



UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

Unrealized promises: the subject of postcolonial discourse and the new international division of labor

Aroch Fugellie, P.

Publication date
2010

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Aroch Fugellie, P. (2010). *Unrealized promises: the subject of postcolonial discourse and the new international division of labor*.

General rights

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

De-realized:
The Place from Where I Speak to You Today

As I end, let me circle back to the beginning: to the place from where I speak to you today. Fallen towers, falling idols: what has befallen the ideals and the Ideas of global Progress now that the New World is bereft of its towers, its towering ladder without rungs targeted as the symbol of our times?

Homi Bhabha 2002 (2001): 363

The words in the epigraph were first heard at an auditorium in Berlin in October, 2001. Homi Bhabha's lecture, "Democracy De-realized," was followed by a discussion with his audience. But Bhabha was not personally in Berlin. As a consequence of the events that had taken place in the United States on the 11th of September, 2001, he was unable to fly. Therefore, his lecture was video-projected live from his new residence as recently appointed professor of English Literature and African American Studies at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

In this chapter I analyze Bhabha's lecture as a cultural object. My title, "De-realized," refers to Bhabha's project of de-realizing democracy and, as I will argue, of de-realizing the sphere of the political more generally. It also refers to the video-mediated nature of his lecture and to its status as an online record running on Real Player software. The question of de-realization is also relevant with respect to the aftermath of what has come to be known as "9/11." Exploring the symbolic impact of that event, Slavoj Žižek puts forward that:

If there is any symbolism in the collapse of the World Trade Center towers, it is not so much the old-fashioned notion of the "center of financial capitalism," but rather the notion that the towers stood for the center of *virtual* capitalism, of financial speculations disconnected from the sphere of material production. The shattering impact of the bombings can be accounted for only against the background of the borderline that today separates the digitalized first world from the third world "desert of the Real." (2002a: 387, emphasis in text)

Thus, the contemporary concern with the gap between virtuality and reality stands in for a geo-economic gap. It is not my aim to hyper-inflate "9/11"; in fact, that hyper-inflation is central to the

displacement of political into ontological questions that Žižek denounces. Rather, I center on “9/11” as a place from which Bhabha speaks, because I deem it paradigmatic of a generalized obfuscation of ideological positioning by diverting attention to phenomenal indeterminacy in the New World Order.

With New World Order I refer to the period after the emergence of the New International Division of Labor (NIDL), the start of which Klein dates in 1973 with the implementation in Chile of the first neoliberal state world-wide (2007: 70-80).¹⁵³ The French cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007) characterized this insipient order as one in which mediatized consumer society was gaining ground, increasingly marked by “the abolition of the signified and the *tautology of the signifier*” (1998 [1970]: 124, emphasis in text). More recently, that tautology is signaled by Spanish art critic Pedro Cruz Sánchez, who describes the paradigmatic contemporary image as one that, enclosed on itself, has lost the ability to make its meanings visible (2007: 470). Wayne Hope points to a similar phenomenon in the sphere of economics, where there is nowadays: “a sequence which disrupts the circulation of commodities and the *realization* of capital. Today, digitally driven finance capital *perpetuates self-contained M-M circuits*” (Hope 2006: 282, emphases added).¹⁵⁴

What those theorists observe is part of our daily experience. As Žižek comments:

On today’s market, we find a whole series of products deprived of their malignant property: “Rich & Creamy. Cream without fat: deliciously creamy” ... “Very beery. Beer without alcohol,” “Decaffeinated coffee” ... “Virtual Sex: sex without sex” ... Today’s hedonism combines pleasure with constraint. It is no longer the old notion of the right measure between pleasure and constraint ... It’s something much more paradoxical. It’s a kind of immediate coincidence of the two extremes; as if action and reaction coincide. The very thing which causes damage should already be the counteragent, the medicine. The ultimate example I encountered recently in California is the “chocolate laxative” ... Today ... the commandment of the ruling ideology is: “Enjoy!” (2005: min. 33)¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ According to Fröbel, already in the 1960s there is a change in the conditions under which the valorization of capital occurs, such as communication technologies and advanced transportation (see Fröbel *et al.* 1980: 44). While he locates it in the 1960s and Klein in the 1970s, Bhabha dates the emergence of the “new World Order” after the end of the Cold War (2002: 350. See also 348, 349 and 355. Bhabha also refers to the period as the “new Global Order,” the “new global hegemony,” the “global world,” the “global era,” the “New global World,” or simply “New World” [348, 350, 352, 357, 361, 363]). Since they are only symbolic points aimed at representing a long-term historical transformation, the dates given by the three authors are equally arbitrary. But while Fröbel’s choice accounts for the economic dynamic propelling the change, Bhabha’s accounts for its political expression. Only Klein’s alternative emphasizes the indivisibility of the economic (market forces) and the political (the state) in the New World Order. Choosing when to symbolically determine the beginning of the era is important insofar as each possible date offers a different account of the present, of how this present relates to the past, and of what potential it holds for future constructions.

¹⁵⁴ M-M refers to the short-circuited M-C-M (Money – Commodity – Money) diagram by Marx. Hope is a specialist in communication studies and political economy at Auckland University of Technology (New Zealand).

¹⁵⁵ This text, retrieved from the video documentary about the film’s namesake, is actually articulated as a collage of Žižek’s words from two of his published volumes, a lecture he gave in New York, plus his responses to the film

The consumer goods listed are deprived of their defining characteristics, of the core ingredient by means of which they typically produce enjoyment: alcohol in beer, bodily contact in sex, caffeine in coffee. While deprived of their essential property, they continue to be sold as that which they simulate. The advertising slogans emphasize the paradox between the products' appearances and their essences. Žižek points to the ideological interests that motivate and shape this paradox.

Elsewhere, Žižek discusses the contemporary obsession with cosmic catastrophes and observes that today it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of global capitalism (2005: min. 3.45). What is common to this statement and the quote from Žižek above is that both point at cases in which an ontological question takes precedence over an ideological one. The dilemma between the appearance and essence of products tends to naturalize their function as commodities, just as the threat to existence itself minimizes the question of the possibility of different modes of socio-economic organization. My concern in this chapter is the degree to which and the ways in which a similar "de-realization" of the political takes place in the context of Bhabha's "Democracy De-realized."

The lecture was held as part of Documenta 11, a series of contemporary art exhibitions and conferences in 2001-2002. Under the directorship of art curator Okwui Enwezor, Documenta 11 moved for the first time in its history towards explicit political discussion and the substantial inclusion of non-Western contemporary art. Documenta 11 was divided into a series of Platforms. Bhabha's lecture was part of Platform 1, entitled *Democracy Unrealized*. The purpose of this platform, as Bhabha explained by quoting occasionally from its manifesto, was to invite its participants

to review the challenges of the Global Order in the *wake* of the Cold War ... "to question whether the notion of democracy can still be sustained within the philosophical grounds of Western epistemology" and to ... investigate the idea and ideals of democracy as "an ever-open, essentially unfinishable project that has fallen short of its ideals." (2002: 348-49, emphasis in transcript)¹⁵⁶

interviewer. Part of the text is spoken, part written. The volumes in question are *The Puppet and the Dwarf* (2003), and *For They Know Not What They Do* (1991).

¹⁵⁶ Page references for "Democracy De-realized" are provided whenever possible. For sections edited from the published lecture transcript, time references from the online video are given. The sections edited out of the published text are those in which the author spoke, rather than read, to his audience. Although the lecture was delivered in 2001, the transcript came out in 2002.

Having exposed the general aims of the platform, Bhabha criticizes the “evolutionary, utopian narrative” that is implied by “democracy,” as well as the reproduction of such teleology in the Documenta manifesto (349).

Yet, while Bhabha considers that the problem is inherent in “democracy,” he proposes to solve the problem not so much by modifying democracy itself, but rather by modifying the adjacent term in the platform’s title. Immediately after his critique of democracy’s teleological pitfalls, he states:

Let me propose ... an alternate title: *Democracy De-realized*. I use “de-realization” in the sense of Bertolt Brecht’s concept of “distantiation” – a critical “distance” or alienation disclosed in the very formation of the democratic experience and its expressions of Equality. I also use *déréalisation*, in the surrealist sense of placing an object, idea, or image in a context *not of its making*, in order to defamiliarize it, to frustrate its naturalistic and normative “reference” and see what potential for *translation* that idea or insight has – a translation across genre and geopolitics, territory and temporality. The power of democracy, at its best, lies in its capacity for self-interrogation, and its translatability across traditions in the modern age. If we attempt to De-realize Democracy, by defamiliarizing its historical context and its political project, we recognize not its failure, but its *frailty*, its *fraying edges or limits* ... it is that *fragility, rather than failure or success*, I believe, that fulfils the Documenta 11 manifesto – “[democracy’s] potential for revision, reevaluation of values, extension and creative transformation to keep in step with the 21st century globalizing processes.” (349, emphases in transcript)

Bhabha thus proposes a shift away from “historical context,” “naturalis[m],” “normativ[ity],” and “reference,” and towards “translation,” de-familiarization and trans-contextualization. There is also a shift from temporal categories (“failure,” “success,” “histor[y]”) to spatial ones (“distance,” “edges or limits”).¹⁵⁷ In sum, Bhabha proposes to focus on the possibilities that democracy opens up when one focuses on its potential for translation rather than on the history of its actual forms of realization, or lack thereof.

Bhabha’s trust in the potential opened up by translatability and his distrust in the possibilities opened up by centering on democracy’s historical situatedness may be appreciated from the moment he proposes to modify the adjective rather than the noun in *Democracy Unrealized*. Particularly telling is the specific direction in which he chooses to modify that adjective. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the prefix *un-* serves for “expressing

¹⁵⁷ The shift away from the historical and towards the spatial is characteristically postmodern, as has been signaled by Foucault (1986: 22) and Jameson (1991: 25).

negation;” hence, “unrealized” would simply mean, “not realized.” The *de-* prefix that Bhabha chooses adds

the sense of undoing the action of the simple verb, or of depriving (anything) of the thing or character therein expressed, e.g. *de-acidify* to undo or reverse the acidifying process, to take away the acid character, deprive (a thing) of its acid. (*OED*)

Bhabha’s title is more ambiguous than that of the general conference. In contrast to *un-*, the prefix *de-* that Bhabha prefers has a paradoxical character, similar to the one Žižek detects in the simultaneity of action and counter-action in decaffeinated coffee (2005: min. 33). While the prefix *un-* negates realization, *de-* deprives it of its essence.

The adjective in *Democracy Unrealized* points to a simple inversion of the process of realization. It opens up a space in which democracy may be considered outside of its reality and outside the limits that reality imposes. It describes the concept of democracy as (temporarily) inhabiting a space that is clearly distinct from that of realized democracy. Conversely, “Democracy De-realized” characterizes democracy as undergoing a process of realization while yet depriving that process of its substance. With this choice, Bhabha ignores democracy as an idea made real in historical specificity, yet frames this approach to democracy as something still inscribed – even if obliquely – in the realm of the real.¹⁵⁸ Bhabha states that the obliqueness of one’s approach to the object of critique is crucial. He challenges discourses “that champion social ‘contradiction’ as the a priori motor of historical change,” because he considers them to be “propelled in a linear direction toward the terminus of the State” (353). Invoking Antonio Gramsci’s “philosophy of the part,” the act of de-realization, the critic assures, is best carried out by minorities, which “proceed at an oblique or adjacent angle” to “the qualitative level of the State,” rather than by directly confronting national or global hegemonies (352-53).

The status of the minorities to which Bhabha refers is ambiguous. At times, the notion is grounded as “groups that have existed in a State before becoming beneficiaries of protection” or as “[i]mmigrants and women”; at other times, “minoritarian presence” is also stretched to mean “NGO’s, Truth Commissions, International Courts, New Social Movements, International Aid Agencies, the spirit of Documenta 11 itself” (361, 359). The concept is de-realized to the degree that it becomes synonymous with “third space,” an abstract category designating an epistemological

¹⁵⁸ The persistence of “democracy” in the realm of reality is signaled by the fact that, for Bhabha, “de-realization” is a marker of the distance “disclosed in the very formation of the democratic experience” (349).

vantage point (355, 357, 361). Inspired by the work of W. E. B. Du Bois, Bhabha proposes to understand “minority as a *process of affiliation*, as an ongoing translation,” a definition that he finds “much in advance of the anthropological conception of the minority” (361, emphasis in text).

As I argued in the Introduction, the interest in the deployment of certain terms – such as Bhabha’s “minorities” here – follows not so much from their definition, but from how the instabilities, contradictions, and ambiguities that prompt the concept to escape definition articulate with wider discursive and extra-textual configurations of power. In other words, I do not take issue with what Bhabha calls the term’s lack of naturalistic reference, nor with the degree of abstraction which he grants the concept, but precisely with his *conflation of both* naturalistic *and* abstract deployments of the term, as well as with the function that this conflation fulfils. Likewise, I am concerned with the less evident double status implied in Bhabha’s approach to “democracy.”

I also put pressure on Bhabha’s concern with the “potential for translation” (2002: 349). In framing the lecture itself as a translation (into the video-conference format and then into cyberspace), I intend to trace the limits and possibilities of the idea of translatability that he puts forward. Focusing on “Democracy De-realized” as a situated object rather than on the eloquence of its argument, my exploration is focused on the re-articulation of the lecture’s topic and the reconfiguration of its aesthetics by a publishing medium and communications format that to a large extent exceed the author.

Yet, the author (that is, the conflation between the articulating principle of “Democracy De-realized” and the person named Homi Bhabha) is responsible for the individual historical place from which he speaks.¹⁵⁹ Therefore, my interest in the lecture’s translatability exceeds a merely formal dimension. Bhabha’s critique of teleology, of the state, and of social contradiction as a motor of change, as well as his call for a de-realization of democracy, must all be examined in context. First, this contextualization is relevant because it is only in terms of a contextual universe that a pronouncement makes sense.¹⁶⁰ Second, it is relevant because the Internet is not only literally descriptive of Bhabha’s medium, but also informative of the era in which he publishes. “Democracy De-realized” is spoken not only in and for this era, but also *about* it: it is a reflection on the

¹⁵⁹ As stated in the Introduction, I follow Foucault (1977) to understand the author as the conventional conflation between the articulating principle of a text and the social agent who wrote or imparted it.

¹⁶⁰ “It is the relation between the sign and its environment that makes it a sign. This is the syntactical relation.” Furthermore, “it can only function as a sign if somebody sees and understands it as such. This is the pragmatic relation.” (Bal 1994: 8, 9)

possibilities of democracy in the New World Order, and on the World Trade Center as “the symbol of our times” (363).¹⁶¹

Below, I revisit the day of Bhabha’s lecture. I focus on the video-mediated relationship between Bhabha and Horst Bredekamp, his discussant and physical substitute in Berlin. Finding that this relationship operates as a metaphor, with one person standing in for another, I explore how this particular metaphor operates and of what it may be symptomatic. Benefiting from my discussion of metaphor and metonymy in the previous chapter, here I push further their possibilities as analytical tools beyond psychoanalysis. Proposing that “symptom” is analogous to “metaphor,” I focus on the implications of this analogy for a critique of contemporary ideology. I use these concepts to analyze, first, the live event, and then the relationship between Bhabha’s words, the video-recording, and its online context. Through a semiotic analysis supported on the formal aspects of all four, I investigate the relationships between reality, reality-effect, and “de-realization” in the contemporary (virtual) world, as well as its epistemic and ideological implications for the practice of postcolonial academic discourse.

House of World Cultures

“Democracy De-realized” was video-projected live from Cambridge on the 9th of October, 2001 at the auditorium of the House of World Cultures in Berlin. The follow-up discussion was also facilitated by live video. As a substitute for Bhabha’s physical presence, the German philosopher and art historian Horst Bredekamp was called in at the last minute. He was not supposed to present a paper, but merely to occupy a place on the rather empty stage that faced the audience. While not exactly serving as a panelist, neither was Bredekamp merely another member of the audience. He was expected to be the first to pose a question to Bhabha, and to do so in an extended manner.

When his turn to speak arrived, Bredekamp was primarily critical of the metaphor with which Bhabha had ended his talk. Bhabha had used the fallen twin towers of the World Trade Center as the image expressing the notion of “the Unbuilt.” In Bhabha’s words:

... the times and places in which we live confront our sense of Progress with the challenge of the Unbuilt. The Unbuilt is not a place you can reach with a ladder ... The rubble and debris that survive carry the memories of other fallen towers, Babel for instance, and lessons

¹⁶¹ The specific question of the World Trade Center is dealt with only at the beginning and at the end of Bhabha’s formal speech, yet it is the most important theme in the follow-up discussion. My analysis of the event taking place at the Berlin auditorium concentrates on the discussion that follows the formal part of Bhabha’s speech.

of endless ladders that suddenly collapse beneath our feet. We have no choice but to place, in full view of our buildings, the vision of the Unbuilt – the foundation of *possible* buildings ... other alternative worlds. (2002: 363-64, emphasis in transcript)

Drawing on Walter Benjamin and Karl Schmidt, Bredekamp accused Bhabha of underestimating the psychological impact of the image of the fallen towers, and predicted the inevitable failure of Bhabha's utopian image as a viable concept.¹⁶² Furthermore, Bredekamp suggested that Bhabha's metaphor reduced the towers to a symbol of democracy, ignoring both their historical embeddedness and the more complex meanings that, as a symbol, the towers produced. Bredekamp built his argument around what he described as the much more powerful image of the second tower falling. While the falling of the first tower could be read as an accident, the collapse of the second tower marked what was happening as a momentous historical event.

Bhabha, listening throughout from the other side of the screen, was notably affected. In his defense, he put forth an extensive argument. Somewhere in the middle of that response to Bredekamp, Bhabha interrupted himself and launched into a personal narrative. Although thematically relevant, Bhabha's story was intrusive and not discursively linked to the rest of his arguments. He was agitated, his voice pitched higher than usual, his hand movements more frequent, and he stumbled over his words as he pronounced the following:

I rushed out of my house to have a key made, to have a key to my new home copied in a shop. And there were these people standing there, and as I walked in they were talking about this narrative. I thought they were discussing a film that they had just seen on the ever-present television in hardware stores. So I said "Sorry, what are you talking about? Has something *happened*?" and they said "What do you *mean* 'has something happened?!'" At which point I've no memory of ... except of the fact that I ran all the way home and I turned on the television and I couldn't believe ... so I don't ... I've no memory of how I came to. And then I saw the second tower come down. (2001b: min. 13:30)¹⁶³

Let me imagine, for a moment, Bhabha's intrusive narrative as a symptom. That is to say, let me read this short story Bhabha has told as a metaphor of the event taking place in the Berlin auditorium and its broadcasting screen.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Bredekamp's contributions to the discussion may be heard by accessing Bhabha 2001b.

¹⁶³ This quotation has not been edited. The ellipses indicate the author's hesitation or self-interruption, not missing text.

¹⁶⁴ Strictly speaking, the psychoanalytic counterpart of metaphor is not "symptom," but the process of "condensation," which may be physically expressed as "symptom" (Lacan 1977a: 746–753). However, since in the literary arena "metaphor" is the name for both a process and the material expression of that process, I presently use the term as

In Bhabha's story, neither he nor the people at the hardware store ever discuss *what* has happened. The important thing is that *something* has happened: an event has taken place. Phenomenological reality has been critically intervened in, and the Bhabha of the narrative is overwhelmed by the fact. He rushes home at the moment he hears that something, whatever that something may be, has occurred. He arrives home in time to see the second tower fall, that same tower that Bredekamp has just argued is the sign of the *event* as such, the image that inscribes the attack as a historical occurrence. The narrated Bhabha, as a symptom irrupting in the theorist's answer to Bredekamp, is responding on behalf of his narrator, saying in effect, "I am not underestimating the real dimension of the event; I was present at the moment of the second tower's collapse; I was present at the moment of the historical event." Bhabha twice insists that he even lost his memory because of it, suggesting that his capacity to *represent* reality was cancelled out by the overwhelming *presence* of the event. Yet, the Bhabha in the story does not rush off to the World Trade Center, he rushes home to his television set. The narrator is critical of "the ever-present television in hardware stores" and contrasts his due realization of the fact that something had actually happened with his initial belief that the people he met were "talking about some *narrative*." Nonetheless, his experience is still centrally determined through the mediation of his own television set. Thus, Bhabha, the symptom, answers Bredekamp once more, saying in effect, "I *am* aware of the phenomenological dimension of the event, but that dimension is always already mediated by the symbolic."

Read as a symptom, Bhabha's story does not serve to answer Bredekamp in terms of the different political views implied in their disagreement, but rather presupposes the issue to be a matter of the level of connection with the realm of the real. The irruption of Bhabha's personal narrative is symptomatic of what Gayatri Spivak has described as the reification of phenomenal reality *per se*. As I have intimated in Chapter One, Spivak criticizes Foucault and Deleuze to this effect. She finds that when Deleuze makes such pronouncements as "[r]eality is what actually happens in a factory," he falls into a "representational realism" that "has helped positivist empiricism – the justifying foundation of advanced capitalist neocolonialism – to define its own arena as 'concrete experience,' 'what actually happens'" (1994: 69). What is problematic about this tendency, Spivak argues, is that "[n]either Deleuze or Foucault seem aware that the intellectual within socialized capital, brandishing concrete experience, can help consolidate the international

parallel to "symptom" rather than to "condensation." Such an equation has been established by Nobus (2003: 60), among others. For a full explanation of this parallelism, see "Realization and Displacement" below.

division of labor” (69). In other words, these authors are at risk of allowing their concrete, personal experience to stand in for reality as such. The concept of reality is reified precisely because it has been appropriated by advanced capitalist neocolonialism as a sign of the political per se.

Spivak suggests that this hyper-inflation of concrete experience and the concomitant neglect of ideology as an analytical category produces a schematic opposition between interest and desire. In the work of Foucault and Deleuze, she argues, ideology is conceptualized exclusively as a “being deceived” while desire is handled as an essence, due to its non-specificity and its association with authenticity (67-69, 73). Spivak criticizes the work of these two theorists because they exhibit a “valorization of *any* desire destructive of *any* power” (Spivak 1994: 67, emphases in text).

In other words, a particular desire stands in for desire in general, and a particular power for power as such. In the obliteration of the particular, the political is erased from view. Furthermore, as Mignolo argues, in the hiding of the particular provenance of a universal, “the order of the enunciated” is taken for “the natural order of the world” (2002: 935).¹⁶⁵ Precisely due to this process of naturalization, hegemony is prone to be perceived as an ontological problematic rather than a political contingency.

In criticizing Foucault and Deleuze’s “valorization of *any* desire destructive of *any* power,” Spivak is also pointing to the absence of the category of “interests,” a category that, she later suggests, designates the historical particularity of a given desire (68-69). Therefore, lacking in the work of Foucault and Deleuze is a theory of interests, if not a re-conceptualization of interest in its relationship to desire (1994: 68-69). As may be gathered from my account of “Democracy De-realized” in the introductory section, Bhabha’s lecture shares this lack. His emphasis is not on the historical situatedness of his object of analysis, democracy, but on leaving aside its historical ties in order to open the concept up to creative re-imagination. In that sense, his argument reproduces the schematic opposition between interests and desire, suggesting that for desire (democracy’s potential) to be operative, it is necessary to exclude interests (democracy’s history) from the analysis.

What such a position fails to recognize is that “interests” may concern the study of the subject as much as “desire.” Mieke Bal, revisiting *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1972) by German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, discusses the importance for critical theory of making the question of the subject a central one (1986: 254-255). She observes that “interests” emerges as a

¹⁶⁵ As I reported, for de Man “what we call ideology is precisely the confusion of linguistic with natural reality, of reference with phenomenism” (1982: 206). For Culler ideology is a narrative that justifies a practice by “concealing [its] historical origins and making them the natural components of an interpreted world.” (1973: 471)

crucial category in addressing that question because “every action is guided by interests” (255). As Bal argues, “[f]rom thence opens up the possibility and opportunity of locating the symptoms of the subjacent interests in the texts under study. Are they of emancipation or domination, and what subjects can they be attached to?” (255).¹⁶⁶

Likewise, Spivak values “interest” as a useful category for addressing the question of the subject. According to Spivak, “interest,” operating at a micrological level, points to ideology (which is macrological) in that it “*marks the subject’s empty place* within that process without a subject which is history and political economy” (71, 74; emphasis added).¹⁶⁷ Since interest is a key analytical category in Marx’s theory, Spivak proposes that the subject in Marx’s work is always already a dislocated one, marked by the disjuncture between the subject’s place and the subject in (and *as*) its self-reflexive capacity. In other words, the identity of interests (class position) fails to produce a feeling of community (class consciousness) (Spivak 1994: 70-72).¹⁶⁸ Spivak maintains that Foucault’s and Deleuze’s gesture of invoking that dislocation as a radical discovery while

¹⁶⁶ “... toute action est orientée par des intérêts. De là s’ouvrirait la possibilité et l’opportunité de repérer, dans les textes étudiés, les symptômes des intérêts sous-jacents. Sont-ils d’émancipation ou de domination, et à quels sujets peut-on les rattacher ?” (Bal 1986: 255. Translation mine.) As Bal explicates, Habermas distinguishes three types of interests, each of which is constitutive of a particular form of knowledge. The first of these, technical interest, motivates the natural sciences while the other two, practical and emancipatory interests, guide the cultural sciences (251-52). More specifically, empiric-analytical sciences are guided by a technical cognitive interest that serves to understand, predict and transform the natural environment. Hermeneutic sciences are guided by the practical interest of inter-subjective communication in society; therefore, the practical interest concerns language and is dialogic (252-53). Finally, since “[r]eason and its usage entail the desire of reasoning freely” (“[I]a raison et son usage entraînent le désir de raisonner librement”), a third kind of interest emerges (252). This emancipatory interest is “the interest of responsibility and autonomy” (“l’intérêt de la responsabilité et de l’autonomie”); it is associated to (self) reflection and guides the critical sciences (252). As may be appreciated, here Bal’s account of Habermas’s work, far from opposing interests and desire, points to their continuity. Habermas’s concern with interests as epistemological motivations further complicates the otherwise easy distinction between “interests” as a marker of a subject’s external determinations and “desire” as a marker of the subject’s internal drive.

¹⁶⁷ For Habermas ideology is also associated with interests but in a different sense. As the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* states “Habermas sharply distinguished between two modes of action, ‘work’ and ‘interaction,’ which correspond to enduring interests of the human species. The former includes modes of action based on the rational choice of efficient means, that is, forms of instrumental and strategic action, whereas the latter refers to forms of ‘communicative action’ in which actors coordinate their behaviors on the basis of ‘consensual norms.’ Habermas’s distinction in effect appropriates the classical Aristotelian contrast between *techne* and *praxis* for critical social theory. The result is a distinctively Habermasian critique of science and technology as ideology: by reducing practical questions about the good life to technical problems for experts, contemporary elites eliminate the need for public, democratic discussion of values, thereby depoliticizing the population. The legitimate human interest in technical control of nature thus functions as an ideology – a screen that masks the value-laden character of government decisionmaking in the service of the capitalist status quo. Unlike Herbert Marcuse, who regarded that interest as specific to capitalist society, Habermas affirmed the technical control of nature as a genuinely universal species-interest; unlike Horkheimer and Adorno in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the technical interest did not necessitate social domination.” (Bohman and Rehg 2009)

¹⁶⁸ Although Spivak departs from Althusser’s distinction between “class instinct” (i.e. class consciousness) and “class position,” she develops that distinction through the work of Marx (1994: 70; see also 105, n. 10).

treating economic analyses as outdated reinforces the dislocation of the subject concomitant with the capitalist system of production (75).

Spivak's argument serves not only to appreciate how Bhabha participates in the approach she criticizes, but also helps to read his lecture as an event. This is because Spivak offers the category of interest as a tool to analyze the macrologics of ideology, history and political economy from a local perspective. Hence, I read Bhabha's situatedness in the video-conference through Spivak's terms. Although the analogy here applies almost too obviously, its implications will become clear further below.

In the context of Bhabha's lecture, the simple fact of video-mediation literally stages the dislocation of the subject. Bhabha's actual and representational (nominal) social positions do not coincide. Bhabha is actually in Cambridge, while Horst Bredekamp is representing him at the House of World Cultures. Yet, from the perspective of the Berlin audience, the situation is experienced inversely. Horst Bredekamp is actually there, while Bhabha is represented on a screen. Furthermore, Horst Bredekamp literally "marks [Bhabha's] empty place" in the Berlin auditorium (Spivak 1994: 71). Bhabha's insistence on his connectedness with the realm of reality when narrating his "9/11" experience, as well as the concern with representation that surfaces in his story, may be read in this light.

As I commented in Chapter One, representation is also a central question in Spivak's 1994 (1985) text. She argues that Marx distinguishes between two categories that Deleuze conflates: "representation as 'speaking for,' as in politics, and representation as 're-presentation' as in art or philosophy" (70). These two forms of representation may be distinguished by the German words *vertretung* and *darstellung* respectively. The first refers to representation as an act of persuasion, which is transformative. The second refers to representation as a trope, descriptive rather than transformative (72). Therefore, Spivak argues, Marx discusses a social subject whose consciousness – that is, his self-representation (*darstellung*), which grants him a subject status – and the political representation (*vertretung*) of whom are dislocated (74-75). In this way, not only is the subject in Marx a dislocated entity, but "class" also emerges as a non-essentialist category, since it is defined differentially (in relation to other classes). Hence, to analyze class agency or class transformation is only to propose the replacement of something that is always already conceived as artificial (71, 74). In Spivak's view, Deleuze's work is only pseudo-radical because, as Marx's work suggests to her, in Deleuze's work *vertreten* behaves as *darstellen*. In other words, acts of *darstellung* (such as that of an author writing about subaltern subjects) are often claimed to be acts of political *vertretung*.

Spivak affirms that as long as these two forms of representation are conflated there can be no transformation in critical consciousness. This is because *darstellen*, which is merely descriptive, takes the place of *vertreten*, the transformative (70-73).

In the introductory section, I pointed to the descriptive aspect of Bhabha's arguments. Here, I have concentrated on Bhabha's words as transformative acts. When both aspects are confronted the most apparent contrast is that, in demographic terms, the reach of Bhabha's discourse as a descriptive pronouncement is incommensurably wider than its sphere of influence as an act. This incommensurability is not an exception, but the normal condition of academic discursive practices. According to Spivak, the important question here would be: does *darstellen* stand in for *vertreten* in "Democracy De-realized"? In order to begin suggesting an answer, let me return to my reading of Bhabha's intrusive narrative as a symptom.

Symptoms erupt when something that requires expression finds no other outlet. In the context of Documenta 11, Platform 1, at the House of World Cultures, Bredekamp's critique of Bhabha is utterly unexpected. Both the chairman and the conference's director have treated the postcolonial critic with great deference. Bhabha's way of speaking, here as elsewhere, is meticulous in its politeness, and constantly seeks to avoid confrontation. Bhabha begins his response by agreeing with Bredekamp and only then adds the phrase "on the other hand." Then, he corrects himself by saying "no, there is no 'other hand,' I applaud you with both hands" (2001b: min.11:30). Furthermore, the criticism with which Bredekamp has confronted Bhabha is emblematic of the major and most persistent accusation directed at the postcolonial critic: that he privileges the sign over lived reality to an unsustainable extent.

But something else is going on in that auditorium. In the context of the Berlin conference room, Bhabha is reduced to a sign on the screen. The mild laughter of the people at the auditorium whenever technical hiccups create a lapse in coordination between Bhabha and Bredekamp or between Bhabha and the chairman underline this fact. Bhabha is no longer just accused of privileging the sign, he has turned into one. He is operating as the metaphor of himself as a sign. The bodily Bhabha is literally displaced, and a sign of Bhabha, the sign-man, stands in his place.

But the image on the screen is not the only thing standing in for Bhabha. His physical substitute, Bredekamp, is literally occupying the place of the former. In this way, Bredekamp is not only accusing Bhabha of disregarding the importance of the phenomenological dimension of reality, he is also embodying Bhabha's inability to access that realm. Bredekamp becomes a metaphor of the dimension that Bhabha, once and again, desires or is desired to access, but, once and again, fails

to access. Pushing my interpretation to a more schematic level, it may be said that Bhabha occupies the place of desire, which is that of potential, while Bredekamp occupies that of interest, which is defined by Spivak as the mark of the subject's empty place in systemic processes (1994: 71).

While the texts of both Spivak and Bhabha that I have analyzed here are works in postcolonial theory, their perspectives with regard to the roles of ideology, interest and desire differ enormously. The differences between the two may be associated with – yet by no means limited to – the different times in which they were produced. While Spivak's piece first came out in 1985, before the fall of the Berlin wall, Bhabha's piece, written in 2001, right after the events of the 11th of September, appears well into the "New World order" and, as its author announces, is to be taken as a reflection on it (2002: 350; see also 349). Yet, while reflecting on an era that claims the title of "post-ideological" for itself, thus attempting "to mask the very ideological gesture that is the basis of its claim" (Pessoa 2003: 486), Bhabha proposes to focus on desire and leave aside the question of interest. Consequently, he leaves aside the question of ideology.

The *OED* defines "interest" as "the relation of being *objectively* concerned in something" (emphasis added). Rather than focusing on the relations by which people are objectively concerned in democracy, Bhabha celebrates approaches that are "less focused on signifying the determinants of global capitalism and more open to the representation/enunciation of the 'right to have rights' as an urgent and open legal and humanitarian question" (Bhabha 2002: 358).¹⁶⁹ The lack of commitment to specificity that Bhabha displays is constitutive of his call for de-realization. This lack of historical specificity implies the displacement of interest as an analytical category. Meanwhile, Bhabha makes desire central for determining the social agent that is best fit to de-realize democracy: minorities. He writes:

¹⁶⁹ The fact that "interest" implies a notion of objectivity may well account for its decreasing popularity in contemporary discourses. The distrust of discourses that presuppose a certain notion of objectivity is largely the result of the questioning of the possibility of unmediated access to objective reality brought about in science, at least since Albert Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity developed at the beginning of the 20th century (Einstein 1985). Yet outside physics, the question has oftentimes mutated from the impossibility of unmediated access to objective reality to one of the non-existence of objective reality itself. This idealist appropriation is well exemplified in the popular film *What the Bleep do we Know?!*, which employs a documentary style and extended reference to quantum physics to justify its claims. The documentary format and scientific jargon produce a realism that, as Bal argues, "may serve the interests of the dominant moral and political structures ... Drawing attention to the reality status of the represented object, it obscures its precise, local meanings" (1996: 8-9). When "interest," (described by Spivak [1994] as that which marks the subject's empty place in history and economy) is taken into account, the idealist conclusions that the film reaches find alternate explanations. *What the Bleep* was produced by a new age church based in Washington State and known as Ramtha's School of Enlightenment. The writers and directors are all also members of this church. The film has become a blockbuster, distributed in over 30 countries and received a number of awards.

Minoritization, now, is not simply that abject condition of being “half stateless,” as Hannah Arendt once described it. Today the identification with minoritarian causes constitutes a form of aspirational activism, committed to an agenda of intercultural and transgroup emancipation. (358)

Hence, Bhabha privileges class consciousness over class position. According to Spivak’s definitions of these two above, Bhabha’s choice marks his position as idealist (1994: 69, 105). Specifically, Bhabha’s use of “aspirational activism” points to the central role played by desire, as an *uncontested* analytical category, in the foundation of that idealism. My own interest in this section – and here I use the term deliberately in Habermas’s sense – has been to explore the implications of Bhabha’s privileging of that category in his exchange with Bredekamp. In the next section, I turn to the online publication of his lecture.

Real Player

I now turn to the record of Bhabha’s lecture on the Internet; a context difficult to define. The video is surrounded by fragments of superimposed information, and is only obliquely associated, by way of added references, with the socio-historical context in which the event originally took place. Those references do not co-exist with the recorded lecture. They only appear as options or hyperlinks, promising mutually exclusive, deferred and fractured sets of information. Because of its virtuality, the video recording of Bhabha’s lecture holds an intricate and destabilizing relation with space as a physical category, thus subverting the basic coordinates necessary for the definition of context. Here, I deploy the context of the recorded lecture through spatio-temporal coordinates that do not coincide with those through which Homi Bhabha, the video-recording, or the Internet discursively position themselves. This lack of coincidence indicates that my portrayal of the object’s context is, like any other, ultimately a naturalization of “framing.” This is why I persist in the usage of the term “context” to refer to the *effect* produced by framing.¹⁷⁰

Let us now take a look at the recorded lecture as I encountered it in cyberspace. In its potential state, my object of study is just another hyperlink on its hosting page. Once clicked, the link opens a new window, in the center of which “Democracy De-realized” starts running. Framing

¹⁷⁰ I benefit from Bal’s distinction between “context” as associated to conflation of origin with articulation, and as a noun referring to something static rather than an event, on the one hand, and, on the other, to “framing” as producing an event, predicating an object and rendering “the agent who is responsible, accountable, for his or her acts.” (2002: 135; see also 133-138)

this new window, so-called user-friendly software enhances its contours to simulate the three-dimensional borders of a television set. Augmenting that effect, a series of control buttons on the lower border serve their iconically stated purposes. At the top left corner, the software's brand name states, with an adjective, the effect it seeks: Real Player. To the surfer's preference, this window may be amplified to fill the entire area of the computer screen, at which point the emulated frame becomes redundant and the cyberspace is offered the option of hiding it from view. In automatic mode, the Real Player window occupies only part of the computer screen, and its frame cannot be excluded. As a result, the video appears to be superimposed, playing against the background of the hosting page.

Amplified to the full-screen, frame-less mode, the video becomes virtually context-less. But even in the automatic mode, allowing for the widest array of simultaneously available information, the virtual context is composed by only two items: the window borders, literally framing the screening as "Real," and the uncovered fragment of the host page. Besides the homogeneously red background of the uncovered section, there are sixteen elements (icons and/or text) on the page. Fourteen of these sixteen elements are not informative in themselves but hyperlinks.¹⁷¹ Hence, my object's virtual context, in the spatial continuum, is extremely narrow, constituted by two single elements: a frame and a series of hyperlinks.

Significantly, one of the two elements directly contiguous with my object is a frame. Outside cyberspace, a frame is the wooden, metal or plastic border delineating the place paintings, mirrors, or screens occupy in space. But a frame not only marks the distinction between surrounding space and the material space occupied by the object, it also distinguishes between real space and the virtual space represented at the object's surface. The frame calls attention to the fact that the illusory reduplication or representation of space is an artifice, not co-extensive with reality. The Real Player frame profits from this effect, and thus stages the screen it encloses as (ontologically) discontinuous with the surface that surrounds it. By indicating that a screen lies within its boundaries, it simultaneously denotes the rest of the computer's screen as *non-screen*. Hence, the frame enclosing Bhabha's video-lecture authenticates the remainder of the virtual space as real.

The software frame competes with the material frame of the computer to deploy the video's context as constituted by the virtual space that lies beyond the video's limits. It draws attention away from the computer frame, which defines my object's context at the juncture of socio-historical

¹⁷¹ The two remaining inscriptions read: "March 15 – April 20, 2001 Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna" and "October 9 – 30, 2001 House of World Cultures, Berlin." These were the two venues to successively host Platform 1 of Documenta 11.

reality and virtuality. In so doing, it also removes focus from the surfer's understanding of virtual space as a technological effect. While the Real Player benefits from the effects of the frame to stage different levels of reality, the screen, the frame and the context it deploys are actually continuous. This is precisely the modus operandi of the virtual, defined as that which is so "in essence or effect, although not formally or actually; admitting of being called by the name so far as the result or effect is concerned" (*OED*).

According to this definition, a virtual object seeks to appropriate the name of a corresponding real object by simulating its effects. Consequently, virtuality can be understood as that which usurps the name of reality by simulating its effects. "Democracy De-realized," the lecture's title, is the widest framework placed around the discourse by Bhabha. It becomes significant in view of cyberspace's exacerbation of the rhetoric of the real.¹⁷² As I have suggested, Bhabha proposes the term "de-realized" as an alternative to the Platform's title that, by abstracting the idea of democracy from its historical reality and ideological origins, may be creatively translated and strategically employed by minorities. In this way, Bhabha privileges the possibilities democracy opens up when it is strategically employed in terms of its effects. In both Bhabha's lecture and its virtual environment, effect is prioritized over cause – whether it be the effect of reality over the technological and social causes producing that effect, or the strategic effect of democracy's translatability over the geo-economic causes for democracy's situated materialization or foreclosure.

By "de-realizing" democracy, Bhabha proposes a suspension of disbelief that allows for the re-imagination of pre-existing concepts to creatively rearticulate the socio-historical realities that they name. As I have mentioned, he insists on the need to move away from phenomenal understandings of categories such as "minorities," proposing instead that "minoritarian presence is a sign of 'intermediate living' within the history of the present, that is neither gigantic nor small, neither global nor local" (361). Towards the same end he uses the image of the attacked World Trade Center not in relation to the historical cause of its destruction, but to the possibilities it opens up as a virtual category. Recall Bhabha's description of the scene:

The times and places in which we live confront our sense of Progress with the challenge of the *Unbuilt*. The Unbuilt is not a place you can reach with a ladder ... What you need once your towers have fallen is a perspicuous vision that reveals a space, a way in the world ... Neither destruction nor deconstruction, the Unbuilt is the creation of a *form* whose virtual

¹⁷² See Hope (2006) concerning "real time" terminology.

absence raises the question of what it would mean to start again in the same place, as if it were elsewhere, adjacent to the site of a historic disaster. (363-64, emphases in transcript)

Just as in the case of “minoritarian presence,” “the Unbuilt” is only defined through oblique and generalized references to historical location. Bhabha’s description of a potentially new “way [of being] in the world” relies on vague spatial references. Just in the quote above, we find “global,” “local,” “site,” “elsewhere,” and the repetition of “space” and “place.” Yet these references suggest imagined rather than physical spaces, while the image as a whole evokes potentiality as such. Hence, “the Unbuilt” may be envisaged as a virtuality, which is, as the *OED* establishes, “a potentiality” or that which is “apart from external form or embodiment,” in other words, as that which is apart from the phenomenal realization of being.

The association between Bhabha’s notion of “the Unbuilt” and virtuality is emphasized when we recall “Building Dwelling Thinking,” an essay that, as Heidegger himself announces, “traces building back into that domain to which everything that *is* belongs” (1975: 145, emphasis in text). Extrapolating Heidegger’s description of “building,” Bhabha’s category of “the Unbuilt” can be understood to function as “that domain to which everything that *is not* belongs.” The way in which Bhabha proposes a new beginning by way of a potential spatiality can be read as a commentary on Heidegger’s notion of building as the domain of that which *is*, as well as on Heidegger’s systematic exploration of being in terms of word-concepts belonging to the semantic field of the spatial, such as “space,” “site,” “location,” “bridge,” “boundary,” “*stadion*,” “*spatium*,” and “*extensio*” (Heidegger 1975: 152-158).

Like Heidegger, Bhabha grants such nouns the active qualities usually associated with verbs. Consider, for example, his opposition of “the Unbuilt” with “a place you can reach with a ladder” and his equation of it with “a perspicuous vision that reveals a space, a way in the world,” in light of Heidegger’s definition of “space” as “something that has been made room for, something that is cleared and free,” or his characterization of “boundary” as “that from which something *begins its presencing*” (Bhabha: 363; Heidegger: 154, emphasis in text). Yet Bhabha’s discussion differs from Heidegger’s in that it is concerned with the potentiality rather than the actuality of being. A methodological difference accompanies this conceptual one. While Heidegger’s associations are the result of meticulous etymological investigation into the words that he develops as concepts, Bhabha’s associations are of an apparently more random nature. The etymological rigor of Heidegger’s procedure grounds his associations for, as Spivak suggests, it points to “the traces of

the empirical entailed by the word,” because “words are in the history of language” (1994: 28, 27). Bhabha’s disinclination to enter the terrain of the etymological may be thus seen as the procedural counterpart of the position he discursively seeks to argue with the use of the image.

Bhabha’s move away from phenomenal and teleological understandings of reality in the case of both “minoritarian presence” and “the Unbuilt” is mostly phrased in negative terms, as in, “it is neither [this] nor [that]” (361, 364). In his description of “the Unbuilt,” Bhabha uses a logical contradiction: “virtual absence” (364). In logical terms, the Unbuilt can only be a virtual category because it does not exist *yet*. It is a virtual *presence*, and an *actual* absence. By inverting the terms, Bhabha cancels out their logic and opens up a paradox. Hence, his definitions, relying upon negation and contradiction, do not state what the two concepts are, but seek to produce the *effect* of what they are in the audience. Furthermore, “virtual absence” does not describe “the Unbuilt” directly, but describes “a form,” while “the Unbuilt” is described as the “creation” of that “form.” Earlier, Bhabha has characterized it as “a perspicuous vision” that reveals a further “space, a way in the world” (363). He thus deploys different levels of reality within the virtual category of the Unbuilt. While his emphasis on effect is parallel to the *modus operandi* of virtuality, his layering of the virtual into differing degrees of reality is analogous to that of the software by which the lecture is played.

The role of the software frame is to position the virtual as real. Its mode of operation is self-referential: by staging the effect of different levels of reality *within* itself, it relativizes the concept of reality as such. By resituating object and context within the boundaries of the monitor’s screen, it removes attention from the context extending beyond the computer screen. It attempts to disrupt history’s sovereignty over the realm of “context” and “the real.” Translated into this technological support, where socio-historical reality is already displaced to the margins, Bhabha’s call for “de-realization” plays out consonantly. Bhabha’s call may be read as a call for a “willing suspension of disbelief,” a call for a momentary movement away from socio-historical reality, to return to it from a different perspective.¹⁷³ But, framed by Real Player, it also translates as an enduring and normative condition of understanding (democracy), in cyber-cultural space.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ On the “willing suspension of disbelief,” see fn. 64.

¹⁷⁴ Here I use “framed” in a sense that had been latent throughout the section. In so doing, I take from Mieke Bal’s analysis of the concept in its double meaning as placing a frame around an object, on the one hand, and “setting [it] up” on the other (2002: 136-37, 143, 141-155, esp. 147. See also my fn. 139 above).

Hyperlinked Space-Time

In the previous section, I indicated that the immediate context of my object is composed of two items: the window borders, literally framing the screening as “real,” and the topography of hyperlinks on its hosting page. I now turn to the second element. Hyperlinks are references leading to other, mutually exclusive, sites on the web. Hence, my object’s virtual context extends primarily in time rather than space. “Context” here does not so much imply synchronic co-existence, but rather succession in time. It can only be defined in terms of routes of access. The routes of access to “Democracy De-realized” are multiple and resist definition beyond individual experience. Any point along the route holds various interwoven chains in a simultaneous and potential form. The interconnectivity of elements appears provisional and ephemeral, dependent on the user’s input into a search engine.

But although routes of access appear to be arbitrary, online research must take recourse to search engines, which act as gatekeepers to the information. The most widely used search engines today offer results in the right-hand column that are paid for by the featured companies and itemized according to the law of the highest bidder. The results shown on the left follow a similar dynamic but employ a different currency. The search engine submits matching documents to mathematical analysis. The ordering of the results is not random, the most heavily linked-to sites gain primacy. A heavily linked-to site “functions as an online authority which makes and unmakes the reputation of related sites”; it is not just a matter of being linked to, but of being linked to by “other important (*i.e.* heavily linked-to) resources” (Ciolek 1999: 13). This process is strengthened by the search engine. The more a site is linked to, the more likely it is to be made visible by the search engine and, therefore, the more likely it is to be linked to again.¹⁷⁵

Thus, a search engine’s mechanism structures access according to pre-established criteria of legitimacy. The offered results respond to individual choice only metonymically, always already structured by those of the community. Given that this community of Internet users is highly specific, the sites presented to the individual user will automatically be filtered by the geo-culturally particular interests of a global elite. This bias is significant with respect to the historical origin of

¹⁷⁵ Ciolek refers to *Google*, the most widely used third generation search engine since 1998. He holds that earlier search engines treated cyberspace as a homogenous whole, scanning the titles and first paragraphs of documents within their reach (30-50%) and retrieving matches. The characteristic technological development of third generation search engines is that they treat cyberspace as constellations of interlinked groups of documents, submitting the cluster of crossed-linked documents matching the search input to iterative mathematical analysis (1999).

the Internet and is most clearly expressed in the predominance of (U.S.) English online.¹⁷⁶ The cumulative dynamic of the search engine tends to homogenize rather than diversify the already existing bias. But these structural traits are not clearly visible, obscured as they are by the rhetoric which emphasizes the Internet's non-hierarchic heterogeneity and the cybernaut's "free choice" within an undifferentiated global continuum of information.¹⁷⁷

In my Introduction, I referred to Brennan's "Statelessness: that is, the American State" to point to the persistence of the state today, despite its alleged caducity (2006: 228-232). Nowhere can the double status of an apparent statelessness underpinned by the hegemony of a single state be seen as clearly as on the Internet that, even if widely praised for its democracy of access, is unequal according to statistics.¹⁷⁸ The disproportion that such statistics display does not describe the hegemony of the U.S.A. as a state. Nonetheless, it is informative of it, particularly when we do not restrict our understanding of the state to its traditional political institutions. As Naomi Klein argues, the contemporary phenomenon of the "corporatist state" functions as an increasingly hollow structure infiltrated by private economic enterprise (2007: 372-81, 502). The geo-economic bias of Internet users is one more reason why, even if as discursive icons, hyperlinks emphasize connection, multiplicity and simultaneity, as operative mechanisms, they perpetually *defer* connection, multiplicity and simultaneity. They are at once the currency structuring the hierarchy of online visibility and the rhetorical device that obscures its underlying mechanisms by giving the impression of agency and free choice.

In the context of the Internet, where the local is framed as global, the discourse of "Democracy De-realized" institutes a critical distance between the viewer and the discursive effects of the links. By insisting on the fact that the global world is not as global as it appears, and on the

¹⁷⁶ "Since the internet was created in the 1960s as a military-research project, America has coordinated the underlying infrastructure ... Today the internet is managed by a private sector group which America helped to set up in 1998 and still oversees" (Emmot 2005: 1). Furthermore, "American/English makes up 80 % of the language of Web sites" (Li and Kirkup 2005: 3). See also Leamer and Storper 2001, and Bidima 2006.

¹⁷⁷ The role of hyperlinks as online currency and their accumulative processes hold more than an analogous relation to capitalist dynamics. Chesebro (2003) examines how major companies online become stronger at the expense of small sellers, which tend to disappear by the very same selection processes described above. On the imagery concerning the Internet in everyday life from a social science perspective, see Contarello and Sarrica (2005). Concerning this rhetoric as deployed from within the Internet and its relation to the discourse of late capitalism from a communication studies/philosophical perspective, see Hope (2006).

¹⁷⁸ Research carried out by Canclini points to the fact that 51.3% of surfers were *native* English speakers in the year 2000. The next highest percentage was that of Japanese native speakers, with only 7.2% of the total. Chinese and Spanish, the first and second languages with most native speakers worldwide, constituted only 5.2% and 6.5% of the total cyber-population respectively (García Canclini 2004: 186). A related statistic, published by the World Summit on the Information Society held in Geneva in 2003, states that 67% of Internet users reside in Europe and the U.S.A., while 97% of the people living in Africa have no access at all to the Internet (García Canclini 2004: 181).

fact that a transnational civil society, universal human rights and democracy are potential promises, to be strategically used in the present, “Democracy De-realized” operates as a critique of the simulacrum that is staged by its hyperlinked environment. Bhabha addresses the rhetoric of connectivity and simultaneity that characterizes contemporary technologies: “most writings on the *expanse* of globalization emphasize its *excessive* temporality ... the speeds through which we live in the air, on screen, in the circuits of cyberspace,” while confronting that rhetoric to what it obliterates: “the slow pace of illegal migration and contraband, the painstaking bureaucracies of asylum applications, and the fact that 80 percent of the world’s cargo still travels by sea” (2002: 354).

Yet, “Democracy De-realized” at times seems to support the conceptions it criticizes. To justify this claim, I return to my exploration of the lecture as a cultural practice, focusing on the deferral between Bhabha and his Berlin audience, a disadvantage to be overcome performatively by the lecturer. Bhabha deals with the situation by openly acknowledging and reflecting on the mediated nature of the encounter:

I don’t know whether you can see me and hear me clearly. I’d like to have some sense that you are receiving me. Can you hear me? [*applauses*] Thank you, thank you. Well, if you can see me, as no doubt you can, I thought I would come to you from the country of the Bald Eagle, dressed in my white suit, looking like a white dove, a dove of peace. Unfortunately, that was not to be. (2001a: min. 2)

As may be gathered from the references to “the country of the Bald Eagle” and “a white dove, a dove of peace,” the lecturer seeks to diminish the distance between him and his audience, not only by calmly acknowledging the difficulties imposed by video-mediation, but also by recurring to a shared common sense by means of clichés. Clichés function as shortcuts, brief references or wide generalizations, the meaning of which is to be completed on the basis of a common cultural experience across the Cambridge-Berlin divide, thus overcoming the space-time deferral.¹⁷⁹

The clichés employed by Bhabha reveal the double status of the place from which he speaks, because they require that a particular cultural experience or mode of expression be recognized

¹⁷⁹ This strategy is also a result of the conventions required for orally delivered theory; a more “informal” tone is usually expected. It is also a result of the relatively short format of the lecture, not allowing for extensive elaboration. Stock phrases allow Bhabha to bring forth a series of implications that need not be extensively justified in their ambiguity. Without the time and space to draw a map of the geo-historically differentiated agents involved in “democracy,” yet nonetheless requiring to make such a point to further his arguments, the lecturer takes recourse to generalizations, such as “[t]hose in the North and South ... that have been the victims of Democracy De-realized” or “[o]nly those societies of the North and South, the East and West that ensure the widest democratic participation ... ” (350, 348)

immediately elsewhere (as in “Bald Eagle” or “a white dove”), or that an abstract expression be automatically associated with a geographically or politically specific reality (as in “at the heart of democracy,” “the victims of Democracy De-realized,” “the right to have rights” [350, 358]). Sometimes, the points of view implied in stock phrases are so arbitrary, yet so widely accepted, that they appear as universals, while indicating the global hegemony of a particular. Ramón Grosfoguel, refers to this as “abstract universalism:” a mode of universalizing that hides the historical particularity of its locus of enunciation (2008b: 209-10).¹⁸⁰

A case in point is Bhabha’s use of “Americans” as shorthand for “citizens of the United States of America” (347). To be operative, the abbreviation depends on the assurance that the listener’s geo-cultural bias is such that the figurative meaning will prevail over the primary sense of the word. The signifier “Americans” will not simply recall its referent but will be displaced to reach another signifier denoting a different referent. This course is so naturalized that the displaced referent comes up automatically. The usage of “Americans” in Bhabha’s sense is often associated in Latin America with the Monroe Doctrine. Regardless of intentions, Bhabha’s choice of “Americans” as descriptive of U.S. citizens is thus inevitably inscribed in the struggle for hegemony over the signification of the word.¹⁸¹

As the names of intergovernmental associations illustrate, amongst countries in the Americas, the adjective “American” primarily serves to refer to things or persons belonging to the continent as a whole.¹⁸² At first sight, the fact that the U.S. government employs the term in this way in its formal international relations with other states on the continent appears to be at odds with the prevalence of its common usage as limited to a specific country. Yet, that equivocation is operative. This is exemplified in a Doctrine that, originating as a protectionist measure against European interference in the Americas, was then used to establish the U.S.A.’s sphere of influence abroad. Its Roosevelt Corollary, declaring the U.S.A.’s *right to intervene militarily* in Latin America, magnifies the equivocation operative in the Monroe Doctrine’s paradigmatic phrase:

¹⁸⁰ Grosfoguel endorses a different kind of universalizing which he refers to as “concrete universalism.” Concrete universalism operates by means of a horizontal relationship between all of its particulars (2008b: 209-10). He considers that abstract universalism is the form of universalizing proper to the Western philosophical tradition; he traces it in the works of Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Laclau and Mouffe. He considers concrete universalism as an *alter-native* form of universalizing and traces the concept in the works of Aimé Césaire, Enrique Dussel and the Zapatistas.

¹⁸¹ On the ideological struggle over signification, see Laclau 1997.

¹⁸² A salient example is the Organization of American States (OAS).

“America [the country] for the Americans [U.S.A. citizens]” or “America [the continent] for the Americans [U.S.A. citizens].”¹⁸³

A final example: Bhabha uses “September 11” as shorthand for “the 11th of September, 2001, New York.” The abbreviation, popularized by the U.S.A. press and exported throughout the globe, is shaped according to the specific date notation system of the country. The abbreviation is possible based on the fact that location is so obvious, so universal, that it need not be mentioned. In other words, that location functions as the zero point of enunciation.¹⁸⁴ The 1973 coup in Chile that, according to Klein, marks the inauguration of the neoliberal era, which is the object of concern of “Democracy De-realized,” also took place on an 11th of September (Klein 2007: 70-80). In Spanish it translates into *el 11 de septiembre*, an established phrase by which the 1973 coup is usually recalled, and which the most recent usage has tended to erase. The new shorthand thus denotes a shallow memory, a shallowness of memory that is reminiscent of the Internet itself.¹⁸⁵ The U.S.-plotted and financed military overthrow of the first democratically elected Marxist president in world history also marks the limits of what Bhabha describes as democracy’s “translatability” across “genre and geopolitics, territory and temporality” (349). Bhabha’s emphasis on the possibilities allegedly opened up by the strategic appropriation of democracy in the Third World is made at the cost of ignoring the role that interests – in Spivak’s understanding of the term – have actually played in foreclosing the fulfillment of such projects in Chile or Nicaragua, for example (Spivak 1994: 71, 74). In both the “September 11” phraseology and in Bhabha’s understanding of democracy, history functions as the constitutive exclusion.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ The Doctrine was issued in 1823 by U.S.A. President James Monroe. Its Roosevelt Corollary states: “It is not true that the United States feels any land hunger ... If a nation shows that it knows how to act with reasonable efficiency and decency ... if it keeps order and pays its obligations, it need fear no interference from the United States. Chronic wrongdoing ... may, in America as elsewhere, require intervention by some civilized nation, and in the Western Hemisphere the adherence of the United States to the Monroe Doctrine may force the United States, however reluctantly ... to the exercise of an international police power.” Furthermore, by such intervention, Roosevelt claims, “much more good will be done than by any effort to give them political power.” ([Theodore] Roosevelt 1905: 33, 41)

¹⁸⁴ The more popular term “9/11” was resisted by some printed media, especially British; the BBC even resisted the “September 11” usage, employing instead: “11th of September,” but finally settled for the U.S.A. syntax in written-out form. On a separate issue, the zero point of enunciation could be defined as the “indexical point of reference,” “the point that determines all further” acts of enunciation (Ehrat 2004: 302, 136).

¹⁸⁵ The erasure of the Spanish by the English version of the emblematic date echoes the procedures of the English language online. (See Wasserman 2002: 312-13). My object of study, “Democracy De-realized”, was not unaffected by the web’s short-lived memory. During my most intensive period of research, the hosting page – which had been online for five years – suddenly disappeared. My “object” simply ceased to exist. Although it was later reinstalled, I learnt how ephemeral it was, and how unreliable as an “object.” My framing of “Democracy De-realized” as an event is significantly informed by the period of its erasure.

¹⁸⁶ As Ariel Dorfman, a Chilean-U.S.A. writer and academic at Duke, has pointed out, amnesia is a constitutive feature of a nation state that wishes to erase or to rewrite its ongoing imperialist history (2004: xiii-xvi). In *Other Septembers*,

The commonplace abbreviations that I have addressed are rhetorical devices that privilege an economic use of language. Although reference and deferral are characteristic of language, the particularity of these devices lies in the fact that not even their primary sense can be achieved without recourse to a source lying beyond their dictionary definitions and textual limits. To the extent that clichés withhold a meaning that, without being entirely present, may be immediately discharged by what is present, and to the extent that they are a form of shorthand deployed to facilitate the discharge of information across non-contiguous space, they are analogous to electronic hyperlinks.

The World Wide Web presents itself as universal. It may more adequately be defined as the global hegemony of a particular. Likewise, there is inconsistency between Bhabha's critique of how the local is framed as global and his reliance on the hegemonic particulars that stock phrases entail to get that point through. Furthermore, both hyperlinks and the stock phrases are marked by the U.S.A. as the locus of enunciation or origin, and in both cases this locus is obscured. Hence, the clichés function on the basis of the same double standard that hyperlinks display.

There is, however, one crucial difference. The rhetoric obscuring the structuring principles of the linguistic shortcuts is not constitutive of them (as in the case of hyperlinks), but an effect of the contrast between their implications and the wider arguments in which they are embedded. Even when his choices denote his priorities, Bhabha as an individual is not to be held responsible for the gap produced between the ideas he proposes and the cultural charge of the words he employs to convey them.¹⁸⁷ As I have argued with reference to Spivak, the phrases denote "the traces of the empirical entailed by the word," for "words are in the history of language" (1994: 28, 27). Bhabha's choice of (historically and empirically specific) words points to his own historically and empirically specific relation to language. Hence, the translation of "Democracy De-realized" into a hyperlinked environment brings to the fore the problematic of the speaker's inscription in a language that

Many Americas, Dorfman claims that in the United States this "systematic forgetting of history" has become more urgent since the 11th of September, 2001, because the event threatened to confront the nation with the terrifying realities the country had exported abroad, but had so far been exempt of itself (2004: xiv, xvi). Dorfman expresses his amazement not only at how the widely documented U.S.A. participation in the Chilean coup was erased from the public sphere and collective memory of U.S. citizens, but also how, in the face of U.S. military intervention in Nicaragua, a war "waged in the name of freedom and democracy," they "seemed not to know that for more than a century their nation had done its utmost to destroy those very ideals in Nicaragua." (xiv)

¹⁸⁷ Since language is shared and inscribed in history, no speaker can entirely avoid usages that might be contrary to her stated claims. Yet the places where a speaker chooses to use a word regardless of its implications, or to use it but to take a distance from it through open discussion, or to avoid the word altogether, denotes either her conscious priorities or her cultural inscription. Thus, for example, despite the urgency of establishing a swift and fluent communication across the obstacle of video-mediation, Bhabha never employs the generic masculine. Likewise, Bhabha uses the generic "we" throughout his text, but only after clarifying its pitfalls at the beginning of the lecture (2002: 348).

exceeds him; his inscription in what Spivak terms “a mother tongue ... a language with a history” (1993a: 27). Before inquiring further into Bhabha’s inscription in a specific language, I turn to the problem of the subject’s place in language as such.

Realization and Displacement

In accounting for the video-mediated discussion between Bhabha and Bredekamp, I interpreted Bhabha’s intrusive narrative as a symptom. I suggested that symptom and metaphor are equivalent. Both entail processes of realization, the symptom traditionally manifesting itself in the body, metaphor in language. Jacques Lacan phrases it as follows: “The double-triggered mechanism of metaphor is the very mechanism by which symptom, in the analytic sense, is determined ... - a symptom being a metaphor in which flesh or function is taken as the signifying element” (1997a: 751).¹⁸⁸

As elaborated in Chapter One, the Lacanian conception of metaphor, which I follow, is the understanding of it as the perfect match between signifier and signified. Metaphor is a materialization – or, more properly, a realization – of the signified in the signifier; similarly with the symptom. In *Jacques Lacan*, a book prefaced by the French psychoanalyst himself, Belgian psychology scholar Anika Lemaire writes: “the symptom is a formation of the unconscious in the sense that, in it, the true speech of the unconscious is translated into an enigmatic signifier.” Lemaire also comments that “the process whereby the symptom becomes fixed is that of metaphor: the substitution in a signifier-signified relation of signifier S’ for another signifier S, which falls to the rank of signified” (1977: 206). Hence, in the symptom, as in metaphor, the missing (i.e. the unpronounced or unpronounceable) signifier is able to find expression and surface in the material support of language by crossing the S/s bar, becoming the signified of another (more manageable) signifier.

Although metonymy is also a process of substitution, it is rarely equated with the symptom in the Lacanian tradition. As discussed in Chapter One, Lacan takes metaphor and metonymy as describing intra-linguistic relationships. Metonymy always implies a horizontal transfer from one signifier to another. Since only metaphor describes the vertical transfer between manifest and subjacent linguistic terms, it alone is equated with symptom, characterized by a substitution of a

¹⁸⁸ Likewise in “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis,” Lacan states that “[a] symptom here is the signifier of a signified that has been repressed from the subject’s consciousness. A symbol written in the sand of the flesh and on the veil of Maia ... ” (2004: 68)

repressed or suppressed for a nameable signifier. Dany Nobus, a specialist in psychoanalysis at Brunel University in the U.K., describes the implications of this conception for clinical psychoanalysis:

Lacan believed that analysts ought to target their interpretations at the *connections between signifiers* in their analysands' associations, and *not at the meaningful links between signifiers and signifieds* (S XI, p. 250). Put differently, he urged the analyst neither to ratify or condemn the meaning of an analysand's symptoms (...), nor to try to alleviate these symptoms by suggesting a new meaning (...), but to elicit analytic effects through the intentional displacement of the analysand's discourse. *The notion "displacement" is synonymous here with the shifting connection between signifiers and also with the rhetorical trope of "metonymy"...* By demanding that the analyst formulate *metonymical interpretations* – undoing and not fortifying meaning, revealing and not concealing it – Lacan championed a purportedly more effective tactic for psychoanalytic treatment than any other, accepted techniques of interpretation (explanation, clarification, confrontation, reassurance, etc.). For Lacan insisted that all these techniques somehow rely on substitution of the analyst's signifiers for those of the analysand, that is to say, *they all function within the dimension of metaphor, which invalidates their power over symptom, because the latter is a metaphor in itself* (E/S, p. 175). Indeed, *because the symptom is a metaphor* – the exchange of one signifier for another signifier or, in Freudian terms, the replacement of one repressed unconscious representation with another representation – *it cannot subside by means of an analytic intervention that is metaphorical too.* (2003: 60, emphases added)

Nobus thus shows the importance of establishing the metaphor-symptom analogy, while stressing the importance of distinguishing metonymy from symptom. Furthermore, he argues that metonymy is the most appropriate tool where metaphoric symptoms are concerned. Following his logic, I contend that under inverse circumstances, the opposite is true. Metaphoric procedures are effective tools for analysis where metonymic discourses prevail.

As discussed in the previous chapter, metaphor tends to be undervalued in contemporary academic discourses. The figure is frequently criticized for its alleged tendency to freeze the flow of signification in identity and resemblance. In contrast, metonymy is celebrated as contingent, desire-inflicted, and open. The privileging of metonymy over metaphor in post-Lacanian literary and cultural criticism may be associated with the fact that, within psychoanalytic practice, such a privileging has a clinical *raison d'être*, as Dany Nobus makes clear. Below I extrapolate Nobus' argument to contemporary discourse analysis. If it is *metonymy* that prevails in contemporary hegemonic strategies, then, by the same principle described by Nobus, this inverse set of conditions would require a – cultural – analyst to proceed *metaphorically*.

To state that I extrapolate the analysis of the psychoanalytic symptom to the analysis of the social symptom is in a sense preposterous, because Lacan recognizes the origin of the concept in the work of Marx. In one of his seminars, he states:

Search for the origin of the notion of symptom, which is not to be sought for in Hippocrates at all, but in Marx, who is the first to make the connection between capitalism and ... feudal times ... Capitalism is considered as having certain effects, and why in effect wouldn't it have them? These effects are, overall, beneficial, for it [capitalism] has the advantage of reducing the proletarian man to nothing, thanks to which the proletarian man realizes the essence of man and, being stripped of all, he is charged with being the Messiah of the future. Such is the way in which Marx analyzes the concept of symptom. Of course, he does so in a number of other ways, but the relation between this one and a faith in mankind is completely undeniable. If we make of man nothing more than that which conveys an ideal future, but we determine him in the particularity of each case of his unconscious and of the way in which he enjoys it, the symptom remains in the same place where Marx put it. But it takes on another sense: it is not a social symptom, it is a particular symptom. (1975: 106)¹⁸⁹

Locating the origin of the symptom in the work of Marx rather than Hippocrates, Lacan distances himself from the medical conception of the term. Lacan draws a continuity between Marx's collective subject and the subject in his own psychoanalytic theory: both are characterized by a lack of being (i.e. the proletarian man is "reduced to nothing," and it is in that nothing that he finds his essence) and by a thrust towards the future (a thrust that, in the case of the psychoanalytic subject, is termed desire). The distinction between the two resides in the difference between the social dimension of existence and the particularity of the unconscious. Because that difference concerns scale and object of analysis rather than mode of operation, the symptom as an analytical category remains the same, in principle, across both terrains.

While Nobus' argument allowed me to emphasize the analytic potential of metonymy, Lacan points to the potential of the symptom (and, by extension, of metaphor) as an analytical category. According to Slavoj Žižek, the reason why Marx produces a notion of symptom that applies to psychoanalysis as well is that "there is a fundamental homology between the interpretative

¹⁸⁹ "Cherchez l'origine de la notion de symptôme qui n'est pas du tout à chercher dans Hippocrate, qui est à chercher dans Marx qui est le premier dans la liaison qu'il fait entre le capitalisme et ... le temps féodal ... Le capitalisme est considéré comme ayant certains effets, et pourquoi en effet n'en aurait-il pas? Ces effets sont somme toute bénéfiques, puisqu'il [le capitalisme] a l'avantage de réduire à rien l'homme prolétaire, et d'être dépouillé de tout est chargé d'être le messie du futur. Telle est la façon dont Marx analyse la notion de symptôme. Il donne bien sûr des foules d'autres symptômes; mais la relation de ceci avec une foi en l'homme est tout à fait incontestable. Si nous faisons de l'homme, non plus quoi que ce soit qui véhicule un futur idéal, mais si nous le déterminons de la particularité dans chaque cas de son inconscient et de la façon dont il en jouit, le symptôme reste à la même place où l'a mis Marx. Mais il prend un autre sens: il n'est pas un symptôme social, il est un symptôme particulier." (1975: 106. Translation mine)

procedure of Marx and Freud” (1989: 11). Due to this (methodological) continuity between the particular and the social, I read Bhabha’s intrusive narrative as a symptom; to historicize rather than to medicalize the lecturer’s performance.

Referring to Marx and Freud’s respective analyses of the commodity and of dreams, Žižek observes that:

In both cases the point is to avoid the properly fetishistic fascination of the “content” supposedly hidden behind the form: the “secret” to be unveiled through analysis is not the content hidden by the form (...) but, on the contrary, *the “secret” is the form itself*. (1989: 11, emphasis in text)

Understood from this perspective, reading the episode at the House of World Cultures as a symptom does not imply delving into psychic content, but focusing on the external configuration that conditions that content, that shapes it in particular ways. Following Žižek’s argument, I propose that the particularity of the form of the Bhabha-Bredenkamp exchange holds the “secret” of the ideological circumstances in which it is inscribed. The symptom is a secret insofar as it points to a system’s or universality’s constitutive internal contradiction. Žižek states that “the ‘symptom’ is, strictly speaking, a particular element which subverts its own universal foundation, a species subverting its own genus” (21). To validate the interpretation of the lecture-event as a symptom, I must first return to metaphor and metonymy.

When contrasting the two figures, the opposition between realization (of being, of meaning, of desire) and displacement (of being, of meaning, of desire) is centrally at stake. As elaborated in the first chapter, metonymy is desire-driven, hence characterized by perpetual displacement. This desire can never be fulfilled because it would literally require the occupation of the same space-time as the other. But, by the laws of physics, this is impossible. Yet the virtual world that I have addressed in this second chapter is not subject to those laws. As may be gleaned from my exploration of the Real Player software frame, that possibility is constantly simulated in the virtual environment. The virtual element usurps the name of the real object and appears to occupy its place in the spatial continuum. Likewise, in online experiences such as role-playing in artificial worlds, one may appear to occupy the same space-time as another because, as Bhabha acknowledges quoting Lessig “the cyberspace actor is ‘actually living in two places at once’” (351). Yet, the occupation of this second space-time is metonymic because, by definition, in the virtual world there cannot be a realization of being, only a displacement.

Conversely, metaphor is the place of the subject's realization: the place where, becoming fully signified, the subject becomes fully satisfied (Lacan 1977a: 756). Yet, in a sense, virtuality is also operative in metaphor. For a split second, metaphor, in contrast to metonymy, is the place where the displaced signifier becomes fully signified, which is to become fully satisfied. This characterizes metaphor as the place of the realization of being. But this is only so because the signifier that is abolished from the uttered or written expression crosses the S/s bar (from above to below) to be retained as the signified of the signifier that takes its place at the material level of discourse (1997a: 745-46). In other words, the outgoing signifier is there, but only in its potential state, not phenomenally there.

Nonetheless, as Lacan suggests, metaphor persists as the place of the subject's realization; the place where, by becoming fully signified, it becomes fully satisfied (1977a: 756). This is because, even when the displaced signifier is erased from the material realm, the relationship it holds with the stated signifier is a perfect match. This complete correspondence anchors the phenomenal aspect of language (the realm of the signifier) in the noumenal (the realm of the signified).¹⁹⁰ That is why metaphor is linked "to the question of being" (Lacan 1977a: 756).

As I concluded earlier, in metaphor the full correspondence between signifier and signified is not determined by the nature of the incoming and displaced signifiers in isolation, but by all other elements that surround the figure of speech, and which point to the place of the new signifier as the place of the old one. In other words, the syntactic aspect of language operates here to designate the new signifier as a placeholder of the old one. Although the outgoing signifier is not phenomenally there, it is structurally there. Because of the centrality of context in their operation, it may be said that metaphors are, borrowing Spivak's description of interests, what "congeal[s] the macrologies" in which they are inscribed (1994: 74).¹⁹¹ Taking this as my cue, I reconsider Lacan's postulates in light of Spivak's conception of "interests" and of "the mother tongue," which enable me to determine the importance of metaphor as an analytical tool for cultural studies.

Much like Spivak's conception of interests, metaphor can be understood as a micrological marker of the subject's place in a wider system. While interest "marks the subject's empty place within that process without a subject which is history and political economy," metaphor could be

¹⁹⁰ I have introduced the Kantian terms for clarity's sake; they are not employed by Lacan.

¹⁹¹ It could be said that, in metaphor, the outgoing signifier is objectively concerned in the place it has abandoned because the *external conditions* – its semantic and syntactic context – point to the place of the incoming signifier as that of the missing one. Similarly, as I have mentioned, the *OED* defines "interest" as "the relation of being objectively concerned in something."

said to mark “the subject’s empty place within that process without a subject which is [language]” (Spivak 1994: 71). This analogy holds insofar as we consider language in the abstract. But, as Ghanaian philosopher Kwasi Wiredu, at the University of South Florida (U.S.A.) implies, the realm of the political emerges in the movement from language in the abstract to language as a particular (1996: 81-153).

As long as we consider language in the abstract, the relation between the two propositions I derived from Lacan and Spivak is strictly analogous. Yet, if we consider a specific language, what Spivak calls “a mother tongue ... a language with a history,” in which “the traces of the empirical entailed by the word” can be traced, then metaphor, as a marker of a subject’s place in a language, may also be descriptive of her (relationship to her) place in history (1993a: 27; 1994: 28). In other words, it may also be informative of her (ideological) inscription in cultural, economic and socio-historical realities. As indicated by my use of parentheses, the distinctions here are ambiguous because, as Paul de Man argues, “what we call ideology is precisely the confusion of linguistic with natural reality, of reference with phenomenalism,” although this “does not mean that fictional narratives are not part of the world and of reality” (1982: 206).

According to Žižek, the degree to which such fictional narratives permeate the world is more pervasive today than before. In *How to Read Lacan*, he suggests that in contemporary society

“culture” is emerging as the central life-world category. With regard to religion, we no longer “really believe”, we just follow various religious rituals and behaviours as part of a respect for the “life style” of the community we belong to (non-believing Jews may obey kosher rules “out of respect for tradition”). “I do not believe in it, it is just part of my culture”, seems to be the predominant mode of the displaced belief, characteristic of our times. “Culture” is the name of all those things we practice without really believing in them, without taking them quite seriously. (2006b: 30)¹⁹²

This externalization and objectification of (ideological) beliefs is dealt with more extensively in one of Žižek’s earlier books, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989). In the chapter entitled “How Did Marx Invent the Symptom?” he proposes that ideology is best understood as a practice – particularly today, when cynicism is the prevalent form of ideology (21, 28, 39).

After recalling that “[t]he most elementary definition of ideology is probably the well-known phrase from Marx’s *Capital*: ... ‘they do not know it, but they are doing it,’” Žižek

¹⁹² The passage above concludes: “This is why we dismiss fundamentalist believers as ‘barbarians’, as anti-cultural, as a threat to culture – they dare to take their beliefs seriously.” (2006b: 30)

reformulates that phrase (taking into account Peter Sloterdijk's *Critique of Cynical Reason*) as "they know very well what they are doing, but still, they are doing it" (28, 29; emphasis in text).¹⁹³

Through this reformulation, Žižek point to the fact that

the illusion is not on the side of knowledge, it is already on the side of reality itself, of what the people are doing ... What they overlook, what they misrecognize is not the reality but the illusion which is structuring their reality, their real social activity. They know very well how things really are, but still they are doing it as if they didn't know. The illusion is therefore double: it consists in overlooking the illusion which is structuring our real, effective relationship to reality. And this overlooked, unconscious illusion is what may be called the *ideological fantasy*. (32-33, emphasis in text)

Hence, ideology today is best defined in terms of the way in which a subject's actions or lack thereof, rather than her apparent knowledge or lack thereof, inform the researcher of her actual involvement in the illusion that structures reality in a particular way.

Because the ideological fantasy implies a practice carried out regardless of the subject's conscious detachment, Žižek aligns it with cynicism. Mere recognition of the real state of things, unaccompanied by congruent actions, can function as yet another way in which "to blind ourselves to the structuring power of ideological fantasy: even if we do not take things seriously, even if we keep an ironical distance, *we are still doing them*" (33, emphasis in text). Because the illusion that defines ideology tends to emerge today in the way people actually structure social realities despite their knowledge, Žižek affirms that we are far from living in a post-ideological era (33).

The ideological fantasy, which Žižek devises as a concept to understand ideology in contemporary society, accounts for reality as a totality that has fantasy as its support (47). In contrast, in the more classical approach to the question of ideology, reality as a totality and the ideological illusion are not coextensive. Thus, for example, the social symptom is inscribed in a dialectic that allows the observer to question a particular ideology from a position of relative exteriority. As I pointed out, the social symptom is, according to the Slovenian philosopher, "the point of exception functioning as [a universality's] internal negation" (23). Žižek's "ideological fantasy" and his "social symptom" correspond to two distinct, yet overlapping, methodological

¹⁹³ *Critique of Cynical Reason*, by German philosopher at Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design (Germany), Peter Sloterdijk, was first published in 1983. Žižek summarizes its postulates: "Peter Sloterdijk puts forward the thesis that ideology's dominant mode of functioning is cynical, which renders impossible – or, more precisely, vain – the classic critical-ideological procedure. The cynical subject is quite aware of the distance between the ideological mask and the social reality, but he none the less still insists upon the mask." (1989: 29)

approaches to the question of ideology. In principle, the former is associated with Lacanian theory, whereas the latter is of a Marxist provenance (30-33; 21-23).¹⁹⁴ Consequently,

in the predominant Marxist perspective the ideological gaze is a partial gaze overlooking the totality of social relations, whereas in the Lacanian perspective ideology rather designates a totality set on effacing the traces of its own impossibility. (49)

The partiality of the ideological gaze in the predominant Marxist perspective implicitly deploys the political as a question of a subject's position in a wider totality, while the equation between ideology and the totality in the Lacanian perspective makes it difficult to distinguish between the realm of the political and the realm of the ontological.

While, strictly speaking, both metaphor and metonymy are Lacanian tools of analysis, I have opened metaphor up to another possibility by way of Spivak's understanding of interest. I now wish to push that possibility further by insisting that what Žižek terms the "social symptom" may be associated with metaphor, while his "ideological fantasy" may be associated with metonymy. With the aid of Lacan, Lemaire and Nobus above, I have accounted for metaphor and symptom as analogous mechanisms operating in different realms (metaphor in literature, symptom in the body). Žižek defines the *social* symptom as "the point of exception functioning as [a universality's] internal negation" (1989: 23). Similarly, metaphor is for Lacan the *exceptional* place of realization occurring along the subject's inscription in a continuum of constant displacements, counterpointed by ephemeral moments of realization.

Metonymy, which accounts for the incessant displacement of being, of meaning and of desire, may be monitored to analyze the perpetuation of the ideological fantasy, described by Žižek as "the illusion which is structuring our real, effective relationship to reality" (32-33). As was the case with metaphor, here metonymy's occurrence in a historically specific language, rather than language in the abstract, needs to be taken into account for the figure to be informative of political issues. In sum, the exploration of concrete occurrences of both metaphor and metonymy is necessary. Even if, for clarity's sake, Žižek states that in the ideological fantasy "the illusion is not

¹⁹⁴ In using the term "social *symptom*," Žižek has already translated the Marxist approach into Lacanian terms. Nonetheless, as Žižek announces with the title of the chapter where he discusses the concept – "How Did Marx Invent the Symptom?" – the actual methodology encompassed by the term is that of Marx. This point is elaborated by Joseph Valente, who states: "Žižek undeniably succeeds in demonstrating that the Lacanian symptom and its anterior Marxist 'invention,' the materialist contradiction, follow a similar formal logic. In either case, the pathological secret resides not in some concealed, subterranean content, but in the desire-ridden signifying machinery whereby that content is articulated within the larger psychic or political economy. In either case, therefore, the pathological instance is not only anomalous to the system that it troubles, but uniquely characteristic of that system as well." (2003: 154)

on the side of knowledge, it is already on the side of reality itself,” still the ideological fantasy is an “unconscious illusion” (32, 33). The difference between traditional understandings of ideology and Žižek’s “ideological fantasy” is not that there is no illusion operating in the latter, but that “[t]he illusion is therefore *double*” (32, emphasis added). Since a lack of knowledge is still operative, but since this lack of knowledge is not phenomenally expressed as such, the dismantling of ideology from both traditional and the “ideological fantasy” perspectives is necessary.¹⁹⁵

The categories of “social symptom” and “ideological fantasy” have, in Žižek’s work (1989), a greater continuity than that which I exposed. However, in view of Nobus’ argument on the necessity for the analyst to operate by methods at odds with the phenomenon observed, I have been more interested in distinguishing the two modes than foregrounding their common denominators. Hence, I have pointed to the manner in which a reading of culture that approaches the symptom (or metaphor) as the place of realization of a universality’s constitutive contradiction may prove pertinent for the analysis of a mode of hegemony that proceeds by instituting an ideological fantasy in which criticism is elided not by direct confrontation, but by cynically incorporating it into the discursive dimension of its corpus. As Nobus also suggest, the parallel employment of metonymic analytical procedures, such as targeting the connections between signifiers, undoing rather than fortifying meaning, and displacing rather than replacing the discourse under consideration, continues to be pertinent insofar as more traditional modes of instituting hegemonic ideology also persist. With this renewed understanding, I return to “Democracy De-realized.”

Live Video, Cyber Video

The video that was beamed live at the House of World Cultures shows Bhabha as he speaks. The taping of his lecture appears to have been produced exclusively for the broadcasting and to keep a record, not for artistic purposes. Technical requirements are handled with great carelessness. Lights are turned on only after the film starts running; the focus is on the lecturer irrespective of how the frame cuts across other objects; and icons, apparently belonging to the menu of the recording equipment, appear and disappear randomly at the bottom of the image. In the context of Documenta 11, after all an event dedicated primarily to the visual arts, this is highly symptomatic. It shows

¹⁹⁵ Valente considers that attempts to link Marxist and Lacanian theory have been overall unproductive because “retroversion has either been reduced to contradiction (Althusser) or contradiction has been subsumed by retroversion (Žižek)” (2003: 172). Valente’s statement points to the necessity of a methodology that is inclusive of both. Yet, while I concur with his observation that Žižek’s approach emphasizes retroversion, I also find – as I have argued – that Žižek opens up the possibility of an analysis that includes both perspectives.

theory as divorced from the material medium of its expression and from the realm of art, understanding the latter as a self-aware aesthetic discourse.

While artistic video installations form a large part of Documenta 11's exhibited works, the recording of the lecture presents itself as a transparent medium that exclusively serves pragmatic purposes. While background elements are disregarded, Bhabha, behind a desk, with thick glasses and a large forehead reflecting the light (and emphasizing the head muscles at work as they wrinkle the skin) occupies center stage. The unmoving camera steadily focuses on Bhabha, showing him frontally and from the chest upwards. Recalling the sculptured busts of eminent characters, the image portrays him in terms akin to humanist ideals of authorship. Credit for the video's authorship is nowhere to be found on the Documenta website. Hence, the video is not to be acknowledged to have a particular social agent as its author, but only serves as a functional mediation. Through the visual metaphor of the great humanist thinker, theory becomes aligned with the transcendental, while technical mediation is deployed as origin-less. Moreover, Documenta 11 was allegedly dedicated to de-autonomizing art. The sloppy recording, in reconfiguring authorship, exposes a rift between the stated political aim in the realm of art and the actual reliance on the figure it aims to debunk where theory is concerned.

Against the grain of his filmed portrait, the lecturer, constantly exploiting the literary qualities of language, points to the material textures of discourse as inseparable from theory. Hence, he effectively contests the transcendental understanding of theory on which the formal aspects of the video-recording insist. Bhabha's discourse also works against the grain of the video's attempt to obscure the fact of mediation. Time and again, he calls the viewer's attention to the critical importance of in-between spaces, such as "intermediate area," "third space" and "interstice." Moreover, he stresses the crucial role of mediating processes such as "translation" and the "middle passage." Resorting to the concept of *poesis* to stress the inseparability of enunciative and political rights, and emphasizing that an "aesthetic act of communication or narration is also an ethical practice," the lecturer's arguments have the effect of challenging the apparent transparency of the medium (2002: 363, 360).

I have called Bhabha's filmed portrait a visual "metaphor," because the meaning "great humanist thinker" is not produced by an element contiguous to Bhabha's image, but brought forth by Bhabha's image itself. The signifier (Bhabha's image) does not call forth its original signified (Bhabha), but a different one ("great humanist thinker"), which occupies its *place* at the expressed

level of visual discourse. Yet, in contrast to the video that was broadcast live in Berlin, the video posted on the Documenta 11 website may be described as metonymic.

Superimposed on the lower left-hand corner of the original video-image posted on the web, there is a small rectangle. Its four sides are proportionate and aligned to the sides of the rectangle demarcating the image as a whole. Given that this smaller rectangle is analogous to the whole while being constitutive of it, it may be said that the small rectangle has a fractal relationship to the larger one. While the larger image portrays Bhabha as he speaks, the smaller one projects the synchronic recording of Bhabha's audience in Berlin. In the smaller rectangle, the surfer not only sees the audience, but also the monitor screen on which the audience is watching Bhabha. This third frame (the material screen in the Berlin auditorium) functions, in turn, as a fractal of the widest image, within which the middle rectangle is inserted. Thus, the overall impression is that of the widest image endlessly reproducing itself inwardly. Through this movement, historical time becomes confounded: scaling leads the surfer to conceive the smaller, embedded images as re-productions of the largest one. But the total composition is only the result of the event reproduced in the middle rectangle, which in turn is synchronic with the smallest rectangle of which the largest frame is a copy. In this *mise-en-abyme*, time enters a closed cycle.

Because of its substitution of the whole by a part, and because of the chain of deferral it establishes along contiguous elements, the image of the online video can be described as metonymic. Bhabha's spoken metaphor of a "double horizon" effectively comments on this visual metonymy. Inspired by a photographic essay by Allan Sekula, he establishes a parallelism between that works' formal composition and the present from which he speaks (357). He describes this present as an intermediate space, a "double horizon," between a past that is not quite past, which includes colonial regimes, the paradigms of the nation, and the state on the one hand, and, on the other, a future that has not quite arrived, associated with the global economy and the paradigm of a transnational civil society (355-359). The horizon of the colonial past traces the contradiction "between principle and power" found "at the heart of democracy" (350). This horizon also unfolds those who "have harvested the bitter fruits of liberal democracy rather than the Western imperial nations that claim to be the seed-beds of democratic thinking" as the locus from which democracy may be most pertinently translated (348). The horizon marked by the future, continues Bhabha, "does not signify the 'global' as a descriptive condition of contemporary life, but as an ethical or political claim"; global civil society and universal human rights are not actual conditions but potential ones (356, 360). Minorities, the author argues, are the place where these two horizons

converge, and they may strategically employ the democratic discourse of the “right to have rights” to translate human rights from a potential into an actuality (358).¹⁹⁶

Visually, the surfer is confronted, so to speak, with the “double horizon” of the metaphoric portrayal of the “great humanist thinker” on the one hand, and with the metonymic mechanism of the fractal-like composition of the screens on the other. In other words, the superimposition of the visual paradigms of the original video-image, on the one hand, and of the re-worked image, on the other, become the signified of the signifier “double horizon.” Coincidentally, each of these visual paradigms corresponds with one of the two horizons that Bhabha distinguishes in historical and epistemic terms. He describes one horizon as the paradigm of the state and of the actual contradictions at the heart of democracy, embodied in lessons of the past. That horizon corresponds with the metaphor that visualizes Bhabha as a figure of intellectual authority, and which is aligned with actuality (rather than potentiality). Furthermore, in its erection as a transparent universal, that metaphor reproduces (in the aesthetic rather than the political field) what Bhabha calls the traditional modes of “authority and autonomy” associated with the paradigm of the state (357). Conversely, the superimposition of frames of the online video is characterized by an engagement with a typically postmodern mode of self-referentiality and with metonymy as a place of potentiality (rather than actuality). This second visual mode becomes aligned with Bhabha’s second horizon, which withholds the potential of a global society, understood not as reality, but as political claim.¹⁹⁷

Bhabha proposes that, at the juncture of these two horizons, one encounters a third space that is neither line nor cycle, but a strategic suspension of time away from, as well as back to, the present. Bhabha describes it not only as the place of minorities, but also as an epistemic vantage

¹⁹⁶ A question that regards media specificity must be considered. Discussing the visual metaphor of Bhabha as the great humanist thinker, I suggested that Bhabha’s self-referential use of language might have the effect of drawing the surfer’s attention to the artificiality of the presuppositions on which the visual metaphor relies. Yet the metaphor persisted, because nothing the lecturer *said* could literally displace it, anchored as it was on the visual plane. In the case of “double horizon,” the same principle, with an inverse set of conditions, holds true. Here, the metaphor has the author’s voice as its material support. Hence, nothing the video *shows* can literally take its place at the material level of discourse. Nonetheless, the visual elements that are contiguous to it may be incorporated by the metaphor as its signified. This possibility is increased by the tendency for displacement that the surrounding metonymic elements have. Even if these metonymic elements occur on the visual plane, they require nothing but contiguity to pass on their meaning to another signifier, regardless of the material media in which they are expressed.

¹⁹⁷ The outlooks that Bhabha respectively associates to the paradigm of the nation-state and to that of transnational civil society are discussed by Robert L. Caserio and Cindy Patton. Pointing to how the paradigm of the nation-state may also be understood as a particular episteme structuring our perceptions of time and space, and to how this episteme is unsettled by contemporary communication technologies, they assert that: “Computer-mediated communications and informationalism overwhelm the stable time and space to which nation-centred citizenship has been attached. ‘Informationalism’ transforms time into something both momentary and timeless; it transforms space into a ‘space of flows.’” (2000: 13)

point, and as the place from which he speaks. Hence, “double horizon” is the metaphor by means of which the speaker validates his own position of enunciation. Yet, his definition of this place of enunciation is slippery. Only through a coincidental contiguity, discursively articulated, Bhabha’s place of enunciation and the place of global minorities become associated with each other.

However, read as a metaphor articulated in a language that exceeds the author, “double horizon” indicates the place Bhabha occupies historically. “Double horizon,” an image suggesting the superimposition of frames, shares in the aesthetics of the online video’s superimposition of frames, substituting historical teleology with formal analogy. Hence, the metaphor points to the author’s affinity with the *modus operandi* of the online video, as a historically specific technology. While Bhabha’s “double horizon” discursively occupies a non-place of potentiality, external to both of the horizons described, the way in which it is formally, logically and contextually articulated points to its affinity with the second horizon.

Analyzed in context, Bhabha’s self-referential linguistic strategies serve to foreground the non-transparency of the material support of discourse. Hence, they deconstruct the foundational presuppositions on which the metaphor of the “great humanist thinker” is built. Yet these strategies cannot do the same for the visual *mise-en-abyme*, since both employ the same discursive procedures to legitimate themselves. If Bhabha’s self-referential strategies point to the importance of foregrounding the *medium* of enunciation, his “double horizon” metaphor points to the crucial role of time and place in the production of meaning. Analyzed as occurring in a language that exceeds the author, “double horizon” thus exposes where and when Bhabha’s strategies are historically pertinent.

Cyberspace Alliterated

When seen from a literary perspective, one of the most striking aspects of “Democracy De-realized” is the phonetic and semiotic displacement that takes place. If translation is “[t]ransference; removal or conveyance from one person, place, or condition to another” (*OED*), we may describe that recourse as a metonymic form of translation. In contrast to metonymy, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) view metaphor as a form of translation across discontinuous contexts.¹⁹⁸ As suggested earlier, they propose that only metaphor involves two domains: a target and a source domain, which are put into

¹⁹⁸ As Bal points out, translation is metaphor’s “etymological synonym.” (2002: 60. See also 56-95)

relation by the paradigmatic trope.¹⁹⁹ In “The Agency of the Letter,” Lacan refers to the form of connection taking place between such non-contiguous elements as pertaining to the vertical axis of language (i.e. as crossing the S/s bar). Conversely, metonymy implies displacement along contiguous elements in the chain of signifiers, which constitute the horizontal axis of language (1977a: 749, 744). Thus, metonymy can be conceived as a form of translation along the horizontal axis of language, and metaphor along the vertical one.

Through the metonymic translation of sound from one word to the next, phonetics plays an important role in knitting Bhabha’s text into a coherent whole. He constantly alliterates: “genre and geopolitics, territory and temporality,” “a longer lineage of *fraying* and *fragility*” (349, emphasis added). Alliteration is not only widely present, but also – as in the first example above – often tends to justify the bringing together of otherwise unlikely pairs. If we take “*Democracy De-realized*” as another example, and recall that in the Introduction I elaborated on how Bhabha questions the first term but responds by modifying the adjacent one, even alliterating it, then the degree to which that rhetorical procedure serves to tighten Bhabha’s discourse may be appreciated.

At a wider scale, Bhabha takes advantage from a parallel procedure, this time involving the displacement of semantic rather than phonetic similarity from one signifier to the next. He devices a concept and then associates it to another and yet another, as if to chain together a semantic constellation along the linear flow of discourse. For example, Bhabha introduces the concept of “de-realization,” he then associates it with “translatability,” and then transfers the semantic charge of the latter to the notion of the “incubational.” As his argument develops, the idea of in-betweenness implied by the notion of the “incubational” is equated with “intermediate area,” the implications of which translate to “intermediate life,” and subsequently to “double horizon,” then to “third space,” then to “minoritarian presence, as a sign of ‘intermediate living,’” and so on, threading a long line of closely interconnected concepts (349-361).

But, while the translation of sounds and semantic charges from one element to the next is persistent, the translation of a given syntactic structure to a parallel or contiguous unit is notably absent. Thus, while connectivity is stressed at the levels of phonetic texture and in the resonance of contiguous elements in the semantic field, the (teleo)logical connections of the argument are

¹⁹⁹ The Lacanian approach brings in a similar emphasis. Holm argues that, in Lacan’s work, metaphor is “a way of drawing lines or connections between things” (2002: 329). “[W]e only use metaphor when we need a line but cannot draw one,” Holm argues, suggesting that metaphor only connects “distant or non-contiguous things.” (340, 335)

constantly postponed.²⁰⁰ To that extent, the lecture's literary textures play in consonance with the online video's formal composition and its hyperlinked background. In both cases "connection" is rhetorically emphasized yet structurally deferred.

In contrast to metonymy, syntax is crucial for metaphor. As I have elaborated, in metaphor the incoming signifier is able to retain the absent signifier as its signified insofar as the rest of the syntactic unit indicates the *place* it occupies as that of the missing signifier (Lacan 1977a: 745). Thus, the efficacy of metaphor may be appreciated in terms of its articulation with surrounding elements. In metaphor, absent and stated signifiers attain resonance in each other insofar as the one relates to the *set of relationships* proper to the other.

Although scarce, there are some concept-metaphors in the lecture, for example, "de-realization."²⁰¹ Bhabha proposes that the Brechtian notion of "distantiation" and the surrealist "*déréalisation*" are to be recalled by "de-realization." Yet, besides Bhabha's brief mention of this, the listener is offered no means to spontaneously have that signifier recall those signifieds. Nonetheless, the relation between "*déréalisation*" and "de-realization" sticks because of the words' etymological properties. But in the case of "distantiation," where there is no such intrinsic relation, the translation between the target and the source domain does not occur. The surrounding text does not point to that signifier as the place of the Brechtian notion. In sum, neither "*déréalisation*" nor "distantiation" are elicited as signifieds of "de-realization" through the mechanism proper to metaphor: that of a signifier occupying the *place* of another. On this limp metaphorical basis, where the source domain does not insinuate itself in "what surrounds the figure of speech," as Lacan would have it, "de-realization" cannot fully thrive as concept (1977a: 745).

A metaphor's resonance depends on what Spivak would term syntax "in the general sense" (1993a: 28). I refer to syntax in this sense to signify something that takes place along both axes of language. Because a word does not have an essence, it introduces in the discourse in which it is translated not just the name of an object or idea, but also the series of logical connections or cultural co-ordinates that defined its place in the context from which it was taken. As Beatrice Warren has stated, "[i]n metaphor, the source expression does not serve as a restrictive complement but invites the interpreter to extract at least one property of the source referent and transfer this to the target" (2002: 113). In Brechtian theory, both the definition and operation of distantiation are only possible

²⁰⁰ As Spivak (1993b) suggests in her three-partite ontology of language, syntax is the realm of logic. By contrast, as Silverman argues, "too much alliteration or assonance within a given linguistic syntagm tends to interfere with the operations of logical meaning" (1983: 81).

²⁰¹ On concept-metaphors see Bal 2002: 110.

in relation to its opposite: “identification”.²⁰² Deprived of the dialectic that constitutes it in its original conceptual terrain, “distantiation” cannot resonate in its place of reception. The abstraction of distantiation from the relationship it holds with identification is a further element that positions “Democracy De-realized” as anti-teleological.²⁰³

Another significant concept-metaphor relates to cyberspace. Bhabha writes: “According to the legal scholar Lawrence Lessig, the cyberspace actor is ‘actually living in two places at once, with no principle of supremacy between ... multiple non-coordinating jurisdictions’” (351). While Lessig uses “non-coordinating jurisdictions” to describe the legal ambivalence in which the Internet surfer is situated, Bhabha borrows the concept to denote the strategic rather than physical locus of minorities in the context of global hegemony (see 361-63).

Bhabha has argued that minorities, situated at a tangential angle to global or state power, are able to see that, while universal human rights are not an actuality, the discourse of human rights may be appropriated to translate them into a reality. Because of this strategic re-articulation of hegemonic discourse, Bhabha claims, “minoritarian agency is envisaged as an act of enunciation, adding that “that very aesthetic act of communication or narration is also an ethical practice” (360). The act of enunciation is ethical, Bhabha continues, because it focuses on “the communal or group right to address and be addressed” as part of the alleged universal human, and because “that social ‘relation’ – to relate, to narrate, to connect – becomes our *juris-dictio*, quite literally, the place from where we speak, from where we engage in the *poesis*, the making of art and politics” (363). “[N]on-coordinating jurisdictions,” thus denotes the strategic position to be adopted with regard to democracy’s discursive promise; it is deployed to translate the legal word into a political act.

The phrase, originally coined in cyber-cultural studies, also translates from the lecture (back) into cyberspace. Framing what was once its place of origin and is now its place of reception, “non-coordinating jurisdictions” paradoxically does not exacerbate the metonymic aesthetics of the space in which it was wrought. Instead, it translates back vertically, embracing the place of the subject behind the computer as part of its signified. In other words, the phrase translates as a metaphor of the listener’s place in the historical present. In pointing to the space-time occupied by the surfer, the metaphor points to the listener’s “empty place within that process without a subject which is history

²⁰² See Felaco 1982: 64, and Pike (David) 1982: 166.

²⁰³ The shift away from teleology is meant, Bhabha argues, “to frustrate [democracy’s] naturalistic and normative ‘reference’ and see what potential for *translation* that idea or insight has” (349, emphasis in transcript). But the virtual world to which the lecture is translated resorts to the rhetoric of simultaneity and self-referentiality rather than teleology and reference to achieve its naturalistic effect. Thus, the ideological and aesthetic norm of the context of reception sets another limit to de-realization’s potential for translation.

and political economy” (Spivak 1994: 71). Confronted with the place she occupies in front of the computer as a site of interest that is inscribed in a wider macrology, the surfer’s actual place is transformed into a signifier standing in for a socio-historically wider signified.

Yet, this very metaphor by which the listener’s physical locus is turned into a signifier standing in for the abstract, strategic site of what Bhabha terms “minorities” runs the risk of allowing *darstellen* (to represent as a descriptive act) to stand in for *vertreten* (to represent as a transformative act) (see Spivak 1994: 70-73). Just as what Spivak calls Deleuze’s “valorization of *any* desire destructive of *any* power,” Bhabha finds an intrinsic value in acts of enunciation per se, giving little importance to the place from which they are formulated (1994: 67, emphasis in text). Although Bhabha does insist on the importance of “the place from where we speak,” this place is not historically specific (363).

In “Democracy De-realized,” the places from which minorities speak, much like minorities themselves, function as floating signifiers that erase historical difference. The lecturer includes in “minorities” not only “[i]mmigrants and women,” but also an epistemological vantage point that he terms “third space,” as well as “NGO’s, Truth Commissions, International Courts, New Social Movements, International Aid Agencies, the spirit of Documenta 11 itself” (361, 355, 359). Taking Documenta 11 as a minority, while positioning himself as the one “engage[d] in the *poesis*, the making of art and politics,” Bhabha proposes his own act of enunciation as an act of transformative representation or *vertretung* (363). But, as I have signaled, the continuous internal deferral that characterizes his discourse tends to foreclose the possibility of escaping tautology or, in Spivak’s terms, representation as *darstellung*.

Bhabha de-politicizes the concept of minorities by turning the particular into an ambiguous universality. He metonymically displaces minorities in the macro-historical sense with his own act of enunciation in the context of Documenta 11. The metaphor of “non-coordinating jurisdictions” holds, in principle, the same potential, since it (unwittingly) equates the place of the listener with that of minorities at large, and since it tends to reduce a historical place (the surfer’s site of access to the Internet) into a signifier of a virtual locus of agency (a strategic vantage point in the abstract).

Yet, Bhabha’s metaphor also holds transformative potential in that it opens up the dialectic between actual and virtual places, contextualizing the latter and opening the former up to creative re-articulation. Since the site of interest occupied by the surfer also maps out her subject *position*, her “empty place in that process without a subject which is history and political economy,” the metaphor may simultaneously confront the surfer with her status as a dislocated subject and the

socio-historical macrology that gives rise to that dislocation. It may confront the surfer with the distinction between her subject position, externally pre-determined, and her subject status, her transformative capacity. The gap between the two is critical to differentiate between interest and desire, a distinction that, as Spivak intimates, accounts for how “the dislocated machine of history moves” (1994: 72).²⁰⁴

Circle Back to the Beginning

Considering the predominance of metonymy in Bhabha’s lecture and its affinity with the aesthetic of the Internet, the actual event that took place on that 9th of October, 2001 in Berlin can be seen in a different light. The question arises: given that Bhabha’s lecture as a whole is characterized by deconstructive strategies, such as the privileging of the virtual and the effect, self-referentiality, and deferral, why does Horst Bredekamp locate his entire objection in that single image of “the Unbuilt?” Why is he so disturbed by it that he dedicates his whole contribution to undoing that metaphor and erecting a new one *in its place*? Is Bredekamp concerned with Bhabha’s incapacity to translate vertically, to translate across and beyond language, his inability to translate not only across the signifier but also across the sign, and into the realm of lived experience? Or is it rather that Bredekamp is disturbed by the feat that Bhabha has indeed been able to get across?

While throughout his lecture Bhabha employs the deconstructive strategy of metonymic transfer from signifier to signifier, in the metaphor of the Unbuilt deconstruction ceases to be a strategy and acquires ontological attributes. As a metaphor, the image of the Unbuilt displaces the falling towers – as signifiers of the lived historical event – and literally puts a deconstructed world in the place of reality. The metaphor of the Unbuilt is effective because it points to a deconstructed scene in the physical world, but also because other scenes of deconstruction pervade reality beyond the limited sphere of the towers’ debris. As mentioned, Cruz Sánchez considers that the postmodern world is one in which the image has grown to the degree of becoming both invisible and meaningless. He proposes that the self-absorbed contemporary image has lost its capacity to mediate, to communicate (2007: 469-70). Is not this all-engulfing, all-disempowering image that Cruz Sánchez describes precisely what disturbs Bredekamp? Is not the image of the Unbuilt a *symptom* of our times? Bhabha hints at this in the quote that serves as an epigraph to this chapter:

²⁰⁴ On my definition of the subject status in terms of transformative capacity see Chapter Four, where I discuss Spivak’s account of the materialist approach to the question.

As I end, let me circle back to the beginning: to the place from where I speak to you today. Fallen towers, falling idols: what has befallen the ideals and the Ideas of global Progress now that the New World is bereft of its towers, its towering ladder without rungs targeted as the symbol of our times? (2002: 363)

Here and throughout his speech, Bhabha points to “the ladder” as a sign of progress and to “the tower” as the paradigmatic site of progress accomplished; “the Unbuilt” is reiteratively positioned as that which is beyond progress. Hence, the Unbuilt entails a paradox. On the one hand, it is the place from which the ideology of progress may be dismantled. On the other, it legitimizes its criticism precisely by virtue of being chronologically posterior and teleologically superior to the obsolete ideals of Enlightenment progress.

Bhabha’s definition of minorities, while attempting to escape a referential enclosure, also benefits from a notion of progress: “[t]his enunciative concept of minoritization is *much in advance* of the anthropological concept of the minority” (2002: 361, emphasis added). Bhabha’s double standard with regard to progress also surfaces in his emphasis on democracy as an unrealized potential, since that understanding of the concept is inscribed in a teleological mode of thought. As Srinivas Aravamudan argues, the understanding of democracy as potential, as a “promise deferred” or as “democracy-to-come,” is nothing other than “the promise of the Enlightenment” (2007: 463).²⁰⁵

Hope claims that to celebrate a victory over progress is to persist in its logic:

Now, however, progress is disconnected from linear historical narrative. Under global capitalism the ruling myth of progress is synonymous with the ideology of real time. Thus, finance culture and info-hype celebrate the drive towards instantaneity. (2006: 291)

Contemporary ideology, manifest in real-time rhetoric, does not so much seek to establish a single progressive account of history, but rather seeks to do away with history altogether. Real time is characterized by the drive towards instantaneity. As Hope indicates, “the very notion of full instantaneity means that the past cannot act upon the present” (298). He suggests that this obfuscation of historical responsibility has a specific political function:

²⁰⁵ Aravamudan’s “democracy-to-come” is actually a translation of *démocratie à venir*, coined by Jacques Derrida; the author with whom Aravamudan is concerned in his discussion.

the circular logic of real time is built into certain representations of the economy and the market. As a linguistic abstraction within financial, corporate, and neo-liberal discourses, the market appears self-operating, self-defining, and ahistorical. (298)

Hope's description of real time rhetoric is akin to the impressions that are produced by the elements that embed "Democracy De-realized," such as hyperlinks, the Real Player frame and the *mise-en-abyme* video recording.

Those elements do not actually alter what "Democracy De-realized" discursively expresses. Yet, they point to its place in a culture that exceeds it. Dialogue between the lecture and its surroundings does not occur because they express the same things about their shared historical reality, but because they have similar ways of coding that shared reality. If particular forms of coding reality are understood as a particular form of inscription in history, then it may be said that the lecture and its virtual environment indulge a practice that presupposes, to use Žižek's term, the same ideological fantasy.

The affinity between the lecture's and the Internet's coding of reality may be further exemplified with reference to Cruz Sánchez. He argues that the image is not the only strategy that is de-politicized by power once its towers have fallen. "The obscene" is also no longer effective per se as a radical political strategy. Etymologically, Cruz Sánchez notes, the obscene may be understood as that which is off-scene or which cannot be staged. (473-79). Hence, the obscenity of the image is not a question of content, but of its staging. Thus, for example, the *mise-en-abyme* online video translates into lived reality by staging not so much an object of desire, but rather desire itself; by staging the image as it metonymically translates within itself. This metonymic translation within the image may be read as a metaphor of a wider reality, of culturally determined modes of structuring the displacement of desire.

Bhabha reproduces what Spivak described as a schematic opposition between interest and desire. He seems to work under the conviction that, for democracy's potential (desire) to be operative, it is necessary to exclude democracy's grounding (interest) from the analysis. Hence, in "Democracy De-realized," the act of imagination – the act of creatively thinking through the concept of democracy and exploring its potential – is not acknowledged to be a historically situated or historically informed act. This relegates the author's mode of imagination to fantasy rather than creativity, if we understand the latter as the capacity to innovate through the re-articulation of pre-existing material, and not the (potential) production of unprecedented material out of the blue. Yet, since even our fantasies are historically informed, the difference amounts to the degree of

deliberation in the form in which that history is re-articulated in the present. Bhabha's take on the realm of ideas characterizes his position as an idealist one, not his focus on the realm of ideas as such. It is in the foreclosure of a dialectics between the phenomenal and the noumenal that the idealist position is erected.

Metaphor indicates the possibility of analyzing the incidence of the noumenal from the realm of the phenomenal. As I argued, in metaphor contextual elements operate to designate the new signifier as a placeholder of the old one. Even if the outgoing signifier is not phenomenally there, it is structurally there. In other words, structure points to the operation of potentiality. If, by approaching language in its historically specific expressions, both economic and linguistic structures are taken into account, the place from which the subject speaks (objective position), and that subject's own relationship to that place (ideology), may be determined.

The same counts for the place that concepts occupy. In his exploration of democracy's potential, Bhabha does not find it necessary to take into consideration democracy's worldly affiliations. His call for a strategic appropriation of the Enlightenment ideal ignores the fact that such appropriations have been systematically destroyed in Third-World countries according to the economic interests of the hegemonic corporatist state. Ignoring the double discourse on democracy of the contemporary imperialist power, Bhabha becomes entangled with it. The approach to democracy that Bhabha proposes does not prove functional in the historical conditions of his enunciation. Furthermore, in an economically undemocratic world, the reduction of democracy to a jurisdictional claim, "the right to have rights," risks substituting a *de facto* democratic transformation with one that is simply *de jure*. Due to the intricate overlaps between contemporary state power and transnational economic flows, a contemporary critique of the state cannot afford to reduce the institution to its exclusively political or jurisdictional façade.

Hope describes how, in the exchange circuit that defines capitalism (M-C-M, Money-Commodity-Money), money becomes an end in itself. As he argues, this exchange dynamic, short-circuited as M-M, "disrupts the circulation of commodities and the realization of capital." Today, "digitally driven finance capital perpetuates self-contained M-M circuits" (2006: 282). This self-contained circle of exchange may be viewed as a metonymic process in that it perpetually postpones the realization of capital as commodity. While in commodity fetishism the subject's alienation is anchored in money or commodities occupying the place of social relationships, in circuits of digitally driven finance capital, the social relationship, beyond being substituted, is eternally

deferred. As in a metonymic chain, one encounters in this circuit the substitute of the substitute of the substitute. The circuit profits from a self-perpetuating chain of unrealized potential.

As suggested earlier, the location of value creation in either the sphere of production or in that of exchange is perhaps the central polemic in contemporary Marxist debates. In principle, I locate the creation of economic value in the sphere of production, not in that of exchange. This does not mean, however, that value is not actualized in circulation and that economic exchange is not exacerbated today as a virtual source of value.²⁰⁶ Baudrillard has pointed out that, in contemporary capitalism, exchange as a source of value is hypertrophied not only in the field of economics, but also in that of semiotics. As mentioned in the introductory section, Baudrillard puts forward that, in consumer society, “we see the abolition of the signified and the *tautology of the signifier*.” Mass media communications deliver a “certain kind of very imperative message: *a message consumption message*, a message of ... misrecognition of the world and foregrounding of information as commodity, of glorification of content as sign.” “[I]nstead of going out to the world via the mediation of the image,” Baudrillard continues, “it is the image which circles back on itself via the world (it is the signifier which designates itself under the cover of the signified)” (1998: 124, 123; emphases in text).

I contend that Baudrillard’s tautological mass media image, which seeks to “neutralize the lived, unique, eventual character of the world” by *staging* contact with it, proceeds metonymically (123). Metonymic discourses run parallel to, are unaffected by, and have no effect on historical realities. Though they may appear to contest hegemony, they perpetuate the status quo while staging resistance to it. *Darstellen* behaves as *vertreten*. Because metonymy enacts movement, it gives the sensation of change or of active intervention. However, this movement is always already limited to the horizontal axis of language. As a strategy of power today, metonymy divorces language from what is beyond it. In the ideological construction of a rift between language and socio-historical worlds, the molding force of discourse in the configuration of ontological and socio-historical realities tends to be forgotten. However, as metaphor, especially when read through Spivak (1993a), illustrates, politics is not a world at an ontological remove away from discourse, but a question of how we position ourselves within it.

Baudrillard’s depiction of the contemporary image as one in which the signified is abolished and the tautology of the signifier prevails, is akin to Cruz’s description of the contemporary image

²⁰⁶ On the question of value, see Chapter Four.

as one that fails to “*make visible* its meanings.”²⁰⁷ What the observations of these authors have in common is that they both point to the impossibility of the signified to become *realized* in the signifier. In other words, they point to the absence of metaphor.

Therefore, akin to Žižek’s paradigmatic “decaffeinated coffee,” a commodity that is distilled from its substance, and akin to virtuality, which produces the effect of something without being that thing, metonymy lacks both substance and actuality in that it consists of a continuous deferral along signifiers, while these signifiers are never anchored in their corresponding signified (Žižek 2005: min. 33). I have read Žižek’s analysis of that commodity as an illustration of how political questions tend to be displaced by ontological questions in contemporary society. I reached the same interpretation about his statement that today it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of global capitalism (Žižek 2005: mins. 3.45, 33).

In view of my reframing of metaphor and metonymy by way of Spivak (1993a, 1994), and Žižek’s earlier text (1989), his 2005 statement may be rephrased as: Today, it is easier to imagine the end of reality (the world), than the end of that which structures that reality in a particular way (global capitalism). As Žižek’s 1989 book intimates, that which structures reality and functions as its support is the ideological fantasy (47). When we find it easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of global capitalism, what we overlook is the fact that in our imagination we behave *as if* global capitalism were not a particular way of structuring reality, but the support of reality as such. Only when understanding global capitalism as a historically situated particular, its hegemonic universalization as the very condition of being may be *politically* contested.

The image of the Unbuilt is, so to speak, an image of the end of the world. It hails the advent of an ontologically deconstructed world as a response to the conditions brought about by global capitalism. While this metaphor offers an image that, perhaps inadvertently, exposes how the predominant contemporary ideological fantasy operates, it also obscures the possibility of analyzing this hegemony in terms of what Žižek, following Lacan’s differentiation of his own usage of the concept to that of Marx, calls the “social symptom” (1989). Metaphor congeals traits of a wider macrology. Hence, it may be appreciated as anchored in historical particularity, as indicative of an ideological inscription, and may thus be equated with the “social symptom.” While, in the ideological fantasy, reality and the ideological fantasy cannot be differentiated, the social symptom allows the analyst to approach the ideological gaze as “a partial gaze overlooking the totality of

²⁰⁷ “*hacer visibles* significados.” (Cruz Sánchez 2007: 470, emphasis added)

social relations” (Žižek 1989: 49). This non-coincidence between ideological hegemony and the phenomenal totality is what Bhabha’s concept of the Unbuilt fails to grasp.

Yet, when taken as a symptom, the Unbuilt becomes informative of an ideological standpoint that is distinct from “the totality of social relations.” The personal narrative that irrupted in Bhabha’s response to Bredekamp was symptomatic of his immediate circumstances: his inability to translate to Berlin. Yet, this inability is also a marker of the historical condition structuring his exchange with Bredekamp, the historical circumstance on which “Democracy De-realized” reflects: the aftermath of “September 11.” I recall a reference made in the introductory section of this chapter: “[i]f there is any symbolism in the collapse of the World Trade Center towers, it is not so much the old-fashioned notion of the ‘center of financial capitalism,’ but rather the notion that the towers stood for the center of *virtual* capitalism” (Žižek 2002a: 387, emphasis in text). Thus, paradoxically, the *historical* reason why Bhabha cannot occupy his place at the Berlin auditorium and thus escape his metaphorical enclosure as a signifier of himself as the sign-man is the attack on the center of *virtual* capitalism. It comes as no surprise that a considerable part of Bhabha’s lecture and most of his exchange with Bredekamp are decidedly a defense of virtuality: of de-realization and of the image of the Unbuilt.

The metaphor Bhabha and Bredekamp enact cannot be read as such by its participants because their own inscription in a historically specific language is ignored. As the heated debate evinces, metaphor – in that Berlin auditorium in 2001 – is lived as an ontological question (if not an ontological anguish) rather than a contextualized marker of the interests at stake. In reading the Bhabha-Bredekamp exchange as a metaphor of Bhabha’s uncomfortable relationship to how he is narrativized by others, that is to say, his discomfort with his own inscription in language, and as indicative of how political questions tend to be substituted by ontological concerns, I have treated the episode as a symptom, as a “point of exception functioning as [a universality’s] internal negation” (Žižek 1989: 23).

But the element that is most symptomatic of Bhabha’s ideological inscription is his deployment of the central term in the lecture, “democracy.” Throughout, Bhabha treats the concept as an elusive universal. The “social symptom” presupposes that “every ideological Universal – for example freedom, [democracy,] equality – is ‘false’ in so far as it necessarily includes a specific case which breaks its unity, lays open its falsity” (Žižek 1989: 21). Bhabha’s reluctance to confront “democracy,” as a universal, with particular expressions of democracy in the Third World, blocks from view not these particulars as cases that deviate from the universal, but as the internal

contradictions that are structurally necessary for the universal to achieve closure. Extrapolating from Žižek, it may be said that “[t]he crucial point is, of course, that it is precisely this paradoxical [democracy], the form of its opposite, which closes the circle of ‘bourgeois [democracies]’” (22). The disruption of Third-World democracies by internally democratic First-World powers may be understood as a point of exception in democracy as a universal; analogously to how metaphor may be appreciated as a phenomenon that rarely occurs in the otherwise constant mechanism of displacement and deferral along the metonymical chain. In both cases, Bhabha tends to circumvent the points of exception, whether it be the social symptom or the literary metaphor. In so doing, he also circumvents the constitutive contradiction of the totality addressed.

I now return to the figure I left on stage: Bredekamp, as he occupies the place of another, embodying the impossibility of his absent signified – Bhabha, the sign-man – to access the material realm. As he strives to erase the metaphor of the Unbuilt, Bredekamp is not so much distressed by Bhabha’s incapacity to get across, but by the tremendous efficiency of his conveyance. But precisely what has managed to come across is the certainty that our attempts to translate across language are endlessly deferred by an all-disempowering rhetoric. As a function of language, this deferral is unrelated to power, but has nonetheless been co-opted by power. Unable to translate to Berlin because the towers have, indeed, fallen, Bhabha is reduced to the obscene sign of the sign of the sign on my computer screen.