White collar is a classical, manly choice”, states the style expert (episode 15). In addition, being a ‘real man’ is attached to heterosexuality as it is presented as the condition for women’s attention while, on the other hand, the need for women’s approval is presented as a motivation for the makeovers. A good example is episode 14, in which the ‘straight guy’ Miika gets compliments for having wide shoulders. He plans to propose to his girlfriend, and the Fab Five think he needs a new, ‘manly’ haircut in order to succeed.

This way, the show promotes the idea of an ‘inner’ male heterosexuality that can become visible through consumption – if a man knows how to shop and dress, he can look the part and become a ‘real man’. This visualisation of sexuality is quite similar to that of the women in HLGN. However, the male body in QE does not have a similar central position as the female body in HLGN. There is also a paradox of visibility in the sexualisation of the Fab Five: they become defined through their gayness, but in the series gayness indicates predominantly appearances and consumption expertise. Even though the Fab Five is depicted through
the sexual frame, sexuality in the series is rather connected to visual aesthetics than associated with sexual pleasure and desire.

10.3 The capital of promotional subjects

The series produce an understanding of gay-associated (sub)cultural capital (about (sub)cultural capital, see Thornton 1996), which appears as a specific knowledge and taste concerning different consumer goods and brands as well as boutiques. However, gay men in the series do not shop for themselves; rather, their shopping expertise materialises in the straight guy’s or woman’s life. Neither are they portrayed as having any ‘real’ economic power in terms of social influence, as the role in which they are located is consumer-driven – the gay guys shop, but they are not depicted as owning or investing capital (see also Fejes 2002:197). Also, the Fab Five’s and Gok Wan’s shopping is limited to small-scale shopping which has often been connected to women – stereotypically, men are thought to buy cars or electronic devices and women to shop clothes and make-up. In QE and HLGN, gay men are portrayed as experts on this kind of ‘feminine’ shopping.

Pierre Bourdieu (1984) discusses social distinctions in relation to economic, social and cultural capital. On the one hand, gay characters of reality television have (sub)cultural and social capital, which are used for promoting not their own but the heterosexual participants’ lives. On the other hand, they do not have access to any actual economic capital. However, in the series, both (sub)cultural and social capital are organised through consumption, which necessarily requires economic capital. Especially in the makeover series, shopping is presented as gay men’s main activity, through which they interact with heterosexual men and women (Callagher 2004:225) and participate in society. Thus, the ability to consume appears as a prerequisite for the agency of gay characters, and consumption is depicted as an essential part of queer citizenship. In Bourdieuan framework, different types of capital take the form of symbolic capital once they are perceived and recognised as legitimate. Legitimation is important because it is the key mechanism in the conversion of capital to power (Skeggs 1997:8). Both the (sub)cultural and the social capital the gay characters are portrayed to have in the series turn into symbolic capital only through a heterosexualised context. Thus, the legitimation of gay persons capital is represented as tied to hegemonic sexual norms.

In the light of the reality television programmes in question, the problematic of gay rights seems to come forward only in the context of consumer-citizenship. The concept of consumer-citizenship illustrates a rapprochement between politics and consumer culture. These domains cannot be divided into opposing spheres of private and public in contemporary Western culture (e.g. Trentmann 2007).
The shift from citizen to consumer is said to mark the moment of neo-liberalism, a new phase in Western capitalism. Neo-liberalism can be defined as a distinctive political rationality which advocates individual entrepreneurial freedom and skills within a framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade. (Harvey 2007: 2–3.) Neo-liberalism as a political rationality also carries with it an individualised and commodified form of citizenship (Clarke et al. 2007).

As noted above, the citizenship that is on offer for the gays in both QE and HLGN is strongly tied to their ability and expertise in the field of consumption, especially to their consuming of visual commodities that are linked to appearances and the management of bodily images. As such, the gays in reality television seem to become close to the characteristics of so-called neoliberal citizens: acting mainly in the field of consumption and advocating individual improvement instead of collective social or political agency. In the context of reality television, the legitimation of queer citizenship is strongly anchored in visual consumer culture with its connection to capitalist market economy. Moreover, consumption here becomes not only a form of queer citizenship but also a prerequisite for gay visibility, making visibility thus greatly tied to the economic, social and cultural capital of the middle classes. In connection to this, the absence of explicitly working-class gays in the series in question is not surprising. The most popular reality genres usually advocate social mobility (Biressi and Nunn 2008: 16), and the advance in social hierarchies is also idealised in gay reality television. For example, in QE the Fab Five are represented as middle-class, although their professions would as well suggest working class; a hairdresser has been renamed as a ‘consultant of appearances’ in the series.

The significance of appearances and consumer choices in relation to gay visibility is also noteworthy outside the makeover genre. In GST, the female protagonist takes the men out for dates and tries to deduce their sexual orientation and availability from their looks and other visual signals as well as from their conduct and consumer choices. The underlying assumption is that the (sub)cultural capital of gay men would manifest itself as distinctive appearances and consumer choices. The protagonist might take a man’s ‘great hair’ or stylish shoes as a sign of gayness. For example, in episode 6 the female protagonist asks one of the men how many pairs of shoes he has, and when she finds out that he has more shoes than she herself she is convinced that he is gay. Also, the wealthy middle-class habitus (for the notion of habitus see Bourdieu 1984) displayed in QE and HLGN is associated with homosexuality in GST as well.

The consumer-driven role given to gay characters in reality television comes close to what Lisa Duggan describes as new homonormativity: a politics that does not question but sustains heteronormative assumptions and institutions.
Duggan relates homonormativity to the neoliberal politics adopted by the American gay civil rights groups. (Duggan 2003: 45, 50.) As characters in reality television, Gok Wan and Fab Five can be thought to articulate this depoliticised gay culture that is anchored in the visual consumption culture. Also, the role given to the gay characters is pretty much bound to the stereotype of feminine gay men. In the case of Gok Wan, there is also present the stereotype ofemasculated Asian men. As Asian men have often been portrayed as the Other of the masculine Western men, they have been presented as feminine, weak and desexualised (e.g. Parikh 2002). Gok Wan, displaying both gayness and Asian features, fits well into this Orientalist stereotype.

In addition to starring in the series, Wan has become a successful brand in the sense that he has extended the imagery of ‘Gok Wan the stylist and the expert on femininity’ into his own website and has, for example, launched a lingerie line. Similar processes have also occurred in connection to the gay men of the Fab Five’s Finnish, American and British versions. Alison Hearn points out how the practices and logic of personal branding have recently “moved into television studio”. Especially reality television shows invent narratives of self-branding and produce branded personae. According to Hearn (2008: 198, 207), work on the production of a branded self involves creating a detachable, saleable image or narrative, which effectively circulates cultural meanings. In HLGN, as well as in QE, the practices of self-branding are evident and organise the connection between gay imagery and visual consumption culture. The (sub)cultural capital of Gok Wan can hence be capitalised for his own benefit outside the television show, even though the production company benefits from this kind of personal branding as well. This way, the imagery linked to Asian gayness that is employed in HLGN serves as a tool for both individual success and promoting the show.

The successful brands that they are, Gok Wan or the Fab Five can be seen as examples of what can be called promotional subjects. According to Andrew Wernick (1991: 193), the promotional subject promotes itself and in the process “constructs itself for others in line with the competitive imaging needs of its market”. Promotional subject is an enacted projection which includes not only dress, speech, gestures and actions but also the cultivation of the body (ibid.). It is significant that Gok Wan’s and Fab Five’s expertise lies exactly in these areas: how to dress, how to cultivate the body in order to achieve a suitable image. The brand ‘Gok Wan’ is, as Wernick states of promotional subjects, “an inextricable mixture of what its author/objects actually has to offer, the signs by which this might be recognised, and the symbolic appeal this is given in order to enhance the advantages which can be obtained from its trade” (ibid.). Gok Wan himself can be approached as both the promotional author and the promotional product that is the brand Gok Wan.
The practices of branding, which take place in a (capitalist) society that builds upon the importance of visual communication and spectacular promotion, are also relevant when considering Wan’s and the Fab Five’s success. Hearn points out that the branded self is located at the nexus of the discourses of neoliberalism, flexible accumulation, radical individualism and spectacular promotionalism. Flexible accumulation refers to a mode of production that is heavily dependent on communication networks and lateral flows of information and production. In flexible accumulation, the role of images becomes crucial as flexible accumulation emphasises packaging, image, design and marketing. (Hearn 2008: 201; Harvey 1990.) In the light of our examples, it seems evident that gay visibility in reality television is connected with these kinds of promotional practices that are typical to flexible accumulation. Also, while considering the political significance of visibility in the series in question, it becomes evident that it is tied to the neoliberal idea of individual empowerment that manifests itself mainly in the sphere of consumer culture (see Gill 2007). Neoliberalism works through empowerment, not against it (Cruikshank 1999), and this is also the case with the programmes that we have discussed.

10.4 Homonormative politics of reality television

At the beginning of this article, we introduced our illustrative material as gay reality television. There are several reasons why we have chosen to call the series analysed as gay rather than ‘queer’. Queer, by definition, contradicts the ‘normal’, legal and dominant (Halperin 1995). However, in the reality television series, ‘queer’ visibility is reduced to gay visibility excluding, for example, lesbian or bisexual characters. Thus, it contributes to the gendered hierarchy of ‘gay visibility’, which favours gay men (e.g. Meyer and Kelley 2004: 215). Gay characters in the discussed programmes are also used to promote traditional and highly gendered beauty ideals, rarely to question them. There is hardly anything ‘queer’ in the kind of appearance management these series idealise and normalise. The imagery of gay men participates both in controlling prevailing orders of gender and sexuality and in normalising particular kinds of femininity and masculinity.

From the perspective of queer politics, it is reasonable to ask how this kind of visibility erodes the hegemonic norms of gendered and sexualised economic or social orders. The increasing gay imagery in media may undermine heteronormativity but seems to replace the norm of heterosexuality with ‘homonormativity’ (see Duggan 2003). In reality, television gay imagery is associated with a certain lifestyle that is centred on visual consumption culture and image management. As our examples illustrate, the mediated legitimisation of gayness requires a certain
kind of expertise in consumption. Consumption becomes a means to integrate gay men into the society. In reality television, the condition of regular media visibility for gay men is to inhabit a certain subject position: to be able, affluent and stylish middle class. Gay men are shown to master the various consumer choices and practices of self-management required by the current neoliberal ideology. This kind of stereotypical representation of gay males portrays gay men rather as a privileged minority than as victims of discrimination (see Fejes 2002: 204), obscuring both the differences among gay men and the inequalities they encounter.

Even though in reality shows gay men are constantly helping heterosexuals in transforming, they do not change themselves. The changes that they assist articulate the idea of two ‘opposite’ genders, which participates in constituting the ‘naturalness’ of heterosexuality. The ‘agents of change’ in contemporary culture are not always portrayed as explicitly gay males. However, whether the agents of change are males or females, most often they seem to master ‘feminine’ skills. Male experts, as they are portrayed in reality television, can thus be associated with femininity. This builds a connection to the figure of the dandy that is associated with homosexuality (see Attwood 2005). Alan Sinfield points out how the function of effeminacy, as a concept, is to police sexual categories and keep them pure (Sinfield 1994: 26). This would also seem to be the case in the series at issue, in which gays are marked as men mastering femininity and thus differentiated from both heterosexual men and women – although is has been suggested elsewhere that the idea of straight guys learning manliness from gay men itself suggests a crisis in the policing of boundaries between homosexuality and heterosexuality in the American context (Di Mattia 2007: 133). Perhaps the existence of GST indicates this kind of crisis, as it destabilises the idea of easily-recognizable, feminine gay men.

Also, the gay characters in the reality television shows in question are represented as strongly in control – an analogy between bodily management and control over sexual desire seems to flourish in gay reality television. As Lisa Henderson (2007: 200) points out, ‘good gays’ are on television transferred from class margins to class centre, in which the practices of bodily control are then maximised. In the case of reality television, being in control is highly connected to the gay characters. The unchangeability of gay men bears resemblances to a politics of discipline described by Foucault (1977) – that is, to the political use of disciplining bodies. This kind of politics of discipline may both profite economical growth and weaken political resistance. The wealthy gay men of reality television are portrayed as subservient to neo-liberalism without any political resistance, and neither are they given any reasons for political resistance as discrimination is replaced with privilege. In relation to the debate on ‘postfeminism’, it has been claimed that media visibility is precisely the evidence needed to ‘prove’ that there is no longer a need
for feminist politics (Banet-Weiser 2008: 208). In a similar fashion, the gay visibility that replaces discrimination with privilege can be used politically to prove that there is no need for radical sexual politics.

In the series discussed, the gay characters take part in the polarisation of genders according to the heterosexual matrix (e.g. Butler 1990). The gay character in HLGN moves women towards a more traditionally feminine appearance in the same way that the Fab Five in QE move men towards conventional masculinity. Even if the neoliberal ethos in the series seems to celebrate individual choice, the positions of a conventionally feminine heterosexual woman or conventionally masculine ‘straight’ man are idealised. Thus, gender and sexuality are repeated and re-repeated according to the heterosexual matrix, and there is not much in the repetition that would seem to destabilise the norms or ‘queer’ them in unexpected ways. Also, desire becomes heterosexualised when the series construct heterosexual men as desiring subjects and women as the objects of male desire. Sexual desire is thus reduced to the property of ‘straight’ when gay men are presented as if they only had mainly style and maintaining heterosexual romance in mind. Female sexual desire is quite invisible, as women are instructed to attract the eyes of men as in HLGN or expected to choose a romantic partner as in GST. Similarly, Rosalind Gill (2008: 35, 44) has pointed out that the discourse of female sexual agency in ‘postfeminist’ culture should be approached as a technology of discipline and regulation; sexual subjectification is a specific and exclusionary practice which prioritises sexual attractiveness over sexual pleasure. The portrayals of gay men in our example series can be seen as participating in the production of this ‘postfeminist’ order in which gay men’s and women’s sexuality is much associated with appearances and sexual desire is reserved for heterosexual men.

10.5 Conclusions

In this article, we have argued that the political significance of gay visibility becomes ambivalent and thus partly questionable if it is analysed in relation to current social and economic processes. Using reality television programmes as our examples, we suggest that the use of gay characters can participate in fortifying normative understandings of sexuality and gender. These programmes both rely on and constitute sexual ‘truth’ in the sense that they differentiate between homosexuality and heterosexuality and constantly visualise this produced difference. Also, in our illustrative material, the portrayals of characters defined as gay are concentrated on the market-driven stereotypes of wealthy gay men in possession of effeminate consumer expertise focused on bodily management and self-promotion. It is exactly this kind of (sub)cultural capital associated with gay
characters that seems to promote gay visibility in the context of examined television shows.

The process of mainstreaming an oppositional politics often functions as a hegemonic strategy to diffuse that very politics, and thus it is accurate to ask whether the normalisation of sexual politics as gay visibility has prevented it from existing as a discrete politics (e.g. Banet-Weiser 2007:208). From this point of view, it cannot be taken for granted that a greater visibility of gay characters in contemporary media would directly improve the position of non-heterosexuals or erode the hegemonic norms concerning gender and sexuality. There is a need for diversification, and gay visibility has to be assessed critically in relation to relevant economic and social context.

Even though this article has a theoretical focus, we suggest that the discussion would benefit greatly from systematic, empirically informed research. As the political significance of gay visibility appears to be ambivalent, case studies would provide more information for evaluating the different conditions and consequences that gay visibility has in different socio-cultural settings. This would help shed the ontological presumption that gay visibility in the mainstream media straightforwardly indicates progress. Rather, we suggest that progress can be approached only from the perspective of partiality and particularity – as Beverley Skeggs (2004:29) has noted, ambivalence is at the heart of many forms of gender and sexuality reproduction. Also, reception studies would offer relevant information about how different programmes are viewed. The constant talk about progress easily leads to a conception that at least the majority of non-heterosexuals would view the ‘queer’ representations in a similar way.

References


Primary research material

“Gay, Straight or Taken” (2007) USA, Lifetime Television.
CHAPTER 11

Mending endings
Power and closure in film plots

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Closing images of films are used to maintain a status quo. Thus images of a happy ending ‘mend’ our critical experience of the world by washing audiences in the escapist glow of cinema light, hiding the chains with flowers. *I Am Legend* (2007) is an example of how a happy ending sanitises the cinema exit, neutralising subversive images before the audience leaves. Contrasting the Hollywood tradition with the critical tradition, this chapter lists ways in which a young scriptwriter can consciously choose his/her own use of images. Most Hollywood scriptwriting gurus encourage film students to use techniques which ‘hypnotise’ the audience with emotional catharsis. Instead, this chapter helps film students to break the mould of this canon.

This chapter explores images at the endings of films to venture some generalisations about how film endings have ideological implications in society. Films, especially Hollywood cinema, form a key discourse in today’s Western society. The way Hollywood films use images at their endings (either to immerse or to alienate the viewer) is imminently political. As Wright (1989:20) puts it, films can only make their representations from within ideology, not from some pure spot outside it. So this chapter uses visual analysis to ask questions like: What happens ideologically when we view the end of a film? How are the last images of films used to make them politically meaningful; how do they function in the competition over the distribution of values in society? Understanding films and their narratives as “images in use” is not only important for the critical analysis of mainstream cinema, but it also has an important pedagogical function, potentially leading to a crucial change in the way images are used in cinema. So the chapter builds up to empower students on making aware choices for their own films and how those films use images at the endings.

The chapter focuses on images in use in New Bad Future films – a sub-genre of science fiction including post-apocalypse films concerned with the question of
what is human. Around this question, discourses of morals, politics and philosophy are activated in such films (Glass 1990: 2). Changes in the film adaptations of a classic science fiction book, *I Am Legend*, reflect changes in how visual imagery is used in a social construction of humanity and reality.

This comparative analysis leads us to a generalisable conclusion on images of closure at the endings of films, and how these images are used when we grapple with power in society. There is also a specific mention of transitional objects as images used to grapple with social change.

The aim of the chapter is to make students of filmmaking aware of the hegemonic canon of narrative structure and its grip on how endings maintain power structures through visual images of happiness. Because film students are not part of the filmmaking apparatus (yet) and are often critical of ideological structures, they can change the canonical way of telling stories and thus change our society. Inspiration for alternatives to pat endings are to be found in a set of questions, some theoretical and some practical for the screenwriter and young filmmaker, in the inheritance of critical theory.

11.1 The end

The end of a film has the narrative function of linking scenes together to conclude the cause and effect of the story. It should be the crown of the structure; the logical conclusion of events; the final effect of the initial cause which sparked off the story. But Bordwell (1986) bemoans the sadly unmotivated and inadequate plot resolutions common in Hollywood films. He believes most happy Hollywood endings are not structurally determined by the internal logic of the text, but by an “arbitrary readjustment of the world”, by ideological matters outside of the text.

An example of a film with an arbitrary ending, not motivated or set up by the narrative, is *AI*. The ending heads for disaster, but in an unexplained twist all turns out to be fine. In *AI*, an android has to grapple with humans’ preconceived ideas of his heartlessness and incapacity to love and be loved. He is cast out by humans to the scrap yard. After many adventures with other obsolete discarded androids, and then many centuries alone and dormant with a flat battery, he suddenly relives a moment of being loved by his human owner, a long time ago. How did the plot manage to convince the viewer of these visual images of a happy ending? By introducing aliens as a deus ex machina who visit the planet and choose to awaken this android and his memory bank, his among millions.

It is the current canon of narrative film to reach closure at the end, no matter what. To achieve that, Hollywood endings have become, more often than not, “purely conventional, formal like a charade” and subject to an “infantile logic”
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(Bordwell 1986: 21). Bordwell supports his lament by pointing out that 60 of 100 randomly sampled Hollywood films ended with a display of the romantic heterosexual couple united, clinched, even if it has to be arbitrary, like the aliens in AI.

His critique is that these happy endings are not intrinsic to the plot but abide to an extrinsic norm. Sometimes, a plot can only find a happy ending by reaching for ‘poetic license’ or deus ex machina. Yet the audience has become so used to the image of a happy Hollywood ending that it has become a structural constant, as if bad endings are not politically correct or structurally possible. Bordwell (1986) tries to remind us that those happy endings are often determined from outside of the text, outside of the structural integrity of the plot, by the extrinsic norms of ideology.

Audiences are soothed with formal devices to forgive happy endings which lack credibility or are too predictable. When the end is very predictable, strongly precast by convention, the middle is structured to delay the outcome (Bordwell 1986). In Bruce Almighty, for instance, the audience knows that the protagonist is going to have to change his ways and face his own arrogance and selfishness. But the point at which he does it is delayed. Similarly, in romantic comedy, boy meets girl, but the kiss is delayed by plot antics to make the predictable image at the end more wanted.

This imperative of the happy ending is taught by masters of screenwriting as if it is a universal constant, not a canonical fashion. One of the strong traditions of screenwriting draws on the archetypal structures of myths. In this tradition, Christopher Vogler (1992) charts the hero’s journey as ending meaningfully when he teaches generations of scriptwriters that the hero should bring back the elixir or trophy to fix his former world. His action is for the good of others. The ending images are full of abundance as the hero gives, and receives: the reward for his journey and the prize are external manifestations of his inner change. The reward and prize are archetypically the sword and/or the woman. And when the hero crosses the return-threshold back into the everyday world of his former life after his journey is completed, he is the righteous master of two worlds. A king among the people he knew. Such an ending is loaded with positive images (as my italics here indicate).

In like happy vein, Skip Press (2004) describes the denouement as the icing on the cake – decidedly sweet – or the final clarification on what was achieved; resolution. Tobias (1993), another famous screenwriting guru, also teaches that the third act and ending resolve the chase and defeat the antagonist. Victory, sweetness, clear resolution, a prize, achievement, kingship and women. This is how Hollywood teaches the end of a film narrative, images of sweetness and rightness.

What is the ideological meaning of such ending images; their use in social construction of what is meaningful?
These endings often have ideological or pragmatic meaning from beyond the plot, the world outside the film (Bordwell 1986:21). To Brecht (1984), they are bourgeois devices to guarantee a truly undisturbed appreciation of even the most intolerable conditions in a society. They reinforce the status quo or offer a ‘re-adjustment of the world’, mending it by washing audience in the escapist glow of cinema light, hiding the chains with flowers.

But for McKee (1997), the film student is a source of change to this canon. He sees film students as the rare filmmakers who have the guts to tell stories with sad or ironic endings. Perhaps this is because students are young and idealistic, or because they are not filming for the pot. After further exploration of the happy ending, we will look at how film students can become more aware of the power of the images they use at the end of their film stories.

But first, let us see how filmmakers get away with arbitrary endings and the loose ends dangling from them. They do so by distracting the audience’s attention away from those loose ends (Bordwell 1986:22). Sometimes the distraction takes the form of a twist in the tale. In Golden Compass, for instance, the heroine enters the site of the final battle by crossing a narrow bridge which her big and heavy fighting companion cannot cross. She breaks the bridge. A bit later in the heat of the battle, she is suddenly surrounded by massive armies fighting on her side, although the bridge access to the battle site was broken. The audience is distracted from questioning this illogical development by means of a visual feast of many creatures in many ways of battle, foregrounding the happy triumphant ending and silencing the lack of narrative logic.

Sometimes the distraction is done by book-ending, repeating the visual image of the beginning at the end, providing a neat recurrence to give the narrative an image of unity (Bordwell 1986). Instead of narrative closure, these images give visual effect of closure – pseudo-closure – wrapping the badly baked narrative cake in a layer of sweet icing. In AI, for instance, the android relives and remembers his happy days with a family at the final curtain, and the audience is shown the same images with which the film opened in Act 1. A sense of full circle and return to stability is created in the image of natural cycles. This distracts the audience from the deus ex machina appearance of aliens and the lack of resolution for the android’s quest. Instead of resolving his quest for love or of being bravely aware that there will never be a resolution and fulfillment for that quest, the audience attention is shifted to a visual palliative.

Sometimes the visual distraction is done by celebration of the hero’s return to his community at the end. In Matrix III, for instance, Neo suddenly transfers power from inside the matrix to the outside world; contrary to the physical laws set up in the narrative world. But the introduction of the big community of rebels and their devotion to Neo drown out this plot inconsistency. And in My Cousin
Vinny; all the hero’s tasks are done, except the one that takes him to court. But there suddenly appears to have been a phone call to the judge, resulting in his case being closed, and he is not on trial anymore. These unresolved loose ends are hidden in the films by celebration of the prize the hero wins (Christopher Vogler), and the prize includes getting the girl and the praise of the community.

Some of the most powerful manipulation of endings are done in epilogues and with the narrative device of the mounted messenger. An epilogue mends the end of Piano. The screenplay had the film ending with the heroine drowning in a spectacular way, together with her piano. Being immersed in water with her transitional object (the piano), from which she refused to be separated, was a liberation for the heroine. Earlier, she had refused to speak and to be a proper wife. This immersion represents more than a death; it represents imaginary freedom of identity, which the symbolic order of Victorian proprietary gender roles refused her.

But the final film version added an epilogue with voice-over, in which she tells the audience that she was saved from drowning, a house was built for her, and her chopped-off fingers were neatly rehabilitated by her new man, who made her a shiny set of steel prosthetic fingers. Those chopped-off fingers were an image of symbolic castration, when her husband wanted to stop her from loving another man and expressing herself on the piano, both freedoms she claimed with her fingers. The absence of her fingers was the image of lack, resulting from the conflict between her own identity formation and her husband’s righteous wrath at her wanting her freedom. Ending with technologically crafted fingers is an image of having been given a (shiny and artificial) identity by a man, having been set up in the symbolic order. In the epilogue, she was also learning to speak, whereas her earlier insistence to remain dumb was an image of refusing to enter the symbolic order of phallogocentrism and resisting social identity-forming and subjectification processes. The last image, of her running her new steel fingers along the clapper boards of her new home, learning her new spoken words, is an image of subjugation, or having become domesticated. It is at odds with the subversive and progressive power of the images in the film in which she claimed the imaginary freedom of not being symbolised by men, choosing silence in a language which could not say her freedom. Now she voices the non du Père, she is a site of the inscription of the nom du Père.

Such images of taming and subjectification are more powerful at the end than anywhere else in the film, as the end sends the viewer back into her world. Silver-Lasky (2004) calls it the slow curtain: a moment for the audience to collect themselves and wipe a tear as they leave the narrative world and enter the real world, carrying with them the boon or the elixir that the heroine has bestowed on the community. If that boon, in Piano, had been for women to find an imaginary
freedom rather than being given a safe niche identity and predictability in the symbolic order, the image would have had a destabilising and subversive power in the audience member and her home.

So we see that the use of happy images at a film ending is often a way of claiming back power, turning the film into a sanitising exit before the audience leaves the cinema, neutralising any subversive images. A similar device at the end of a film is the miraculous appearance of the mounted messenger. Brecht (1984) coined the term when he resolved the climactic conflict in *Threepenny Opera* by sending in a mounted man with a message from the queen. Such a bourgeois device for a happy ending allows the audience to enjoy even the most intolerable conditions and not disrupt them, whereas an unresolved ending would stimulate the audience to think about the power structures in their world, and to act in their world (Bordwell 1986; Eagleton 1981: 156ff.; Willett 1964: 276).

*Pretty Woman* is an example of a film ending with a mounted messenger, when Richard Gere's character Edward is mounted on his sports car and armed with his rich boy's umbrella as he enters the prostitute Vivien's world to claim her as his bride. This happy ending is very different from what the screenplay writer J. F. Lawton intended (Russen and Downs 2003: 79).

The screenplay was at first called *Three Thousand*, not *Pretty Woman*. At the end, Edward did not go back to the prostitute Vivien in a sports car and save her from the streets. Instead, when the week for which he paid was over, he decided to take her back to her end of town, with all the clothes he had bought for her but not the fur coat. She got angry, he got irritated, she started hitting him and his car, he got alarmed, dumped her out the car, upbraided her ingratitude and threw thousands of dollars at her. She used that money to take her sick cocaine-addicted friend and colleague to Disneyland. Nothing changed.

The studio could not live with the ending as an unhappy image of sick, poor prostitutes, tragic anti-Cinderellas, as the writer had intended. Instead of being a story of haves and have-nots and the gender divide, it became the opposite – a kiss and hug at the ending (Russen and Downs 2003: 80).

But surely things are not always like that? Surely the audience and studio would be flexible to allow innovation on the canonical plot structures? Brecht (1984: 53) believed in innovation above renovation – that a good script can innovate our social order and ideological institutions. “Real innovations attack the roots”, he says (1984: 41). But Bordwell (1986: 30, 32) points out that the current hegemonic canon of classical Hollywood narrative does not allow innovations in plot structure, only in plot content: Hollywood finds new stories and tells them along the same narrative structure. The Hollywood system is run on speedy and economical filmmaking which reproduces a tradition of ideological and economic protocols. Granted, any alternative or oppositional cinema can mobilise and
call forth different plots, different relations between film and audience and different ideological uses for the images at the film ending. But they might not make it into mainstream cinemas: The apparatus of filmmaking, the studios, the protocols and systems, the canon and the economic infrastructure reinforce current values and turn the output of filmmakers into fodder. Brecht (1984:35) believes that writers and critics become muddled in their thinking, imagining that they have got a hold on the filmmaking apparatus, whereas in fact the apparatus has got a hold on them and is out of their control.

It is no longer (as they [writers and critics] believe) a means of furthering their output but has become an obstacle to output, and specifically to their own output as soon as it follows a new and original course which the apparatus finds awkward or opposed to its own aims. Their output then becomes a matter of delivering the goods. Values evolve which are based on the fodder principle. And this leads to a general habit of judging works of art by their suitability for the apparatus without ever judging the apparatus … People say, this or that is a good work and they mean (but do not say) good for the apparatus. Yet this apparatus is conditioned by the society of the day and only accept what can keep it going in that society. We are free to discuss any innovation which doesn’t threaten its social function – that of an evening’s entertainment … Society absorbs via the apparatus whatever it needs in order to reproduce itself. This means that an innovation will pass if it is calculated to rejuvenate existing society, but not if it is going to change it – irrespective of whether the form of the society in question is good or bad. (Brecht 1984:35)

So we see that real root-deep innovation hardly makes it to the big screen, for power reasons. Meanwhile, innovation is channeled to other areas of filmmaking, aside from plot structure. Conventions of cinema as a medium are changing in camera and in editing styles. The camera is becoming more subjective, with many extreme close-ups showing off the high resolution of digital technology, and moving around a lot to create subjective moods, as in 21 Grams, Domino and Bourne Identity. Similarly, editing style is becoming faster, as the audience is becoming more and more visually literate, like the hip-hop editing in the films of Darren Aronofsky. Or more disjunct, like in Babel.

One might also argue that plot structure is indeed being reinvented with the current appearance of many films with multiple plot lines. Magnolia, 21 Grams, Babel and Crash are examples of such tandem or sequential plots. And yet, the gurus still warn filmmakers to provide the audience with an ending that provides closure to these types of stories. Yes, you can have separate themes and many plot lines, but you are expected to tie them together at the end. Bring your characters and stories together in an image of unity at the end in a unifying event, says Aronson (2001).
Another innovative trend in plot structures of today’s film is the ever-increasing pace of action narratives, driving faster to meet higher obstacles. The *Die Hard* series is a good indication of that. The 2007 version has a very extended head-over-heels third act with a car chase bigger and badder than any in the wild west before. This driving pace is also a way of ensuring the audience’s total suspension of disbelief. Aronson (2001) warns that a slow narrative pace creates a distancing effect. Instead of being emotionally involved, the audience watches the acting, he warns.

Like many other scriptwriting gurus, Tobias links audience engagement and plot resolution to narrative pace:

> We want to keep our audience engaged in the action – another way of saying that we don’t want the story to get stale … Each conflict gains intensity. Audiences feel themselves being thrust toward the cataclysm, the climax, when all hell will break loose and the story will get resolved. (Tobias 1993: 20)

When the audience is hanging on the edge of their seats, they are less conscious of narrative structure and can enjoy complete suspension of disbelief, complete escapism. For Brecht (1984: 78), this makes the spectator a victim of the hypnotic experience of theatre / cinema. This escapism in the images in front of the viewer helps maintain the status quo in the images of the world outside of the cinema. As Brecht (1984: 50) puts it:

> What the film demands is external action and not introspective psychology. Capitalism operates in this way by taking given needs on a massive scale, exorcising them, organizing them and mechanizing them … Great areas of ideology are destroyed when capitalism concentrates on external action, [and] dissolves everything into process …

The rhythm of action and relaxing, the highs and lows of each film act, are structured sequentially, and images are used at a very fast pace to make any disengagement and thinking impossible. Most scriptwriting gurus recommend that scenes follow each other in sequences which alternate intensity to maintain the pace and forward thrust of the story. This craft of sequential structuring is often stipulated down to the minute. Instead of this sequential structuring of audience attention, Brecht (1984) proposes a complex rhythm of simultaneous relaxing and concentration, not sequenced in scenes’ down and up values.

Thus, alternatives to the canon of narrative closure in Hollywood also involve the middle of the story and how audience attention is structured by plot (pace and sequence). For Brecht (in Eagleton 1981: 23ff.), a drama or film would not end with an image of closure but with fragmented, non-hierarchical, shock-producing,
dispersed, gear-switching images which engage the audience in dialectical inter-
play and interaction with the narrative and their world.

Coming from a tradition of committed art and entertainment, Brecht (in
Eagleton 1981:24) proposes not to offer the audience total engagement and es-
capism but rather estrangement, foregrounding and distance. Instead of a fast
narrative pace immersing the audience in a sequence of very busy action, Brecht
proposes to let the audience be less serious and less involved with the action. Yes,
and less serious also means more laughter and less fear for the life of the protago-
nist. Comedy is a way of getting the audience to imagine alternatives. “Laugh-
ter and thought are close to each other: thought is more free than pity or fear”

Where Aristotle promoted emotional catharsis in a play to purge the audience
of pity and fear, Brecht wants to transform pity and fear into the desire for knowl-
dge and the readiness to help. Instead of forgetting the world by watching a film,
he wants us to transform the world we know, and laughter is a powerful tool to
create this attitude of ‘gay criticism’ in the audience (Wright 1989:25).

Let us not confuse laughter and its subversive powers with the Hollywood
happy ending. The happy ending is not funny. Laughter is distancing, subversive
and disaffective, and sometimes uncomfortable, whereas the happy ending is en-
gaging, soothing, pretending that everything will be fine in the end.

For Brecht (1984:190), at the end of a good film, the audience would have
simultaneously an experience of being present in the senses (even sensually) and
being distant and disaffective through humour:

We need a type of theatre [and film] which not only releases the feelings, insights
and impulses possible within the particular historical field of human relations in
which the action takes place, but employs and encourages those thoughts and
feelings which help transform the field itself.

This is an interesting combination of thinking and feeling; of psychic investment
of presence of mind; with psychic release of a certain productive indifference. The
result should be that the social division of labour and leisure is transcended.

11.2 Audience estrangement vs. audience engagement –
Critical vs. traditional attitudes

So, while the scriptwriting gurus like Tobias, Silver-Lasky, Aronson and McKee
teach filmmakers how to engage an audience, the ideological critical tradition is
to go in the opposite direction with the audience’s psychic and other energies – to
estrangement (ostranenie or Verfremdung). This is an age-old divide between, on
the one hand, experimental or avant garde film, which aims to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange by forcing the audience to see the filmness or the formality of the film, and, on the other hand, conventional or mainstream film, in which the formal devices are concealed to let the film appear ahistorical and natural. For the scriptwriter, the choice is whether s/he wants to participate in the critical tradition or in the traditional tradition.

One could argue that these two different projects or genres should not be expected to fulfill each other's goals. Rightly so. Let us not expect mainstream film to be anything other than it is, a film does not have to be experimental to be ideologically brave. But let us take some lessons from Eagleton, Bordwell and Brecht's theoretical exploration into the weaknesses of happy endings, and let us be aware of the ideological implication of the hegemonic pressure for happy endings.

Let us remember that there are alternatives to the Hollywood bibles' dogma that the audience should be allowed to escape into a fantasy unchallenged by the text. Brecht, for instance, warns the writer against turning the audience into a "cowed, credulous, hypnotized mass" (1984: 188). The notion that a film is good only if the audience member is completely engaged in the action of the story, with every fibre of his being at rapt attention, can be replaced by the notion of a constructing audience – relaxed, thoughtful. While the Hollywood audience member experiences tension and fear, and its cathartic release in an ending with a happy image, it is also possible to use estrangement and estranging images to allow the audience to think above the action, around and across the dramatic structure and its tension. This allows the audience to construct its own possible worlds, and to change the real world, but also to construct a narrative world of its own.

This is a dialectic which allows the audience to both concentrate and relax. Not only in sequence (in the causal imperative of Hollywood scenes and acts) but in a complex rhythm: we also relax during the action and concentrate during the plot's breathing breaks. This complex rhythm is quite different from the sequential narrative structure, which strings images together in definite up and down plot moments with climaxes and breathers.

11.3 Realism and the real

The debate between estrangement and engagement of audience emotions can also be linked to the debate on realism. Classical film narrative presents realism and maintains the status quo. But the Real of Lacan and Žižek is the site of a revolutionary disruptive act, not of the status quo. Like Brecht, they see realism as a choice we have to engage with and change the world instead of accepting it
blindly. To make that choice is revolutionary because it disrupts what is taken for real and natural, a system of power structures.

In this tradition, film should oppose rationality and realism, and thus the reproduction of power, or, for Brecht, fascism (1984). Brecht helped achieve a dialectic shift of the debate about realism (Eagleton 1981): He made us aware that art (film) makes possible the concrete and makes possible abstraction from it. In this view, realism is not a way of representing reality in art but more a way of affecting reality through art. So the realism of a film cannot be determined by studying it in isolation – only in social context. Realism can only be retrospective: you cannot determine the realism of a film by inspecting its intrinsic properties; you can only know whether a text is realist or not after establishing its effects on the audience. And those belong to a specific context. A film might be realist in June and antirealist in December (Eagleton 1981:88). So if you want to know if a text was realist, ask the audience.

After Brecht, Eagleton offers a list of practical questions to ask the audience. These questions would lead us to an answer on whether the film is realist (has an effect on reality) or whether the film maintains an illusion of reality which makes real intolerable conditions terribly tolerable:

- Did the film narrative discover the causal complexes of society?
- Did it unmask the prevailing view of things as the view of those in power?
- Was it written from the standpoint of the class which offers the broadest solutions for the pressing difficulties in which human society is caught up?
- Did it emphasise the element of development? In other words, does it show the determining factors of our lives, such as social background, special events, etc., as alterable? (Brecht 1984:60)
- Did it make possible the concrete?
- Did it make possible the abstraction from it? (Eagleton 1981:88)

Now let us look more closely at the example of I Am Legend as a test case for these questions and for the power of endings. I Am Legend is the third film adaptation of a successful 1954 science fiction novel by Richard Matheson. In the novel I Am Legend, Dr Neville is apparently the last human survivor in a New Bad Future. The apocalypse was the result of a mutating disease, turning people into vampires. Dr Neville had two helpers, a dog and a woman called Ruth.

All three film adaptations work with the book's given of diseased vampires (with the usual theme of their lust for blood and fear of sunlight) and Dr Neville's research for a cure. In both the first film adaptation, The Last Man on Earth (1964) and the second, The Omega Man (1971, Charlton Heston), the dog is a stray and Ruth is an infected mutant, just like in the book (Bazzargh 2008). And, as in the
book, these films have an ending in which Neville dies as the last human, or at least the last uninfected human. Clearly no happy ending here. In *The Omega Man*, the mutants are evolving, and some evolving semi-human mutants escape the city with the cure for the disease. The cure is the result of Neville’s blood serum mixed with that of evolving children. The end of their journey is not shown, as Vogler (1992) would have it. No image of prize or celebration; no closure or resolution.

In the latest adaptation of *I Am Legend* (2007, Will Smith, Warner Bros), we see new adaptations to the story. Now the dog is a family member. Early on, Neville says goodbye to his wife and daughter as they escape the city, before the full ravishing effect of the virus has destroyed the entire city population. In the goodbye scene, the daughter passes the cute puppy on to Neville, so that he is not alone. Now, the puppy has grown up and Neville has adapted to life in a dead city.

Another new image in this adaptation is connected with the disease. In *I Am Legend 2007* (henceforth *IAL*), the disease is the result of human tinkering with the chicken pox virus. We see an old broadcast on a familiar global American news network of a doctor’s breakthrough research: she has found a cure for cancer by genetically modifying the chicken pox virus. And then the virus keeps mutating and spreads. In *IAL*, for the first time, Ruth is an uninfected woman, moreover a pure woman, a good Catholic mother from Latin America.

And for the first time, the ending of the story is happy.

Yes, Dr Neville dies, but it is a triumphant death: his research is successful. He saves the pure woman, who clasps the phallic vial of his serum and takes it in a Land Rover – as a mounted messenger – to a colony of pure white religious men. More about the use of images in this ending later.

First, let us explore the subgenre of New Bad Future (NBF) or post-apocalyptic films and how its images are present or not in *I Am Legend* (*IAL*). Films about the New Bad Future (NBF) tell stories about a future in the grip of social decay, often represented as barbarism. Typical images of NBF films are (1) big advertisements, (2) technological toys, (3) amnesia, (4) aliens as a code for otherness in gender, class and race, and (5) phallic women. These images are usually applied to understanding a current issue of change in society from a leftist, intelligent, progressive and subversive perspective (Glass 1990).

When we compare *I Am Legend* with other NBF films and the other film adaptations of the same story, we see the film’s unique representation of societal experience of and response to change:

1. A typical image in NBF films is the use of large ubiquitous advertisements, like in *Blade Runner*, *Brazil*, *I Robot*, *Babylon AD* and *Total Recall*, as a leftist critique on neoliberal capitalism (Glass 1990: 4). Using images of known media in fictitious film form and in an unknown time (the future) is a device
to increase belief, suspension of disbelief, in a fantastic narrative world. And yet, it links the world of the story to the world of the audience, providing an anchor of recognition from which the imaginary has the license to float off. These images recall the world of the film-goer and thus also (perhaps paradoxically) invite comparison to the real world, and to the other which we could become. But in *IAL*, that familiar anchor in the media is not with advertisements, but with news: both TV news and newspaper clippings. At the start, when we see a flashback to the cause of the virus, we see the news programme with the doctor discussing her proud lab work on the chicken pox virus. This genetically modified virus becomes the agent of change and is the focus of transitional fear in this NBF film. Newspaper clippings are shown when Neville enters abandoned houses in search of canned food left by the dead. The clippings are often posted on a fridge, with important updates on quarantine and advice on immunity against the infection. They portray a pathetic collective scientific attempt at survival in the last throes before all humans have either died, or mutated into viral vampires or fled. This different use of news images positions *IAL* as more “realistic”, more serious and less fictitious than other NBF films. When we ask Brecht and Eagleton’s realism questions about *IAL*, we find that the film does not challenge our perception of reality or the power structures in it, nor does it unmask a prevailing view as the view of those in power. It immerses the viewer in the action and its concrete consequences and causalities, (the virus and the fight against it), and not in the complex causalities of social structures. The message of the concrete is foregrounded: if we use genetic modification, we will become barbaric, it seems to say. The ethics debate on genetic modification is given priority above other issues of change and development, such as power relationships or questions of civilisation. *IAL* is very clearly against genetic modification, and it does not make the abstraction from it very possible. However, we will apply more analytical tools to make interpretations and abstractions about *IAL* with the help of critical theory.

2. Many other post-apocalypse films of the New Bad Future are set far into the future, replete with *techno toys* (Glass 1990), like the beautiful computerised house in *Babylon AD* or the androids in *Blade Runner*. But *IAL* has no images of toys, no escapism into the wonder world of sci-fi semiotics. Even the abandoned cars in the virus-stricken city are recognisable models. Instead of projecting scientific focus onto techno toys, as usual in sci-fi, *IAL* uses images of scientific progress only in images of a laboratory and the efforts of the biochemist hero to do lab research and find a cure for the virus. At the end, Neville’s lab and all the tools of knowledge and scientific enquiry go up in smoke. Ruth takes the fruit of his labour to a religious community in the mountain,
but she does not take them the knowledge or skills that went into his labour. So this next generation will have lost those skills, but they do maintain religious habits – there are many more religious than scientific images at the end of the film. Science is lost to mankind. Faith (or superstition) takes that place. This can be seen as a symbolic castration of the scientist, but in the film it is celebrated as a happy ending. In this lack of techno toys as image of change, IAL again seems more conservative about its message than many other NBF films, and the message preached is about the importance of faith and religion in the fight for humanity.

3. Amnesia is typical in NBF films. Memories are implanted at birth or systematically deleted for the sake of totalitarian control in Equilibrium, Total Recall, Johnny Mnemonic and Blade Runner. In Robocop, the hero’s identity is missing. These missing or false memories represent symbolic castration, the characters’ loss of power and agency over their lives (Glass 1990:6). But there is no amnesia in IAL. Here, the only ones who do not remember are the mutants; they have forgotten their humanity. Neville is often cast into the past by means of flashbacks, old songs (like Bob Marley), old movies (like Shrek), newspaper clippings, photos. Even his dreams are memories, not fantasies, of his wife and child. It would appear that his rationality resists the imaginary – true to his make-up as warrior scientist. Images of the past also signify loyalty to tradition and the ‘old ways’. In Philip K. Dick films, the loss of memory affects the narrative. Our experience of the film in Total Recall and in the 2006 A Scanner Darkly could be as paranoid and untrue as the character’s false experience of his life. This narrative doubt is a Brechtian device (Glass 1990) – it breaks the narrative and interrogates our underlying assumptions about what we have been watching. Distance and engagement, not total engagement. But in IAL, there is no such tearing of the narrative fibre. The only narrative tear and rip is the deus ex machina appearance of Ruth, and that is (a) true to stories of faith, where god is indeed expected to drop from the machine, like Ruth does to save Neville; and (b) motivated in a classical Hollywood narrative device of set-up and pay-off. The set-up in Act 1 is a radio message Neville sends (regularly, for years) to all possible uninfected humans. He invites them to come to New York harbour, to a specific pier, where he will wait for them every day at noon, hoping that there are other immune surviving humans like him. When Ruth appears from nowhere when he most needs a friend, and one wonders how that is possible, she answers that she had heard his broadcast in the far south and travelled across America for this. How did she travel? No, this question is not allowed. So the audience is not torn from the story and not invited to think above and around the narrative structure but to become the lost, the saved, the uninfected, the rational scientist, the faithful, immersed.
To further prevent disengagement, the pace of images is fast, so that the suspense and the suspension of disbelief are never broken. Other NBF films also sometimes have unresolved matters at the end. In *Total Recall, Babylon AD* and *A Scanner Darkly*, various unresolved matters surface, such as wondering whether it was a dream after all, doubting rationality and doubting the value-orientation of characters. These unresolved matters are recognitions that the social problems cannot be solved by films but demand social solutions (Glass 1990: 12). But in *IAL*, the plot is resolutely resolved.

4. **Otherness of aliens** in NBF films is usually a genre code which can be substituted with gender, race and class (Glass 1990). But in *IAL*, there are no aliens, only a multicultural mix of central characters and once-human vampires. Otherness is incorporated into the characters. It is not the other or the strange identity that is feared – it is the potential decline of the I. We see the other in a barbaric ritual; banding together in a tribe, defending and hanging on to the mating partner at all costs, with torn clothes, and with a driving lust for blood and fear for sunlight (rationality?). These images seem to pit Neville’s rational science and lonely individualism against the mutants’ loyalty to tribe and family in a binary opposition. Perhaps because the other is so threateningly close to the I and my identity, Neville hunts the other with a much more aggressive vehemence than heroes do in other NBF films. In *Blade Runner, Chronicles of Riddick, Total Recall, AI* and *Terminator*, the lines of us and them are sometimes tricky and the binary code of us/them is explored on the hero’s journey, often reaching empathy or dialectic synthesis. Similarly, in previous versions of *IAL*, Ruth is one of the other, infected, which is only discovered later. This could mean that the difference between I and other is less black and white and that the other has the potential of being respected and incorporated. The young hero in *Terminator* has a cyborg (Arnold Schwarzenegger) as his helper, and in *Babylon AD*, the travelling companion of Vin Diesel’s character is a human computer. Such images, in which the other is not an absolute, are usually found in NBF films, and Glass (1990) notes that they convey messages of rebellion against social power structures, for instance against authoritarian rule in *Robocop* and in *Equilibrium*. These films do not convey insurmountable fear and suspicion of the other but often empathy, trust, cooperation and aspirational rebellion. Here, instead, in 2007’s *IAL*, the other never earns recognition from the hero. Neville commits (barbaric?) violence against them, hunting them coldly for scientific experiments and separating their nuclear family. He remains oblivious of their emotional distress about that. But in the *I Am Legend* book, Neville dies with a clear understanding of their point of view. About to be executed by the mutants, he glimpses their point of view: He is feared as a hunter and a scourge. He is the last of the
old race. Obsolete (Bazzargh 2008). Again, if we apply Brecht and Eagleton’s reality questions, we see that the IAL film of 2007 fails to unmask the prevailing view of things as being the view of those in power. It is also not written from the standpoint of groups which offer a broad pool of solutions for the problems the films raise and does not represent more than one solution to the debate on genetic modification. The film does not even seem aware of some of the social problems it raises unconsciously, such as gender roles, religion and its new role in our changing society, and the shifting structure of the nuclear family. It is aware only of the problems stated by the protagonist and deals only with his point of view on it.

5. Most heroines in NBF are ‘phallic women’ – strong women who can throw their slight weight around in macho-militaristic fashion and yet in many cases remain the love interest of the hero: Sarah Connor in Terminator, the feminist Melina, wife of the hero, in Total Recall, Ripley in Alien (Glass 1990:10). Not the heroine in IAL. There is no love interest or sexual relationship for the hero in IAL. This is different from the previous IAL films, in which Ruth presented a possible love interest but with a lot of value confusion when she turns out to be infected. In most Hollywood films, there is clarity of character’s value roles – they are either for or against the hero. Like Vladimir Propp, Greimas (1971) groups characters as actants in terms of their orientation to the binary value code of the film, once again being either for or against the hero: Helper or Opponent, Beneficiary or Receiver – whether they forward the quest or oppose it. These clear actantial roles become clouded when characters are unwilling to respond to a call to action due to their unreliability or chequered pasts (Fell 1977). These obstacles to their appropriate value behaviour can often be traced to a sexual root. For instance, the love interest in a film noir detective story distracts the detective from the scent of the chase. But IAL has no sexual interest and no confusion of Ruth’s value to Neville. Here, Ruth is chaste like mother Mary, she is visually represented with the image of the cross, devoted to her son and framed like an icon in beatific glow. In previous film versions of the book, Ruth was a top-ranking mutant. This top rank makes her one of the phallic women of NBF. But in the 2007 IAL, she is demure. Although she is active, she is quiescent, religious, mothering and healing. She is a virgin mother. She has the Proppian narrative function of the princess assigning a task to the Hero. However, she executes that task herself – to go on a journey into the mountains to find more faithful uninfected survivors. As such, she is no flat female character, no female object, no other. Her son represents the future, and could be seen to be ready for a castration battle with the hero Neville. But the hero does not desire to enter the battle
for the woman's body. The only intimacy is when she saves him from drowning, brings him back home and nurses him. Little of that is experienced consciously by Neville, as if he is in an imaginary phase, which he entered when his vehicle toppled into the water from which she rescued him. In the process of bringing Neville home, she breaches his blockade and leads the mutants to the house. They penetrate the safe haven. Usually in classical Hollywood narrative structure, the narrow space represents the innermost cave (Vogler 1992, or the blockade of the big confrontation in Fell 1977: 23). But in this case, the blockade of Neville's defence against the mutants is the starting point in the establishment of the film, and the big turning point is when it is broken. During this climactic conflict with the mutants, Neville finds new blockades and safety in increasingly narrow spaces (his basement lab, the quarantine room inside it and again the safe inside that). Here he retreats to defend his values (his science, the serum, the woman, the child) against the onslaught. This is a visual image of his conservative response to the threat of change; he does not go on a hero's journey, he tries to protect his home and values from those who do – the mutants and Ruth. Identity issues have moved beyond race and gender in this film: where NBF phallic women are often anxious, representing the fears of both men and women about social changes (Glass 1990), the woman in IAL (2007) is calm and wise, hopeful, faithful, active as an agent and confidently feminine while she is at it. She portrays traditional local values (Latin American Catholic) and does not express or visually portray any inferiority or minority problems with this identity. This is a big visual departure from previous adaptations of the story, in which all characters were white. The cross-racial casting seems to have redefined NBF images of race, gender and class. The hero is black, the heroine Latin American, and the other is not beyond a racial or gender line but infected by a virus. So the us is all of us, all races and genders, and the other is the sick and infectious potential of what we could become if we cannot work with the transition. We will work with transitional objects in NBF and I Am Legend in the next section.

So we see that IAL does present NBF images of (1) media, (2) technological toys, (3) amnesia, (4) otherness and (5) phallic women but not in ways which allow the film to grapple with matters of social change in a progressive and enquiring manner (Glass 1990). When asking Brecht and Eagleton's realism questions about the film, the audience is likely to experience the film as a reinforcement of the current power relations in society. Although gender, class and racial images do not constrain the challenges of change, we need to explore that further in the next section, on transitional objects in NBF.
11.4 The transitional object

Transitional objects are images in use and as such provide very useful opportunities to analyse how a society grapples with change. They bring together a picture or other form of semiosis, the ideological, the social, and narrative moments of change, in a visual image. NBF stories grapple with the question of what human is – morally, politically and/or philosophically. The core issue in each NBF film represents a current transition with which society is grappling, and in the film it is represented as a transitional object which helps the society in transition to project its fears and anxieties (about the change) outside of itself. In *Blade Runner*, the fear is redundancy in the workplace due to automation and a sense of displacement as a new world moves away from its old meanings. In *Total Recall*, the fear is nuclear destruction. Science fiction does grapple with the social and moral implications of big science, but not only technological fears are worked through in sci-fi – also issues like urban spread or totalitarian control (*Matrix, Equilibrium, Robocop*) (Glass 1990). In *I Am Legend*, we see fears of the new millennium: the shifting structure of the nuclear family and, especially, genetic modification. The transitional object through which society can push from one stage to the next is the dog in *IAL*.

An object is transitional if it allows society to work through conflict with the help of imagination. This enables change and growth, so that society can move from one stage of emotional development to another, just like a growing child (Glass 1990 after Winnicott). A child can project her emotions (e.g. separation anxiety) onto a transitional object. This helps her move away from the fluid baby/mother relationship into childhood, thus helping the child establish her individual identity. A typical transitional object is not quite external and not quite internal, a bit of both, like a teddy bear or a blanket, an immediate part of the child’s physical nearness as she emerges from the imaginary phase. There is a parallel between this individual psychological use of transitional objects in growth and that of society and its collective metamorphoses when faced with change. After Winnicott, Glass (1990) calls this a cultural transitional object – the image of an object in a culture product, such as a film, with which a character and its audience engage, revealing something of the collective psychological process as society works through culture transformation.

In an attempt to deal with change, NBF films feature such transitional objects. We can analyse these to interpret current political battlefields for power over values as conveyed in images. In *I Am Legend*, the transitional object is the dog. When the dog becomes infected, it transforms from one of us into one of them. The core issue in *IAL* is strongly value-laden, and thus can be represented in a binary code: infected or uninfected. Binary codes are useful in analyses in
which we interpret value-laden elements. Such good/bad polarities in a narrative lend themselves to character analysis with groups of dualities – those who are aligned with the goal of the hero and those who are opposed to it. The shift of the dog from the good side to the bad marks it as the transitional object (Fell after Greimas 1977: 20).

When the dog crosses this threshold and becomes infected, the hero is called on a journey, on which he avenges the loss of his dog. In the other films, the dog is a stray, not Neville’s own dog. In Act 1, the dog is a typical helper in Greimas’s method of analysis (Fell 1977). It affects the hero’s movement and overcomes the hero’s misfortune and lack by being his companion in touching scenes of surrogate intimacy. This high value investment by the hero in the dog endows the dog with the relationship power to become a transitional object, and we can map its transitional role in three stages matching the three acts. (1) The dog is given to Neville in the time before the film starts, shown in flashback, by Neville’s daughter when he is separated from his family. So it represents the first transition: into abandonment, into being the only human left in infected New York. This is like the lack and loneliness a subject experiences when emerging from the mirror phase into the symbolic order, with an own identity separate from the mother. In the establishment, Neville showers the dog with love and shampoo and engages in conversation and dinner rituals with it, clearly making it the transitional object of his lost society, his lost imaginary unity. (2) Crossing the first threshold (Vogler 1992). The dog chases after the infected pack and finds their lair. This calls Neville into action – at first just to retrieve his dog, his only companion, and thus to cross into the world of the infected where he sees them hunching together in a sort of ritual. This then sparks his scientific quest for the cure, and he goes back to their lair. They become more known to us in this process, and we recognise in them certain barbaric traits which represent our social descent: pack hierarchy, with the alpha male and female; a sort of ritual; a defense against Neville’s attack; a growl and a shuffle … So the dog represents that moment of shifting from ignorance of what we can become into knowledge and fear of what some of us have become, the horror of regression. (3) When the dog becomes infected, Neville holds it as it undergoes rapid and rabid mutation. He has to kill the dog, quickly and decisively with his bare hands, while crying for its demise and embracing it in a beautiful scene. There is a potential here for the story to explore a complex dialectic synthesis of the binary opposites of good/bad, uninfected/infected, when the transitional object itself becomes bad and infected. Instead, Neville turns this growth opportunity into a call for revenge, in which he gets stuck. If the goal of the hero is to conquer the infected, the infection and death of the dog is really the inciting incident – as opposed to the previous versions of the story, in which Ruth is involved in an inciting incident. At the loss of his dog in IAL 2007, Neville
becomes reckless with grief, exposing himself to risk of death in his attempt to hunt and kill as many of the infected as possible – no longer for science, just hate. He neglects his research and his health routine; he breaks his safety and security rules to be locked up at home before dark and sets himself up as bait on the harbour pier at night. In the fight between the infected and the uninfected, Neville is outnumbered and has lost his rational edge in grief. Sick and vengeful, Neville loses his mental balance. In a fight with the mutants, he and his car topple over the pier into the harbour, an immersion into irrationality, a thanatosis surrender to the imaginary and the fluidity of the changing other, the pre-identity. He almost dies. This irrationality sets the scene for the deus ex machina of Ruth's sudden appearance to save him from becoming less human.

NBF images can help us work through social issues in progressive ways, or in ways of narrative rebellion against capitalism or social decline or power abuse (Glass 1990). But if the genre is used to maintain the status quo conservatively, like in I Am Legend (2007) we have a neutralisation of those progressive moves into the centre of power. The ending of IAL is very different from the book and also gives a different meaning to the title. In the book and other film adaptations, Neville comes to realise that he is the last of the old and obsolete way of being human. In the future society, infection is normal and he is a murderous biological deviant. Neville dies grasping the reversal: just as the vampire was legend in pre-infection time, he and other uninfected humans are now legends, lost (Bazzargh 2008). So the meaning of the title in the book is that Neville is a legend in the eyes of the new race, the last of the previous dispensation. The point of view is with the new race. But in the 2007 film, the meaning is held in the point of view of the survivors of the old race, and Neville's legend, his legacy, is to return the previous dispensation, maintaining the genetic make-up of the human race as we know it, and its status quo of normality. Although the story of Dr Neville had the potential of innovation, subversion or at least rethinking our teleologies, this 2007 film is the first version in which the story works to maintain the status quo. That is clear from how the film gives the conservative community the point of view on the meaning of legend and, thus, the point of view of the future and how we will go on into it.

Another important analytical tool to interpret the ending of a film and its ideological meanings is to explore who wins the prize, the elixir or boon that the hero's journey delivers (Vogler 1992). The prize of Dr Neville's journey is the cure for the virus mixed with blood and carried in a vial. As such, it is a phallic signifier of the new generation and control over its gene pool, not unlike the weddings at the end of a Shakespearean comedy, suggesting the start of a new generation. In the book and the older film versions, the anti-viral serum is carried forth by
mutant children, or not carried forth at all as the mutating new species adapts and evolves successfully.

With the non-racial, non-sexist, non-classist cast in the 2007 IAL, one is hopeful that the power of the image will be yielded by those black, latino, female and poor characters by the time the end of the film comes along to announce the prize and its celebration. Alas, no. Ruth travels to a gated community of white protestant men of the old American ways. They get the woman and her future potential as mate, while the black man dies. They win the phallic vial of serum from the woman, although she and the black man worked for it.

Who wins the prize and what is celebrated is a very important way of visually showing the message of a film at its end (McKee 1997). Casting Ruth as latina and Dr Neville as black could mean that society is managing to deal with identity matters successfully to the point that it is not an issue raised by this NBF film. It could perhaps mean a neutralisation of progressive moves into the centre of power by allowing the marginalised to move closer to the centre but never yet in the centre – the prized elixir is not given to any gender, race or class but to white protestant men.

Brian Aldiss (1974) calls that ‘cosy catastrophe’: NBF stories in which civilisation is destructed for the masses, and the masses with it. But a handful of survivors continue civilisation in their comfortable way (perhaps they prefer to call it ‘pure’) in an enclave. For them, the privileges of the upper classes continue as they were before the apocalypse. The ending with Ruth, pure and religious, saving the gated community of white males is achieved with a narrative device of deus ex machina and the mounted messenger. It constitutes a happy ending with arbitrary readjustment of the world, presenting reality as mended and fine for now, not as power-ridden or problem-riddled. The power behind the images of the end of the film is hidden in suspense action and breakneck pace.

11.5 Endings and generalisations

Film adaptations of I Am Legend have become more and more arbitrary, more ideologically motivated from outside the text, more conventional, a good example of Bordwell’s critique of bad happy endings (1986:21).

For the student filmmaker, generalisations are possible on aspects of a film narrative ending which help us interpret its ideological use of images and be aware of the ideologies we weave into our own films. (1) We can analyse how the transitional object in a film narrative presents images to deal with an issue of change in a society and how that issue is resolved at the ending. (2) When there is a mounted messenger as deus ex machina, we can analyse which ideology its
message represents. Then we can consciously decide whether it is the best plot
device for our story, or whether it is truer to an external ideological teleology than
to an internal textual integrity. We can avoid flat endings and rather use resonant
 endings, and be conscious of what is visually signified about the ‘new order’ of
the end and what is celebrated. (3) We can analyse whether a film affects reality
by asking Brecht and Eagleton’s realism questions about the images in it and by
getting the audience’s answer to those questions, including: Does the film make
abstraction possible from the concrete issues it presents? Or does it drown out
our reflective distance and concentration by means of a fast sequential structure,
cathartic emotions and a tense pace? (4) We can analyse the point of view at the
ending of a film and ask whether it represents the view of social groups which of-
er a broad variety of solutions to current social problems or whether the point of
view of the hegemony can be unmasked as the view of those in power. (5) We can
analyse the image of the prize and who gets it and whether it is celebrated at the
end. (6) We can also ask the audience questions about their experience of reality
through the film, e.g. whether they think the film narrative discovers the causal
complexes of society, unmasksthe prevailing view of things as the view of those in
power, offers a wide pool of solutions for the pressing difficulties in which human
 society is caught up, and emphasises development over stagnation in the status
quo (Eagleton after Brecht 1981:88).
Successful unhappy or open endings are possible. In the Tarkovsky original
of Stalker, in Michael Clayton and in Tsotsi, the ending is unresolved or unhappy.
Student films also often risk dystopic or challenging endings. It is not that a happy
ending is bad. It is just that the mounted messenger as deus ex machina is a plot
device to maintain the status quo in visual images. It is not the tool of a good story
teller but that of an ideologue.
And arbitrary endings make for bad storytelling.

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Representing the state of exception
Power, utopia, visuality and narrative in superhero comics

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This article explores the relationship between the superhero and the state and the subversive potential within that relationship, both thematically and visually. The superhero must act above the law in order to uphold it, and thus question the legitimacy of authority. The comic book narrative has to convey the illusion of causality, movement and sound through the means of consequent, still and silent images. Both examples here show a paradox that must somehow be resolved in order to make sense of them. The article approaches these questions through Giorgio Agamben's concept of the state of exception, which is used to analyse the problematics presented by the visual narrative and the questions raised by the political status of the superhero.

“We've always been criminals. We have to be criminals.”
Batman, in Batman: The Dark Knight Returns (1986:135)

The relationship between the superhero and the state is not quite as simple as it first may seem. In the comics of the Golden Age, Commissioner Gordon may well have called Batman for help in catching the bad guys, but when brought closer to reality, the relationship proves to be more complicated than that. As Tony Spanakos explains, the superhero genre has “taught us to believe our liberty is more likely to be protected by heroes, who are above and beyond the state, than by the bureaucrats who comprise it” (2009:37). Spanakos identifies this ‘fundamental tension’ within the genre as one that deals with the legitimacy of authority in general, and with the authority of the state over the ‘coercive capacity of the superheroes’ (2009:34–35) in particular. Thus, in order to protect society, the superhero must inevitably become a criminal, a vigilante who breaks the law in order to save it when the more traditional state powers fail to do so.
The vigilante superhero, as Frank Miller’s Batman above states, has always been, and indeed, always has to be a criminal. The superhero’s status as a vigilante places him outside society, effectively denying him the possibility of acting within the state-approved powers. Instead, he is forced to repeatedly break the law, sometimes becoming a wanted criminal himself. On a different level, the comic book narration, a hybrid of visual and textual information, has to convey the illusion of causality, movement and sound through the means of consequent, still and silent images. Both the superhero and comic book narration perform a paradoxical ‘confusion’ to their meanings: the subversion of powers which is inherently inadequate to their respective tasks (be it preserving law and order or enforcing the illusion of sound and movement). The aim of this article is to examine and analyse the subversive qualities located within the politics of the superhero comic, both thematic and visual, especially in connection to the power of the hero and the legitimacy of that power within state authority. The use of the term ‘politics’ here refers mainly to the more conventional state politics, which includes influencing state policy and challenging it, but also to the power struggles that can be found within the superhero comic on its various narrative levels of textuality and visuality. I will draw on the traditional ‘Golden Age’ superheroes, such as Superman and Batman, who have been seen as representing the classic ‘Truth, Justice and the American Way’, but my main focus will be on the more politically (and visually) radical superhero comics of the 1980s, especially Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons’ acclaimed graphic novel, *Watchmen* (1987).

Originally published in twelve parts and later as a single volume, *Watchmen* portrays real-life superheroes in a fictional US of the 1980s, which features Richard Nixon as President for the third term – and a nuclear war with Russia not far ahead. It is explained that superheroes became real in this version of the US, and that people inspired by superhero comics took on the crime-fighting in tights, which quickly lead to the extinction of the superhero comic book itself. Outlawed in 1977 by what Spanakos refers to as an attempt to “emphasize the authority of the state over the coercive capacity of the superheroes” (2009:35), the heroes of *Watchmen* are either retired (Night Owl, Silk Spectre) or choose to live as outlaws (Rorschach), not revealing their true identities. Only Dr Manhattan with his superpowers (gained through a radiation accident) and The Comedian remain active under strict governmental supervision; through their assistance, the US has won the Vietnam War and achieved substantial technological progress, thanks to the contributions of Dr Manhattan. The comic deconstructs the entire superhero tradition, filtering through fiction the quite questionable ethics of vigilantism (DiLiddo 2009:47) in order to expose the reality behind the ‘American’ ideal, which is revealed to be a paradox of power and authority.
I will approach questions of power, authority and subversion in the superhero narrative through the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben’s concept of the state of exception, which I intend to put into dialogue with the questions presented by the visual narrative of the graphic novel and the questions raised by the political status of the superhero in Watchmen. In a state of exception, there exists a confusion between the executive and legislative powers, as ‘full powers’ are assigned to the executive and separated from the legislative (Agamben 2005: 7). The confusion between the acts of these powers is what characterises the state of exception (2005: 38). Accordingly, the superhero is one who usually has a ‘superpower’, an ability that makes him superior to others. With this superpower, the superhero creates a state of exception and takes on the executive power of the law without the legislative power; in other words, he has no legitimacy of authority behind his actions. The narrative form of comics, in its own way, also contains a confusion of meaning, as the use of images within the narrative serves several functions, sometimes even contradicting each other. Watchmen, in particular, presents an interesting case because of its highly detailed, multilayered narrative in which images and text are deliberately used to convey contrasting messages. Both the politics of content (the political relevance of the superhero) and the politics of form (the narrative structure) can be analysed through Agamben.

The state of exception, as Agamben points out, is not just a matter of suspending the legislative power – and more importantly, it does not mean its abolition; instead, the hero exists in a “zone of indifference, where the inside and outside do not exclude each other but rather blur with each other” (2005: 23). The state of exception includes the suspension of civil rights in order to preserve and protect the system that guarantees those rights, whilst the comic book narrative uses images and text to create a narrative out of still, consequent panels. The superhero (comic) can been seen as a subversive character acting beyond the traditional structures of society, one who aims to support the institutions of democratic power while at the same time undermining their legitimacy with his actions.¹ The state of exception deals with political power, governmental power, even dictatorship, all themes the traditional superhero narrative has sometimes been seen as lacking. The political nature of the superhero itself has still been questioned as recently as 2006, when Jamie A. Hughes claimed that by creating the superheroes as ‘champions of justice and perfection’, the writers of superhero comics also placed them outside ideology and thus made them uninterested in any social or political issues, such as bigotry,

¹. Note: the subversive role of the superhero applies to the legitimacy of his actions supporting the power of democratic states and/or regimes. In authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, the executive and legislative are usually subsumed by a single party or a ‘junta’ which act as a ‘superhero’. 
education, sexism or racism (2006: 546–547). In her article, Hughes also compares the traditional superheroes of the Golden Age to the heroes of Watchmen, attributing all ideological concerns to the latter.

While one can agree that the ideological concerns and motivations in Watchmen are more obvious and clearly pronounced, one may be more sceptical of the claim that heroes such as Superman or Batman would ever have existed completely outside ideology. Superman’s very first stories in Action Comics (1938) already showed him battling such injustices as domestic violence, illegal lynching and capital punishment, even corruption within the US government – hardly the acts of someone with no ideology (Daniels 2003: 22–23). Only as Superman’s powers began to grow did he need something more challenging than mere social concerns to battle.2 As the superhero by definition often possesses ‘superpowers’, the relationship between the superhero and his superpowers and the political power of the Superpowers (such as the US) is indeed a highly relevant question, especially since the distinction is often between state-approved powers and the private powers of the superhero. In the next section, I will go briefly into the history and the overtly political nature of the superhero from the emergence of Superman until the arrival of Watchmen, contextualising the origin of the superheroic ideals in American utopianism in order to analyse the ideological relevance of the superhero within the state of exception.

12.1 From Superman to Watchmen: The evolution of superhero politics

In the United States, Superman, the first comic book superhero, saw the light of day in 1938 at the end of the Great Depression and just before the Second World War. The timing here is significant, as millions of Americans had just experienced poverty and unemployment, and had “had their faith in the notion of uninterrupted economic progress seriously undermined” (Reynolds 1992: 18). It was from this economic state that the new superhero rose: a ‘self-reliant individualist’ who stood apart from many of the ‘humdrum concerns of society’ and yet was able to follow his personal code of honour, take on the world in his own terms and win (Reynolds 1992: 18). This hero, of course, can be interpreted as a variation of the classic myth of the American hero that goes back to the Western frontier hero and beyond (Wright 2001: 10). The ‘evolution’ of superhero politics can be traced both in the themes and topics dealt with in the superhero narratives as well as in the visual narrative structures comprising the comic book, moving from strict

2. These escalating problems the superhero faces can also be interpreted as mirroring the accumulating real-world issues and problems such as the Cold War (cf. Wood 1986).
and simple binary divisions and clarity of lines to more morally ambiguous and nonlinear narratives.

The American hero himself and the changes he has gone through can be used to analyse the underlying social and political tensions within the society; as Jones and Watkins (2000: 4) have stated, the hero is always portrayed through the “ideological frameworks of gender, imperialism, and national identity”, a claim that clearly contradicts the idea that the superhero would somehow exist ‘outside ideology’. Following what the Marxist critic C. L. R. James wrote as early as in 1950, popular culture from film to comics mirrors from year to year the “deep social responses and evolution of the American people in relation to the fate which has overtaken the original concepts of freedom, free individuality, free association, etc.”. James stresses that it is the serious study of these phenomena that allows the reader to find the most explicit ideological expression of the “sentiments and deepest feelings of the American people and a great window into the future of America and the modern world” (James 1950/1993:118–119). Crucially, what need to be addressed and examined when looking for this ideological expression are not just the images themselves but their various uses through popular culture; the image of the superhero can be used to reflect nationalistic ideals, satisfying the emotional needs of a nation in need of a hero, but it can also be used to criticise and question those ideals. Following the editors’ introduction to this volume, it is precisely the critical analysis of the uses of these images of superheroes, not merely the superheroes themselves, that connects this article to the construction of realities and the power images hold in their formation and development.

The study of images and their uses in comics is a complex process: the confusion of powers between linguistic and visual communication at work in a comic book narrative deals with the balance between the textual narrative in speech balloons and captions, whereas the visual narrative comprises not only the imagery within a panel but also the page composition as well as the juxtaposition of panels from separate storylines. Also, as Matthew Costello notes, the artwork of the superhero comics offers a way of analysing the American worldview especially during the Cold War: in the early 1960s, the superhero comics offered a “vision of moral certainty” with “clear lines, stark contrasts, and a formal, contained look” (2009:68). By the end of the decade, this clear vision had been gradually replaced with an ambiguity in the visual narratives: as the boundaries between the events within the narrative began to crumble, so did the moral certainties of the early 1960s. By the late 1980s, the visual expression of superhero comics was often close to chaotic, the distinction between (often nonlinear) images having been almost completely obscured: according to Costello, this mirrored the “more porous moral boundaries between heroes and villains as vigilantism became dominant and the heroes and villains were increasingly equated within those stories” (Costello
The moral collapse in the world of the superhero comic is both visual and thematical, approaching visual and ideological chaos.

In the light of the apparent moral and visual chaos that took over the superhero narrative, it is interesting to study the visual narrative of *Watchmen*. At first glance, *Watchmen* appears to have more in common with the clear-cut narratives of the early 1960s than the violent and bleeding imagery of the 1980s. Closer inspection of the narrative, however, proves that this is by far not the case. Generally, the narrative ‘powers’ of visual and textual information may work together in creating the narrative structure, or they may be in conflict, each denying or challenging the other. The uses of images in *Watchmen* often present us with separate visual and textual storylines which continuously (and often with high level of visual/thematical symmetry) comment each other. The graphic novel also offers the reader textual excerpts from the fictional world of *Watchmen*, such as autobiographies, a psychological report on one of the characters as well as an article written by the alter ego of one of the heroes. All these discourses contribute to the textual power of the graphic novel narrative, fighting for the reader’s recognition with the visual narrative.3

*Watchmen* begins with the brutal murder of one of the heroes, The Comedian. Investigating his death, the uncompromising vigilante Rorschach becomes convinced that there exists a plot to kill former superheroes and attempts to convince his former colleagues of this. Night Owl (Dan Dreiberg) and Silk Spectre (Laurie Juspeczyk) are at first unconvinced, but soon they begin to unravel a plot much greater than just killing superheroes. Adrian Veidt, also known as superhero Ozymandias, has decided to use his superior knowledge and vast fortunes to unite mankind by fooling them into believing that there is an alien attack on New York. Three million New Yorkers may die, but Veidt believes he is introducing the world to utopia, as the Americans and Russians will now point their guns at the sky instead of each other. During the uncovering of the scheme, the heroes recall their past and try to accept their now forbidden desire to fight crime in a mask. One scene between Laurie and Dan, for example, raises the question of sexual fetishism in connection to the costumes. Dan fails to perform sexually until one night they go out in their costumes and save several people from a burning

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3. It should be noted here that this article uses the term ‘reader’ in the deliberately wide and general context, referring mainly to the cognitive aspects of reading the visual narrative. However, when discussing the readers of comics as cultural texts, there exists very little empirical evidence on the exact nature of these audiences apart from studies of fandom (such as Matthew Pustz’s *Comic Book Culture: Fanboys and True Believers* from 1999). As Duncan and Smith quote Jeffrey A. Brown’s *Black Superheroes* (2001), the comics industry estimates that only ten to twenty percent of comic book audiences consist of hardcore fans, while the rest are an elusive group labeled ‘casual readers’, which is yet to be studied empirically (2009:173).
building. Afterwards, Laurie asks him: “Did the costumes make it good? Dan …?” (VII:28). He confesses to the excitement of the costumes as something he has been ashamed to admit. Through these ‘heroes’, Watchmen quite consciously unravels some of the myths of the superhero.

These heroes are far from the four-colored supermen of the 1940s and 1950s. Rather, they appear as ‘realistic’ portraits of people battling with questions of sanity and personal relationships – and this is supported by the very realistic illustration style by Gibbons, which excludes two of the most traditional effects of superhero comics: thought balloons and sound effects. Watchmen draws on decades of superhero comics, deconstructing the familiar image of the superhero by extrapolating the idea of real-life superheroes, and overtly plays with the embedded ambivalences of traditional superhero narratives; as Annalisa DiLiddo argues, the heroes of Watchmen form a group of ‘semi-archetypal figures’, each of whom represents a particular aspect of the superhero tradition to be deconstructed (2009:55). The text also ventures behind the notorious paradox of destroying the world in order to save it, or stepping outside the law in order to enforce the law. I will approach Watchmen not just as a case study but as a work that actively deconstructs and rewrites the conventions of the superhero comic and acts as a vital part in the evolution of superhero politics. A central theme in analysing superhero politics is the role of utopia, which is rarely achieved: as Richard Reynolds claims, the superhero “by his very existence asserts American utopianism, which remains a highly potent cultural myth” (1992:83). In the next section, I will analyse this claim further, connecting the utopian themes to the politics of the superhero.

12.2 American utopianism, or, The Veidt Method

As Slavoj Žižek argues, to critically study ideology, one should analyse fictional or ‘utopian’ narratives of ‘failed alternative histories’, which reveal the antagonistic character of society and ‘estrange’ us from our established identities (1994:7). Revisionist superhero narratives, such as Watchmen, are well suited for such critical studies of ideology, as the world they represent is one of dystopia, an alternate history that makes the familiar strange and questions the seemingly simplistic ideologies behind superhero narratives in order to reveal the complex ideological questions that lie beneath the surface. In superhero comics, it is precisely through ideology that the state of exception, with the superheroic vigilante actions and violence, is made acceptable and justifiable. What makes the use of ideology as justification for vigilantism a hazardous approach is the way it is often made to appear ‘natural’, even though ideology is always constructed and often promoted
through the use of a mythical construct like the superhero. Thus, analysing the fictional extrapolations of the superhero universe, it is possible to access the so-called ‘real’ world politics through the subversive potential of the superhero comic and its uses of images.

The image of the superhero offers what could be called ‘an iconic shorthand’ (Jewett and Lawrence 2003:6) that allows the reader to access ‘American’ sentiments. The superhero, therefore, opens up a way to approach hegemonic American identity and American ideology and reveals some of the ambiguities and tensions embedded within the dominant ideology. The state of exception and its problematic politics form one of the central tensions within the superhero narrative, its roots reaching all the way back to American utopianism. Conceived in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, American utopianism was about the potentiality of utopia rather than reality; according to mercantilist ideas, everyone had to work hard, and this hard work “might eventually bring modest rewards to all” (Segal 2000:7–8). This view was gradually replaced in the late eighteenth century by a more technological view of utopia emphasising endless progress (not change!), development and growth, thanks to technological developments. The rapid economic and technological growth gradually led to comparisons with the Old Country, and now the view was that America was not only a potential but also a probable utopia: a utopia ‘in practice’ (ibid.: 9–10). As Segal says, a large reason behind this was the American sense of individualism:

At a time when other countries still defined themselves as consisting of groups, Americans moved away from this in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The individual now became the fundamental unit of American society. (2000: 10)

The individual American as the ‘fundamental unit’ of American society enables the arrival of the American hero, as the opposition between state power and private power places the individual more within the sphere of the private, not state power.

The notion of America as a realised utopia slowly became a part of what Segal refers to as ‘America’s so-called civil religion’: a secular nation invoking God in public ceremonies and in public policy, declaring the US a de facto utopia, “unique among the world’s nations yet a model for them all” (2000:11). The potential utopia of the early settlers had been replaced by the probable utopia, the view that America was in fact a utopia in practice. It is interesting to approach this idea of the US as a de facto utopia within the context of the traditional view of

4. This is exemplified already in John Winthrop’s A Modell of Christian Charity (1630), which visioned America as a “citty upon a hill” that should act as an example to the rest of the world.
the superhero narrative which aims at preserving the status quo. As, for example, Umberto Eco (1972/1986) has criticised, the traditional superhero has been seen as upholding the status quo and not actively pursuing utopia (which he could presumably do, as he is a superhuman with superpowers). In this context, if the US is viewed as a de facto utopia, then the superhero who has been criticised for merely upholding the status quo actually preserves utopia and therefore has no need to change the society actively.

What links Watchmen to American utopianism is Ozymandias: as Matthew Wolf-Meyer notes, Ozymandias is “the fulfilment of the genetic promise of humanity, achieved through a self-improvement course” (2003:498). The self-improvement reference is visible in the graphic novel, too, as Adrian Veidt’s publications include pirate comics which advertise ‘The Veidt Method’ that allows anyone to achieve what he has achieved through rigorous exercise and dedication. The method includes a

series of physical and intellectual exercise systems which, if followed correctly, can turn YOU into a superhuman, fully in charge of your own destiny, All that is required is the desire for perfection and the will to achieve it.  

(X: 32)

This text is actually a pastiche of the Charles Atlas’ advertisements that ran in comic books for nearly fifty years. These advertisements urged ‘90-pound weaklings’ who got picked on at the beach by more handsome men to send money to Atlas for a subscription of a life-altering self-improvement course (Wolf-Meyer 2003:498). Ozymandias is the ultimate result of such a course, and thus proves in the vein of American utopianism that it is available to all humanity and possible for anyone through hard work and determination:

Entering school, I was already exceptionally bright, my perfect scores on early tests arousing such suspicion that I carefully achieved only average grades thereafter. What caused such precociousness? My parents were intellectually unremarkable, possessing no obvious genetic advantage. Perhaps I decided to be intelligent rather than otherwise? Perhaps we all make such decisions, though that seems a rather callous doctrine.  

(XI:8)

According to Ozymandias’ monologue, he simply chose to overcome humanity and become the smartest man on Earth. Later on, he also states that “I was determined to measure my success. Firstly, I gave away my inheritance to demonstrate the possibility of achieving anything, starting from nothing” (XI:8). This sets him apart from heroes such as Batman, who has not only dedication but also an immense fortune. However, the übermensch approach is not without questions, either: the superhero as a superman ultimately undermines the democratic processes he aims to protect, much like the state of exception separates the
executive from the legislative, effectively creating what Jewett and Lawrence have labeled as ‘Captain America Complex’, whereby essentially nondemocratic means are employed to achieve democratic means (2003: 28). The central paradox of the complex is, indeed, the way the very existence of the superhero effectively erases the very principles he is set to defend.

In the same paradoxical vein, the ‘utopian project’ of America actually stresses what could be referred to as the ‘anti-utopian nature’ of the US: the continuous strive for perfection expected and stressed by the society and the media (‘all that is required is the desire for perfection and the will to achieve it’) can have the opposite effect of suppressing people, leading to disappointment and disillusionment. As Matthew Costello points out, the story of American success may have been one of prospering individuals with limitless opportunities, but “the new reality of the postwar political economy was an organized capitalism in which the individual was in fact a part of the great capitalist organizations” (2009: 36–37). Realising that they are merely parts of a larger organisation, although living in abundance, the individuals may have experienced their lack of success as discouraging and, in a sense, anti-utopian.

Ozymandias is a superhero in the universe of *Watchmen*, but paradoxically he is also the villain of the story; it is his plot that motivates the story and in the end leaves millions of people dead as he attempts to unite mankind. As he says:

> [Because I was] unable to unite the world by conquest ... Alexander's method ... I would trick it; frighten it towards salvation with history's greatest practical joke.
> (XI: 24)

Ozymandias can be read as a villain through the dynamical structure of the plot, too: as the traditional superhero is always essentially a passive, not an active figure, the events leading up to the confrontation are usually initiated by the supervillain (not the hero). The hero becomes passive, as he is not required to act unless the status quo is threatened by the villain (Reynolds 1992: 50–51). This means that a hero who becomes the protagonist of the story, the hero who actively aims to change the status quo, will inevitably take on the role of the villain in the narrative dynamics of the plot. As Reynolds puts it, “the villains are concerned with change and the heroes with the maintenance of the status quo” (1992: 51).

Ozymandias becomes the hero-villain as he actively aims at change (at utopia), whereas the other heroes remain as heroes as they only wish to maintain society, not to alter it. Ozymandias also possesses a more detailed set of values than the other heroes, which, according to Fingeroth, links him to the side of the villains, as he is ‘inflexibly sure’ of the correctness of his own values (2004: 163). It is through these various heroes (and villains) that *Watchmen* extrapolates the impossibility of
the vigilante ideal, which leads to a state of exception – a confusion of powers that threatens the very society itself while still aiming to uphold it.

12.3 Who watches the watchmen? – The superhero in a state of exception

The 1980s saw a revisionist streak in superhero comics that produced such works as *Watchmen* (1987) and Frank Miller’s *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (1986). As Steven Shaviro notes, these works went ‘behind the scenes’ and showed us what we should have guessed all along: that all those patriotic, costume-clad crime-fighters were really violent and fascist sociopaths with ‘a kinky underwear fetish’ (1997:63–64). The premise of the hero is extrapolated to the point where the superheroes’ secrecy and paranoia about secret identities is ridiculed, and more importantly, the paradox of ‘destroying the world in order to save it, or stepping outside the law in order to enforce the law’ is brought forth (Shaviro 1997:64). As C. L. R. James noted, the popularity and the vast number of these heroes who take the law into their own hands makes the clear statement that “for preserving order against the real criminals the police are not needed” (1950/1993:124). Costello sees the superhero comics of the late 1970s and early 1980s as mirroring the feeling of betrayal experienced by the American people, betrayal for which the authorities are responsible. According to Costello, in a society characterised by betrayal, the hero was now required to act even at the expense of legality, defending the nation “no matter what the cost” (2009:167). The official law enforcement is not capable of acting out the requirements of the law, and from the state of exception that is created by this confusion, the vigilante hero emerges to enforce the power of law – and paradoxically, he undermines the very principles of democracy behind the law.

Indeed, when facing the demands of democracy, the superhero forms a complex equation: even though the premises of democratic equality are present in the superhero in the sense that the superpowers are to be projected onto ordinary citizens, the very transformation into a superhero places him outside democratic citizenship – and the absolute power of the hero must be depicted as “totally benign, transmuting lawless vigilantism into a perfect embodiment of law enforcement” (Lawrence and Jewett 2002:46). This is perhaps most clearly represented in Superman, who intuitively seems to recognise the state’s authority, which, in turn, “authorizes him to act on its behalf” (Spanakos 2008:56). However, the hero of the monomythic tradition is not always endowed with the blessing of the state, as the hero’s actions are usually required not by the state but because of the state’s inability to uphold law and order. This leads to a conflict in the power relations
between the state and the superhero, for as Foucault has written, punitive systems and methods act as techniques and modes of exercising power (1977: 23); in this way, punishment is not seen as just a consequence of legislation but as a part of a larger matrix of power relations that aim to define and control the human subject, both mentally and physically. For the superhero to take on the executive role in this power matrix challenges the state’s established modes of power, threatening to overthrow the entire society – in other words, leading to a permanent state of exception.

The superhero, by his nature, exists in the terrain between law and politics, in a state of emergency, breaking the law in order to uphold it. The superhero executes acts of power but, at the same time, has no legislative power. As Agamben (2003) says:

[W]hat is specific for the state of emergency is not so much the confusion of powers as it is the isolation of the force of law from the law itself. The state of emergency defines a regime of the law within which the norm is valid but cannot be applied (since it has no force), and where acts that do not have the value of law acquire the force of law.

The state of emergency is the result of a political crisis that presents itself as the legal form of that which can have no legal form (Agamben 2003). This is the superhero, who has no legal position as an agent of the law, yet acts like one. As Reynolds points out, Superman is a character whose loyalty and patriotism are above his devotion to the law – a central theme around which endless stories can be built, as the hero battles his conscience over the right way to follow (1992: 15).

The absolute power and freedom from law that the superhero possesses makes him both an asset and a liability to the state (Hughes 2006: 547). Some heroes, such as Superman, may have the ‘blessing’ of the community, but others, especially such heroes as the ones in Watchmen, may find themselves in quite a different position. Vigilantism is condemned in the world of Watchmen, as a piece of legislation called the Keene Act bars them from fighting crime in a mask. The state of emergency, prolonged, may become the state of exception, the dominant paradigm in contemporary politics and the ‘war on terror’; once it has become the rule, it entails “the loss of the traditional distinction between different forms of Constitution” (Agamben 2003). The superhero exists in this prolonged state of exception, and therefore his mere existence forms a threat to the society in which he lives.

The superhero is a threat to the society he protects, unless, of course, the power of the hero can be harnessed to serve the legislative powers: in Watchmen, two heroes, the Comedian and Dr Manhattan, are allowed to act as superheroes but only in co-operation with the government. Following Max Weber’s observations, they
possess the ‘right’ to use violence as is ascribed to institutions and individuals “only to the extent to which the state permits it” (1991:78). Thus legitimised by the state, The Comedian and Dr Manhattan fight the Vietnam War and release American hostages when required. As Dr Manhattan states, “the newspapers call me a crime-fighter, so the Pentagon says I must fight crime” (IV:14). Both heroes seem to be removed from the state of exception, as they now act within the state authority that defines the force of law. However, as Spanakos points out, Watchmen questions the Weberian state and its legitimised violence through its brutal portrayal of vigilant violence: “even when the state ‘permits’ the use of violence by superheroes, their violence hardly seems legitimate” (2009:39). This becomes quite apparent as we see Dr Manhattan disintegrating petty criminals and The Comedian executing his pregnant Vietnamese girlfriend – the violence, though permitted to them, is hardly justified.

The significance of the superhero and his actions can be read in association with initiatives such as the Patriot Act, (26 October 2001), which authorised such actions as ‘the indefinite detention’ of noncitizens suspected of terrorist activities. As Agamben (2005:3) points out, these initiatives radically erase any legal status the individual may have and produce a “legally unnameable and unclassifiable being”. The individual apprehended and punished by a vigilante superhero holds a position quite similar to the one above, as the hero abolishes the “distinction among legislative, executive, and judicial powers” (Agamben 2005:7). Extreme examples of comic book heroes who take on the role of the judge, jury and executioner could be seen in the title characters of Judge Dredd, The Punisher, Frank Miller’s Batman and, of course, in Watchmen’s Rorschach. Whereas a temporary and regulated use of full powers (of the hero) is, according to Agamben, compatible with democratic constitutions, “a systematic and regular exercise of the institution [in my reading, the superhero] necessarily leads to the ‘liquidation’ of democracy” (2005:7). One could even claim that the mere existence of the superhero, being in a constant state of exception, makes the democratic principles and forces redundant and pointless, as the omnipotent hero could “take over the government, defeat the army, or alter the equilibrium of planetary politics” (Eco 1972/1986:342). As the excerpt of the ex-superhero Hollis Mason’s autobiography describes the arrival of the omnipotent Dr Manhattan:

A new phase had entered the American language, just as new and almost terrifying concept had entered its consciousness. It was the dawn of the Super-Hero. (II:30)

The society will never be the same again after the introduction of the ‘real’, truly omnipotent superhero. According to Spanakos, the presence of a superhero as an almost unrecognisable Other makes humans more insecure (2009:44). In
Watchmen, this realisation makes the original, powerless costumed vigilantes appear almost ludicrous; as Dr Manhattan himself observes, the other heroes are “friendly middle-aged men who like to dress up. I have nothing in common with them” (IV: 14).

The superhero aims to uphold the status quo, yet his presence alone is enough to liquidate the idea of democracy and thus alter society. In Watchmen, the existence of the nigh-omnipotent Dr Manhattan has begun to affect the society through technological achievements, and there is no return to a ‘pre-Dr Manhattan state of purity’ (Wolf-Meyer 2003: 507). The knowledge that he exists is enough to render some aspects of society meaningless, as he has the power to destroy the world in an instant: one of the characters in Watchmen even describes him as a “goddamn walking H-bomb” (II: 8). Of course, this sounds very similar to the threat of nuclear war during the Cold War and the fear of ‘mutually assured destruction’, a threat which is very real within the world of Watchmen, too: as the ‘article’ by Professor Milton Glass in the Appendix to Chapter IV asks:

If threatened with eventual domination [by the US], would the Soviets pursue this unquestionably suicidal course? Yes. Given their history and their view of the world, I believe that they would. (IV: 32)

As the Soviets are powerless when faced with Dr Manhattan’s powers, they are ‘sufficiently unnerved’ to make a pre-emptive strike (Reynolds 1992: 106).

The superhero must often choose to exist outside the society he defends. This is most strikingly expressed in Watchmen’s Rorschach, a vigilante who almost literally lives outside the bounds of society; his bad manners, failing hygiene and violent behaviour make him a hero with every semblance of glamour stripped from him (Reynolds 1992: 107). Similarly, Dr Manhattan has become increasingly detached from the human world, and at the end of the graphic novel, leaves humanity for a galaxy ‘less complicated’ (XII: 27). As Agamben (2003) says, “to be outside and yet belong: such is the topological structure of the state of emergency” and, I shall claim, that of the superhero. The superhero is a sovereign, at the same time outside and inside the juridical order; the sovereign exception that traces a threshold between outside and inside, providing an entry into “those complex topological relations that make the validity of the juridical order possible” (1995/1998: 15–19). It is the sovereign who has the power to decide on the state of exception – and paradoxically the superhero becomes the sovereign by his existence alone, as he exists only within the state of exception.

So why do superheroes choose to act as heroes, make themselves public and, through their superhuman abilities, challenge the force of law to become its true applicator? Hughes claims that superheroes become superheroes “for some intrinsic responsibility”, and are thus freed from ideological constraints (2006: 548).
I, however, shall claim that the heroes become heroes out of perceived necessity, the need of society for someone to act. As the state-approved powers are seen as failing, the superhero must step forward and take on the executive power of the law; like one of the 'heroes' in Watchmen cries out: “Somebody has to save the world…” (II: 11). Agamben has stated that necessity always entails a subjective judgement and that “the only circumstances that are necessary and objective are those that are declared so” (2005: 29–30):

The recourse to necessity entails a moral or political (or, in any cases, extrajuridical) evaluation, by which the juridical order is judged and is held to be worthy of preservation or strengthening even at the price of its possible violation.

(Balladore-Pallieri 1970: 168, quoted in Agamben 2005: 30)

Thus, the hero always has to make a political choice whereby he deems the present society worth saving and begins to act in order to maintain it, that is, to uphold the status quo. The price to pay, of course, is the possible violation of the forces of law that need to be broken in order to uphold them in the state of exception that holds the superhero.

12.4 Confusion of narrative powers? – Image vs. text in the comic book narrative

As the politics of content have been discussed above, now is the time to move on to the last part of this paper: the politics of form. The state of exception is not only a question of the superhero’s political nature but, as I shall extrapolate here, a term that can be used to describe the subversive nature of the comic book narrative itself. Just like the legislative powers are separated from the power of the law itself, a similar confusion of powers can be seen taking place within the comic book narrative. To call comics an art of the state of exception in which visual and textual information create an illusion of a coherent narrative through a succession of still images and textual captions and balloons is to try and name that confusion. If one approaches each panel as a still image, all movement and action within a comic book is created by the sequential positioning of these images – the movement is created in the reader’s mind, not in the panels themselves. The panels may have indicators of movement within them, such as lines that signal action, yet they are still images contained within the panels.

The visual power of the comic book narrative comprises several aspects. The panel has usually been held as the basic unit of comic book narration (cf. McCloud 1993). However, as Pekka Tammi (among others) has pointed out, comic book narration is far more complex than that, and the meaning of the narrative can
be created not only within a single panel but also from a combination of several panels which form a single interpretational unit (Tammi 1999:282). There exists a constant battle for meaning within the narrative, as visual and textual information combine to form an exceptional narrative; as Thierry Groensteen describes it, comics are a “combination of subject(s) of expression, and of a collection of codes”, and should therefore be referred to as a system (1999/2007:6). A particular example of the problematic relationship between these collections of codes that are combined of words and images is the speech balloon: a contradiction in itself as it aims to convey sound through a silent medium. Like written dialogue in a novel, the speech balloon attempts to create the illusion of voices. What differentiates these two mediums is the fact that the comic book relies heavily on visual information, whereas the dialogue in a novel is (usually) only in textual form, without any visual emphasis such as bolded words or graphic text.

As the state of exception is about the confusion of powers, so is the visual narrative of the graphic novel, especially in Watchmen: though at first glance straightforward and seemingly simple in its panel division, the parallel visual storylines are in fact often juxtaposed on the same page, with panels alternating from separate narratives and textual captions of one storyline often infiltrating the other by presenting captions of one storyline on a panel from another storyline. There exists a clear confusion of narrative powers in Watchmen as the juxtapositional storylines battle for the meaning within the narrative, leaving the task of narrativising to the reader, who must create meaningful units from seemingly unconnected narrative elements. This subversive potential within the comic book narrative is brought forth in the use of images in these juxtapositional storylines and their relationship within the overall narrative structure that also includes the textual appendices to each chapter.

In Watchmen, as mentioned above, separate storylines are often juxtaposed in such a way that the textual captions of one storyline appear on the panels of another storyline, as if commenting it. An example of this can be found in the comic book within the comic book, The Tales of the Black Freighter, which is read by a young black boy in the comic. Scenes and captions of the pirate narrative mingle with the main narrative, creating a metanarrative that gives the events currently taking place in the narrative a new context and can therefore affect the reader’s interpretations of the main story as it contrasts with the violent and cynical world of Watchmen (Herkman 1998:114).

For example, the black and yellow colouring of the fallout shelter sign predicts the unavoidability of nuclear war, and consequently, death is juxtaposed against the captions which come from the pirate comic:

Delirious, I saw that hell-bound ship’s black sails against the yellow Indie’s sky, and knew again the stench of powder, and men’s brains, and war. The heads nailed to
its prow looked down, those with eyes; gull-eaten; salt-caked; liplessly mouthing, ‘No use! All’s lost!’ The waves about me were scarlet, foaming, horribly warm, yet still the freighter’s hideous crew called out, ‘More blood! More blood!’

(III:1) (see Figure 1)
These captions are joined by a monologue from the real world of *Watchmen*, where a newsvendor is saying how they should “nuke Russia and let God sort it out”. The visual and the textual come from two different narratives, yet they begin to create a new level of meaning, as the nuclear war images mingle in with the dooming pirate narrative (“No use! All’s lost!”, “More blood! More blood!”).

*Watchmen* uses many strictly visual effects and themes in its visual narration, such as colouring and rhythm: for example, Chapter V (the aptly titled “Fearful Symmetry”) is completely symmetrical in its panel composition, the strict panel division mirroring itself symmetrically page by page. The same chapter also cleverly uses colouring to give rhythm to the action through a blinking streetlight that paints every other panel a sickly yellow. As Groensteen also claims, the use of a regular panel layout (such as the one in *Watchmen*) enables a more effective use of pages that have an unusual or specific panel configuration (the so-called splash panels) (1999/2007:97). Groensteen also goes on to explicitly analyse the effect of the symmetry in Chapter V: from graphic elements such as the smiley badge or Rorschach’s mask to the more abstract categories of superpowers and morality, the symmetry of the panel division penetrates every level of the graphic novel (1999/2007:100).

Yet much of the narrative information is found within the captions and speech balloons, not to mention the textual appendices to each chapter. Often it is impossible to separate the images from the textual information, as the meaning in the panel can only be deduced from the whole (Mikkonen 2005:299). Also, occasionally the text can be treated ‘graphically’, which means that it can also be read as an image, as Will Eisner has demonstrated (1985:10). This links closely to the central issue here, which is the state of exception-like paradox of depicting sound without sound. The speech balloon, dubbed as a ‘desperation device’ by Will Eisner (1985:26) because of its impossible mission, is an onomatopoetic sign that represents the struggle to capture the very essence of sound (McCloud 1993:134). The attempt to depict sound without sound is a desperate attempt, symbolised by the speech balloon.

When discussing the uses of images and their power in society, one often overlooked visual tool is, indeed, the speech balloon. Instantly recognisable to the Western reader, the speech balloon can be used to express various things, such as Dr Manhattan’s gradual withdrawal from the human world through his double-lined speech balloons, which separate him and his utterances from those of the other characters.

Another clear example would be the vigilante Rorschach (see Figure 2), whose balloons have wavy edges that make his voice seem muffled and moist because of his mask; once his mask has been removed, his balloons appear just like everyone else’s. These examples show that ‘speech’ can be somewhat illustrated within a
silent medium, but yet we cannot hear anything the characters say. As Thierry Groensteen points out, the speech balloon is simultaneously both information (the symbolic function of the outline of the balloon) and a carrier of information (aka the words and other graphic elements inside the balloon) (1999/2007: 68).

However, seeing both the action in the panels and the sound it creates may cause a feeling of detachment in the reader. This is the result of the ‘double effect’ of seeing the action and the sound, whereas just seeing the action alone can also create the sound in the reader’s mind (Miettinen 2009: 118). Speech balloons mostly avoid this problem as the movement of the mouth is so minimal that perceiving it does not give any clues as to what is being said. It is noteworthy that Watchmen does not employ sound effects at all, even though they have generally

Figure 2. Rorschach’s wavy lines indicate that his speech is muffled by the mask he is wearing
been seen as the essential trademark of superhero comics. It has been my interpretation that by abandoning all sound effects, *Watchmen* manages to involve the reader more closely, as the reader has the power (and possibly the need) to create the sound effects in his/her mind and thus be more engaged with the narration (Miettinen 2009: 118).

12.5 Conclusions – The politics and poetics of the superhero

The way the images of the superhero comic can be used contains a vast subversive potential, and it is far from neutral. The superhero is forced to break the law in order to uphold it; the comic book must make a sound without a sound. The liminal functions performed both by the superhero and the visual narrative provide a way of exemplifying Agamben’s ‘state of exception’, which affects both political and visual discourses present in the superhero narrative. The term can also be used to describe the subversive potential of comic book narration, where sound effects and various shapes of speech balloons try to create the sound in the reader’s mind, and movement is portrayed by using a string of still, static images.

*Watchmen* is a multilayered work that represents the subversive potential of the superhero in relation to the state, both through political and visual discourses. It should be noted, though, that this potential is quite ambivalent: it can be both reactionary and critical depending on how well the reader can read through the lines. The politics and poetics of the superhero are problematised in the heroes of *Watchmen*, and the state of exception that defines and describes the status of the superhero becomes visible. In the world of superheroes, as Tony Spanakos aptly puts it, the question is no longer “who will watch the watchmen?” but who in fact has the ability to watch the watchmen? Can the superhero with his or her superpowers be truly bound to the state? (2009: 45). According to Dr Manhattan, the answer is no: “They can hardly outlaw me when their country’s defense rests in my hands” (IV: 23). The superhero is beyond the state and cannot be bound by its authority as his actions are motivated by the state’s inability to fight crime.

As Karin Kukkonen insightfully points out, the readers of the comic book can, too, be interpreted as ‘watching the Watchmen’ (2008: 69). The readers interpret the meaning of the comic through its structures, reading the heroes in the competing narratives of *Watchmen*. Like the meaning of the comic book narrative in soundless sound and static movement, the superhero too exists on a threshold, an in-between, ‘watched’ by the reader. The state of exception can be used to characterise the content as well as the form of the superhero comic, both being in a constant conflict caused by the confusion of powers that entangle them, whether those powers are legislative or visual.
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