

AFFECT AND IDENTIFICATION IN AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

By

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To my family

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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School
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AFFECT AND IDENTIFICATION IN AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

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Major: Political Science

This dissertation explores and analyzes the interweaving roles of affect, language and identification in recent episodes of American foreign policy. Its central argument is that despite receiving little attention from International Relations (IR) scholars, affect and desire are central dimensions of social and political life. Affect and desire are crucial to understanding the central question posed in this study: why are some discourses more politically successful than others? Some discourses come to define widely-accepted “common sense” of American foreign policy because of how people affectively invest themselves in, and thus identify with, these discourses. I offer a theoretical framework, based upon insights from the theories of Jacques Lacan and Ernesto Laclau, through which to analyze the differential affective appeal of foreign policy discourses. This framework theorizes the relationship between affect and language, and how they combine to produce political identities and discursive power. In doing so, this framework captures the dimensions of desire and affect that other linguistic and social constructivist approaches in IR are unable to capture.

I apply this framework to offer new understandings of several recent episodes of American foreign policy. First, I analyze the discourse of the war on terror in terms of its affective appeal after September 11, 2001, an aspect that surprisingly few IR scholars have

explored. Next, I turn the framework to scrutinizing how Iraq was discursively incorporated into the war on terror, and explore and identify how dimensions of affect and desire underpinned and sustained the discursive contestations and competitions surrounding American foreign policy at the time. Subsequently, I deploy the framework to analyze discourses of neoconservatism. The influence of neoconservatism on debates over American foreign policy has ebbed and flowed over the last several decades. I argue that neoconservatism's rise and fall can largely be traced back to the desires it evokes and the affective and identity appeals it offers. The study concludes with a summary of these arguments, suggestions for future research into these questions, and a few implications for policy.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

This study is about the role of affect and desire in the politics of American foreign policy. It poses a central yet extraordinarily complex question: why are some discourses more politically successful than others? It argues that affect and desire are ever-present and vital aspects of social and political life. Accounting for them theoretically and empirically is indispensable in understanding why some discourses are more appealing than others. It offers a new theoretical framework to understand and analyze the role of affect and desire in politics and in doing so offers guidance on some thorny theoretical questions that International Relations (IR) scholars have yet to address. What is the relationship between dimensions of social life such as affect and identity? How should we think about the bonds between language and affect? And, how should we think about the politics of affect? In offering a fresh theoretical lens through which to better analyze these intricate yet immense questions, this study substantially deepens our understanding of facets of social and political life to which the field of IR has paid little attention.

Thinking About Discourse, Affect, and Identity in World Politics

To argue that affects and emotions are central to understanding world politics can be seen as controversial and not. From the perspective of many mainstream approaches in IR, such as neorealism, neoliberalism, and rationalist frameworks generally, affect and emotion play little role in global politics. State actors' interests are assumed as pre-given and are largely based upon material concerns and cost-benefit analyses. Factors such as affect and emotion play little role in such perspectives, except perhaps to explain "irrational" deviations from rational interests derived from cost-benefit calculations. Of course, many in IR have moved beyond such narrow concerns. The rise of critical theory, constructivism, poststructuralism and other related approaches in IR have thrown open the door to both broader and deeper understandings of actors

and their interests and identities in global politics. Building upon the theoretical trails these approaches have blazed, many scholars have now recognized that affects and emotions are not “irrational” or marginal factors but are in fact central to understanding many issues on the discipline’s theoretical and empirical radar.

The questions and challenges posed by affects and emotions are complementary and compounded in their difficulty. Gaps in empirical research point to the theoretical issues raised by them. While affects and emotions pose considerable theoretical and empirical difficulties, this should not deter scholars from developing and refining their analytic apparatuses so as to better tackle them. The payoff in empirical and theoretical insights, and the opportunities for self-reflection, will produce a stronger grasp of a vital dimension of politics that has for a long time been neglected. The discipline needs novel theoretical frameworks that can shed light on affective and emotional aspects of politics which often receive only a passing remark, yet are usually crucial insights into political events and issues that gain our attention. Some recent literature by IR scholars on the war on terror and the Iraq War is illustrative of this tendency.

As the following chapter elaborates, much has been written about the dominance of the war on terror discourse in the months and years immediately following September 11, 2001. The pervasiveness of the war on terror in American culture and society at the time was seen in everything from official policy statements and speeches to jokes and highway billboards. As such, the war on terror arguably attained the status of a cultural milieu and background which formed widely-shared understandings of what the post-9/11 world was like or should be. Many of these studies have typically analyzed the war on terror as a social construction rather than a naturally-occurring condition. These studies argue that the Bush administration deployed a

discourse on the war on terror through a binary rhetoric of identity of good versus evil and civilization versus barbarism.

Yet, much of this literature largely stops here. That is, it focuses our attention on the fact that the war on terror is indeed a social and discursive construction, rather than an “objective” threat.¹ While useful, such studies severely limit themselves by not addressing other crucial factors for why the war on terror, as a social construct, gained widespread traction with audiences. The emotional and psychological state of Americans after September 11, 2001 is often given a brief nod in this literature without ever being more fully addressed and investigated. To argue that the war on terror was socially constructed says very little about how this discourse was able to “grab” people. Not all discursive constructions become widely shared “social” constructions as did the war on terror, and theorizing why some constructions are more appealing and politically successful than others would offer a much deeper understanding of the contentious foreign policies that followed September 11, 2001. This is not a study on the politics of the war on terror per se, but this literature is one that illustrates the need for theoretical approaches which can better handle the politics of affect and desire that are often glossed over without appropriate scrutiny.

These empirical gaps in the war on terror literature are symptomatic of important weaknesses in several bodies of IR theoretical literature. First, these weaknesses demonstrate the need for a systematic understanding of the role of affect and emotions in world politics. Affects and emotions are multiple, fluid, and contestable, and a theoretical framework that can capture some of these dynamics will be well-suited to offer insights into these kinds of empirical puzzles.

¹ This is not to say, of course, that acts of terrorism have not had real and horrific impacts on people’s lives. It is simply to say that the naming and construction of certain violent actions as “terrorism” is not naturally grounded in violence itself. Violent acts do not speak for themselves.

The recent work on affects and emotions in IR offers some instructive suggestions for how to go about developing such an approach, but there has been little to no work done on the central questions posed above. Second, these weaknesses point to a lack of understanding of the interweaving relationships between affects, emotions, and identity. Third, these issues also point to a general shortcoming of how the field understands and theorizes the social construction process itself. For example, the conventional wisdom that identities of self and other are mutually constructed through social interactions says little about the affective and emotional dynamics that presumably sustain and are bound up within these processes.

In this study I bring together these different issues to offer a new way for analyzing the politics of discourse, affect, and identity. In this pursuit, I draw upon the theories of Jacques Lacan and Ernesto Laclau, who together have not been the source of much thinking about American foreign policy or world politics within the established discipline of IR. Specifically, I systematically bring together elements of Lacan's theories about affect and identification with Laclau's work on the theory of discursive hegemony into a framework that not only theorizes the relationship between affect, discourse, and identification. This framework also explicates how these elements underpin and sustain struggles to construct political boundaries and define hegemony, or "common sense."

Lacan argues that people strive to identify with the social resources of culture (or what he terms the Symbolic order) because of a structural emptiness or lack around which their identities cohere. People do not have naturally-given or primordial identities. They instead must identify with the Symbolic resources to which they have access (such as certain prominent or valued signifiers, words, ideologies, etc.) in order to overcome what Laclau (1994, 2-3) calls the "originary and insurmountable lack of identity." This structural emptiness or lack sparks the

desire to engage in identification processes so as to overcome the lack. The latter induces uneasiness and frustration in the subjects, and as a result they attempt to “fill” this lack through identification with Symbolic resources that seem to promise a sense of identity security and stability. This continual process is always infused with affect. For Lacan, affect differs from emotion insofar as affect is that which is inexpressible, that which cannot be directly represented or articulated within language. Affect escapes signification, yet it nevertheless has an effect on signification. Affects, as opposed to emotions, then, are the movements that are felt at the boundaries of what can be said and what cannot be said. We strive to find a signifier that can best express what we feel, but no signifier ultimately can do it. Language cannot fully express the affective experiences we have, and thus language, in a sense, *takes something away* from being a subject as such. A subject would feel that there is always a deep part of him/her that remains outside of how s/he can describe him/herself with language.

This sense that *something* is missing from the discourse which subjects must use to speak about and construct themselves plays a central role in Lacan’s thinking about the subject. Subjects desire to reclaim that “part” of themselves they feel is missing from their discourse, yet this inexpressible “something” is merely the lack of what we might call a full, unified, and complete “self.” The attempted recovery of the affective experience promised in once again becoming a full “self” is what drives the desire to engage in identification processes. The discourses that subjects feel promise the delivery of this “missing” thing, or what Lacan calls fantasies, evoke a stronger desire and appeal because of the image of a secure subject that they offer. In identifying with such fantasies, subjects attain a certain level of affective satisfaction without ever reaching the complete affective experience of a full “self” that fantasies seem to promise.

Lacanian theory thus introduces some complex notions about the “self,” others, affect, discourse, and identity, or what I call identification into problems of world politics. When combined with Laclau’s ideas about how political frontiers, boundaries, and identities are constructed, they offer some powerful insights into how and why some discourses resonate more than others. The war on terror, for example, was more politically resonate following September 11, 2001 than a number of other discursive alternatives. Yet current understandings of discourse, identity, and social construction are unable to differentiate between different degrees of resonance. By focusing on the level of merely rhetoric or language itself, existing approaches such as constructivism and poststructuralism cannot probe into the deeper affective factors why some discourses resonate more than others. Briefly put, the desires evoked and affective appeals offered are the major factors that explain differential discursive successes, and thus how some discourses might become hegemonic. In Chapters Four through Seven, I demonstrate how these ideas can be applied to gain a deeper understanding of the war on terror and Iraq discourses, and why discourses such as neoconservatism have had varying influence on American foreign policy debates over time. More generally, I argue that these ideas can advance several bodies of current research in IR, and that they offer substantial insights toward answering the main research questions posed in this study: how should we conceptualize affects and the politics surrounding them? What is the relationship between affect and discourse? What is the relationship between affect and identity? And, how can we employ these ideas to understand why some discourses resonate more than others?

Outline of Chapters

I develop these arguments and ideas in the chapters that follow. The next chapter fully lays out the gaps and weaknesses mentioned above in several bodies of theoretical literature in IR. Although my arguments and the theoretical framework I develop speak to many core issues

of IR literature, there are four specific literatures that are most directly relevant to this study. Social constructivism, poststructuralism, recent works on affects and emotions, and ontological security all offer potential insights into the major questions posed here. Yet none offers satisfactory answers to the questions posed above. Both social constructivism and poststructuralism take a limited view of social and discursive construction processes that focus on rhetorical structures without taking into account how people become affectively invested in these constructions. The emotions and affects literature asserts that these factors are central elements to political identities. However, there has been little systematic work on how emotions and affects relate to social and discursive construction, how they relate to discourse, or how they sustain political identities. Finally, other scholars argue that states seek ontological security, or security of the self, in addition to seeking physical or territorial security. Although these scholars share some of my concerns expressed here, there has been relatively little work on why states continue to seek ontological security in the face of continual frustration.

In Chapter Three I move beyond the shortcomings of the current literature and offer my own theoretical approach. I systematically bring together some key elements from the theories of Lacan and Laclau to develop a framework that can account for both the affective attachments of discourse and identity and the politics surrounding them. Specifically, Lacan's notions of desire, identification, affect, and fantasy offer a framework to understand why people desire, how they identify with discourses, how they become affectively invested in them, and why they continue to desire and identify despite their continual frustrations in never securing a fully stable sense of self. I combine these ideas with Laclau's theory of hegemonic politics. This theory argues that the "common sense" of a society is socially produced through discursive inclusions and exclusions when some political forces are able to define a society's universal values with

their own particular understandings. In combining these insights from Lacan and Laclau, the proposed framework offers a way to think about the politics of identification as the construction of “common sense” powerfully underpinned by affective investments.

The next four chapters offer empirical demonstrations of the power of this framework through analyses of recent episodes in debates over American foreign policy. Chapter Four applies the framework to the affective power of the war on terror. As discussed above, most constructivist and discourse-based approaches that have analyzed the war on terror have emphasized its constructed-ness. I show that such analyses have obscured the complex plays of desire, affect, and fantasy that are in fact necessary to understand how these discourses appealed to audiences after September 11, 2001. I argue that the war on terror discourse was able to “grab” people because of the fantasy that it offered to shaken audiences. The war on terror offered a fantasy which conveyed a promise that the shattered national subject, the “Nation,” could once again reclaim the definition and stability that it supposedly possessed before September 11, 2001. This fantasy of the national subject was appealing because of the way it allowed people who identified with it to avoid the ambiguity and instability at the heart of their identification processes.

These same dynamics are shown in current analysis of Iraq’s incorporation into the war on terror, which is examined in Chapter Five. Desire and fantasy, not the mere social construction of a “good” America and an “evil” Iraq, made possible the incorporation of Iraq into the war on terror, thus making the American invasion seem like a “natural” step in the conflict. Through an analysis of the 2002 State of the Union address, in which George W. Bush incorporated Iraq into the war on terror through tropes such as the “axis of evil,” I demonstrate that the same kinds of fantasies that had “grabbed” audiences after September 11, 2001 formed a

social background against which Iraq was discursively grafted. This grafting, furthermore, was not simply rhetorical blurring, but was a movement made possible by the desire for a stable national subject. The second half of this chapter also demonstrates and explores the fantasy and affective underpinnings of the hegemonic politics of the war on terror. Comparing the discourses of Bush and John Kerry from the U.S 2004 presidential campaign, I show how certain signifiers that were frequently deployed by many in the war on terror, such as “freedom,” were not simply assertions of competing values, but functioned as sites of hegemonic competition for meaning-making and for channeling affective potentials towards certain national fantasies.

Chapters Six and Seven offer an extended analysis of discourses of neoconservatism. Neoconservative discourses arguably resonated widely with American audiences after September 11, 2001, and this resonance likely goes some way towards understanding the widespread public support for the Iraq war in early 2003. Although many in IR seem to have begun paying attention to neoconservatism after the beginning of the Iraq War, the history of neoconservatism shows that its ideas have been a part of American foreign policy debates for many years before that. Like any political movement, its influence on public debate has ebbed and flowed over time. Although neoconservatism more likely than not reached the pinnacle of its influence on foreign policy during the first Bush administration after September 11, 2001, it has had substantial public presence for much longer. Neoconservatism has been more significant at some times than others, and I argue that this varying influence can largely be traced back to affective appeal neoconservative fantasies have offered at different times. These chapters apply my theoretical framework to map the changing fortunes of neoconservatism over time based on its varying affective appeal.

Chapter Six analyzes an early peak of neoconservative influence, the closing years of the 1970s, through a close examination of two prominent political discourses from the time. I compare and contrast the fantasies and affective appeals of the discourses of Jimmy Carter and Norman Podhoretz, arguing that they constituted a hegemonic contest in which they each attempted to define the “common sense” about the nation’s problems at the time. I argue that a major reason why Podhoretz’s neoconservative discourse was able to gain social traction at this time was because it offered a stronger fantasy of the national subject than did Carter’s discourse, whose “crisis of confidence” address largely evoked anxiety through its emphasis on the ambiguity and vagueness of the national subject.

Chapter Seven presents an analysis of varying neoconservative influence during the 1990s. The early years of the decade were a time of relatively light neoconservative influence, whereas the latter part of the decade saw their fortunes begin to change in terms of their increasing public presence. I argue that earlier neoconservative arguments about the arrival of the “unipolar moment” (i.e. the global dominance of the United States after the Cold War), found most prominently in the writings of Charles Krauthammer, evoked less desire for identification because of the fantasy of subjectivity that his discourse offered. Later neoconservative discourses, most notably in the writings of William Kristol and Robert Kagan, were more politically successful, I argue, because they offered more affectively appealing fantasies of subjectivity compared to Krauthammer’s earlier pronouncement. Together, these two chapters on neoconservatism demonstrate the power of my framework to argue not merely for the social constructed-ness of neoconservative views of foreign policy, but more importantly to analyze the differential affective appeal and desires evoked by them over time. This is followed by a

conclusion in Chapter Eight which reiterates and summarizes the major arguments, and offers some suggestions for future research and possible policy implications.

This study is, hence, intended to be a systematic, combined theoretical, empirical, and analytical exploration deploying a range of concepts and ideas that have yet to be the source of any serious or systematic thinking about global politics or foreign policy. The above cases were selected based on aspects of American foreign policy that existing literature has ignored, or questions that have had yet to be asked but are in fact vital to understanding the issues at hand. One hope is that viewing American foreign policy through some of the lenses that this study proposes will evoke more discussion of some dimensions of human social life that are exceedingly complex and thus theoretically intimidating. Yet, complexity should not intimidate; it should be seen as an opportunity to develop our analytical lenses in a manner that may not have seemed necessary before.

CHAPTER 2

DEBATING DISCOURSE, AFFECT, AND IDENTITY IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

This chapter presents an overview several theoretical literatures in International Relations (IR) that are most directly relevant to the central question posed by this dissertation: what accounts for the power of discourse and identity beyond the mere contingency of their socio-historical construction? The contemporary, and empirical, relevance of this question is demonstrated by close readings of recent work in IR on post-9/11 politics. Critically-oriented studies of the war on terror, while illuminating and crucial for opening spaces for questioning and de-naturalizing this powerful narrative, nevertheless reveal significant shortcomings in our understanding of the politics of discourse and identity. These gaps are not exclusive to the war on terror literature, but are instead symptomatic of broader lapses in the discipline's understanding of how social construction, in a sense, "works." In this chapter, I review several bodies of IR theoretical literature relevant for exploring the gaps not only in the "war on terror" literature, but in the larger theoretical holes to which they draw attention. Social constructivism and post-structuralism, the emerging body of research on emotions and affects in world politics, and the ontological security literature all bear directly on the question of how to account for the power of social constructions beyond their mere "constructed-ness." I argue that although each of these literatures suggests tentative answers to this question, none has yet offered a satisfactory understanding of the power of discourse and identity.

To begin to understand the power that language has over people, we can simply recall any number of everyday circumstances where this power is at work. Reading a novel is one such experience. We admire courageous characters, despise hateful ones, root for some to succeed and others to fail, weep with characters in despair, laugh with others, and so on. The experience of reading can be both a profoundly intimate experience, but at the same time is never entirely

personal. We, as individuals, experience the power that a writer's words have over us when his or her words evoke feelings. Our feelings, though, are never purely *ours*. What and how we "feel" is shaped by our political, social, and cultural surroundings.¹ In many ways, we learn how to feel by watching how others feel. The views we hold about who we are and about our place in the world are shaped through social interaction. The emotional experiences that some texts evoke are given familiar contours through shared cultural histories and memories. The experience of reading that "grabs" us is far from what conventional social science would call "power." Yet, the capacity of a novel to arouse a multiplicity of emotions is arguably a form of power.

Of course, novels are not the only texts that produce such responses of feeling. One can have the same effect from non-fiction, escapist films, documentaries, and so on. People consume these, of course, precisely because they seek such effects. Political texts should be understood in the same way. If we understand "text" in a broad sense, there is no reason to believe that there is any real difference in the effects produced by different "kinds" of texts. Signifiers (written, spoken, graphic, etc.) can be powerful wherever they are encountered, whether in a novel, a comic book, a film, or a political speech. Conventionally we can differentiate these as belonging to different social arenas ("entertainment," "pop culture," as separate from "politics"), but in terms of their social and political impact, these differences are less clearly-cut. IR scholars are increasingly recognizing this.² Few, of course, would deny that political texts are powerful. Yet, surprisingly little attention has been paid in IR to thinking about them in the terms discussed

¹ Some IR scholars have recently begun analyzing aesthetic dimensions of world politics. See Bleiker 2009. Although these aspects are not the subject of my investigation, they are relevant to understanding a text's effects on its audience.

² See, for instance, recent edited volumes on the intermixing of world politics with science fiction and the Harry Potter fantasy series. See Weldes 2003 and Neumann and Nexon 2006, respectively.

here. IR scholars have spent much time employing a variety of interpretive methods (Klotz and Lynch 2007; Klotz and Prakash 2009), but few have combined these insights with understandings of how desires and emotions are evoked by varieties of texts which help to (re)produce and stabilize political identities. IR scholars have produced much innovative work on the social construction of political identities, but this work needs to be supported by a deeper understanding of how identities are bound up with affective experiences of the kind that can be produced by any other “kind” of text.

The diversity of ways in which we interact with texts, especially “political” texts, matters profoundly for how our views of self and other cohere. Beginning with critically-oriented research in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Ashley 1987; Ashley and Walker 1990; Campbell 1990; Dalby 1988; Der Derian 1987; Klein 1990; Walker 1986), the significance for how constructions of “us” depend upon, and are mutually constituted by, “our” encounters with “them” has enormously broadened the theoretical scope and concerns of IR as a discipline. Empirical analyses of the processes of social construction, most often examined through textual sources, have typically centered on how self and other are constructed in terms of predication, representation, gendering, metaphor, and in social science theorizing (see Milliken 1999; Doty, 1996; Tickner 1992; Chilton 1996; and Oren 2002, respectively). While these approaches, and others like them, have taken the discipline into innovative new realms, analyses of the social and discursive construction of identity have, for the most part, neglected crucial aspects of identity. The affective and emotional experiences that texts produce in their audiences have received far less attention in IR than the rhetorical construction of texts themselves. While the theoretical difficulties in such an effort are considerable, IR scholars arguably should not let this keep them from theorizing about such effects. As Roland Bleiker and Emma Hutchison (2008) have

recently argued, social scientific methods are often ill-suited to help us understand aspects of social and political life that are as tough to grasp as emotions. However, by expanding our theoretical apparatuses to incorporate approaches that are better equipped to handle such difficulties, the payoff will be greater comprehension of a previously neglected, yet vital realm of politics.

An approach that helps to capture some of these subtle, but powerful, textual effects would offer us a more complete understanding of many aspects of contemporary world politics. Such an approach could shed light on aspects of politics that usually receive only a passing remark, yet are usually crucial insights into political events and issues that gain our attention. As the previous chapter mentioned, this is a tendency displayed in the existing IR literature on the politics of the war on terror and the 2003 Iraq war.

Many accounts of the politics of the Iraq war have emphasized how the Bush administration's push for war became legitimate by dubbing it as a part of the war on terror. As Ronald Krebs and Jennifer Lobasz (2007) argue, the administration's ability to achieve a dominant interpretation of the September 11, 2001 attacks in terms of a "war on terror" provided a crucial background against which the existing image of Saddam Hussein could be grafted, thus making it seem as though Iraq was the next logical step, after Afghanistan, in the war on terror. Amy Gershkoff and Shana Kushner (2005) have showed that the high levels of public support for the war were due to the Bush administration's frequent and explicit linking of Iraq to the war on terror. Richard Jackson (2005) argues that the linking of terrorists with 'outlaw regimes' through the weapons of mass destruction (W.M.D.) trope provided a number of political advantages for mobilizing public support. As for the power of the war on terror to drown out other competing narratives, Ian Lustick (2006, 17) observes that it "is assumed without debate or

public questioning that terrorism is a problem of the sort that must be addressed by a ‘war’. The war on terror has thus achieved the status of a background narrative’.” Stuart Croft’s exhaustive analysis of how deeply the war on terror became embedded within American society through news media, television shows, jokes, and highway billboards (Croft 2006) supports the arguments and observations of many that the war on terror indeed constituted the dominant understanding of American foreign policy in the years immediately following the Sept. 11 attacks.³

Extant critical studies of the politics of the war on terror have typically analyzed it as a social and discursive construction that has been deployed in U.S. foreign policy since September 11, 2001 (Hülse and Spencer, 2008). These studies have explored how the Bush administration deployed a binary rhetoric of identity that portrayed the war on terror as one of good against evil, civilization versus barbarism, and freedom against fear. These identity tropes are drawn upon to help explain why the American public accepted the idea of conducting a “war on terror” and why they largely favored the idea of launching a military strike against Iraq. The idea of a struggle of good against evil tapped into American religious imagery (Domke, 2004), just as the war on terror itself was cast as a struggle to defend the American “way of life” through a renewed form of liberal interventionism (Widmaier, 2007).

Even as this literature demonstrates convincingly that the war on terror was a founded on a socially constructed condition more than a self-evident, “objective” threat, this literature suffers from a major weakness of the kind mentioned above. Most studies of the social construction of the war on terror, and the identities constructed by it, focus on its various narrative strands and rhetorical structure. For instance, most of Jackson’s extensive analysis consists of readings of

³ Many other states also accepted the interpretation of post 9-11 world politics in terms of the war on terror, albeit to varying degrees. See, for instance, Arfi (2008), Katzenstein (2003), and Rees (2007).

the various sub-narratives within this discourse (Jackson, 2005). Wesley Widmaier (2007) examines the particular ways in which elites interpreted and constructed the range of possible responses by the U.S., while Roxanna Sjöstedt (2007) traces how the articulation of the war on terror drew upon historically available resources, such as prior U.S. and international security doctrines. Most critical accounts of the war on terror up to this point, however, seem to do just this: bring to our attention the various ways in which the war on terror is indeed not an objective condition, but rather a social construction in which certain interpretations of the world became dominant, excluding other possible interpretations which might not legitimate military intervention. While illuminating, these studies limit themselves by tracing discursive and rhetorical structures as such, without examining other factors that are crucial when trying to understand why the war on terror discourse became hegemonic.

The emotional and psychological state of the American public after September 11, 2001 is one of the most important factors in offering a deeper understanding of the political success of the war on terror which has been largely glossed over, if addressed at all, by these studies. Some of these same studies, paradoxically, illustrate this. Sjöstedt (2007, 249, 237), in analyzing the historical sources of the Bush Doctrine in the Truman Doctrine, finds that both doctrines “clearly reflect the overall political and societal discourses of their times,” although she acknowledges that she does not problematize “exactly how discourses affect the ideas and beliefs of individuals.” More directly, Andrew Flibbert (2006, 326) argues that ideas about the role of American hegemony and the efficacy of military force are crucial for understanding “their effect on the collective understandings held by political actors themselves and through their deployment in political contestation.” He adds that these ideas “gained currency over a short period of time and shaped both elite and, to a lesser extent, popular discourse” largely because

they “appealed to a wide segment of the American public after September 11,” just as a black-and-white vision of the world as one of good and evil “resonated with many Americans” (Flibbert 2006, 336, 337). For Krebs and Lobasz (2007, 428), the Bush administration’s rhetoric became dominant partly because its “identification of the perpetrators of the September 11 attacks as evil...resonated with an American public increasingly drawn, if not always consciously, into the orbit of evangelical discourse.” The hegemony of the war on terror narrative, and the inability of the Left to make oppositional headway, Krebs and Lobasz (2007, 433) argue, lay in the fact that it was the right “identity” story at the right time: “what was needed was a rhetoric that would make sense of these shocking events, identify the perpetrators, explain what they wanted, reaffirm the nation’s ideals, and reassure the public that security would be restored. The rhetoric of crisis is consequently a rhetoric of identity, providing the occasion for re-narrations of national self-conceptions; it only secondarily seeks to articulate a rational policy response.”

Largely missing from this literature is a thorough understanding of the power of influential political texts after September 11, 2001. What these studies have in common, despite their sometimes opposing arguments in explaining the hegemonic efficiency of the war on terror, are that each of them implies that the psychological, affective, and/or emotional state of the American public after the September 11, 2001 attacks helped to facilitate the political success of the war on terror discourse.⁴ Religious imagery “resonated” with people. The Bush Doctrine “reflected” already-existing discourses within American society. Ideas about the role of military force and American power “gained currency” and shaped perceptions and policy options. Ideas

⁴ Emma Hutchison and Roland Bleiker (2008) argue that emotions are a central component in understanding the responses to terrorist attacks and in understanding the rebuilding of political community after such a trauma. While insightful, they nevertheless do not pursue the complex questions addressed in this chapter and the next and the relationships between discourse and emotions and affects, distinctions between affects and emotions, or how emotions play in the constitution of subjectivity.

about American exceptionalism and power “appealed to” much of the American public. That Americans (and, albeit to a lesser extent, publics abroad) accepted the legitimacy and necessity of a “war on terror” does not explain *how* and *why* this discourse was appealing, why it gained public traction, or why appeals to national identity had significant power to make a majority of the American public feel insecure. Arguments that rely on accepting that these discourses “resonated,” “gained currency,” and “reflected” already existing identities and “common sense” ignore the non-rhetorical aspects of why the war on terror, and the subsequent foreign policy issues that were integrated into it (such as Iraq), became hegemonic after September 11, 2001.⁵ These claims, while perhaps accurate, do not offer systematic or satisfactory accounts of how non-rhetorical factors mattered in the emergence of the war on terror discourse.

Perhaps more importantly, these gaps in the recent literature on post-9/11 American foreign policy point to, and are symptomatic of, larger shortcomings in several major bodies of IR theoretical literature. Dimensions of social construction processes such as affect, desire, and emotion should not be viewed as somehow separate from social construction, but instead as integral to their power. Consequently, affects and desires should not be viewed as mere supplements to current forms of constructivist and poststructuralist analyses. Rather, I argue that these factors are crucial to understanding the power of social constructions and identities in the first place. As Mark Bracher (1993, 19) contends, when “a cultural phenomenon succeeds in interpellating subjects – that is, summoning them to assume a certain subjective (dis)position – it does so by evoking some form of desire or by promising satisfaction of some desire.” Theorizing the dynamic inter-weaving of desires, affects, discourse, and other identity needs – indeed, conceptualizing them in a way that does not deny them as separate factors at all – seems to be the

⁵ I include my own previous work here. See Solomon (2009).

crucial next step in understanding the social construction of world politics and foreign policy. These gaps in the war on terror literature are symptomatic of these much more substantial theoretical holes in our understanding of how social construction “works.” The following overview of constructivist and post-structuralist research reveals many of these shortcomings.

The Limits of Constructivism and Poststructuralism

It is now commonplace, if not cliché, to argue that world politics is socially constructed. Politics and identities are widely seen not as primordial or given by nature, but rather are socially produced through meaning-making interactions (Checkel 1998; Finnemore 1996; Hopf 1998; Katzenstein 1996; Wendt 1992, 1999). Beyond these broadly accepted notions, however, the problem of how to approach the social construction of identity is highly contested. How to define identity, the relationship between identities and interests, whether they are truly “ideas all the way down” or not, how identity should be incorporated into explanatory arguments, and the ultimate stability or instability of identity are all questions that IR scholars, working within a variety of theoretical perspectives, continue to pour over. While a variety of frameworks agree with the constructivist and/or post-positivist critique of neorealism and neoliberalism’s general neglect of identity issues (Katzenstein 1996; Lapid, 1989; Lapid and Kratochwil, 1996), various stripes of constructivists and poststructuralists approach the concept of identity in sometimes overlapping but frequently diverging and incompatible ways.⁶

⁶ In a much-cited article, Rogers Brubaker and Fredrick Cooper (2000) lament the conceptual ambiguity of the term “identity.” “‘Identity,’ we argue, tends to mean too much (when understood in a strong sense), too little (when understood in a weak sense), or nothing at all (because of its sheer ambiguity)” (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 1). Consequently, they argue that the concept is simply no longer suited for use in the social sciences: “‘identity’ is too ambiguous, too torn between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ meanings, essentialist connotations and constructivist qualifiers, to serve well the demands of social analysis” (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 2). While I sympathize with their frustrations, I disagree that “identity” should be thrown out of social analysis completely. Further theoretical, conceptual, and methodological engagement and exploration would seem to advance the study of all that “identity” typically entails rather than giving up on the concept. For an early but still relevant “semantic history” of the term, see Gleason (1983).

A recent edited volume and review of the identity literature in IR offers a useful starting point for examining the current status of the concept. In their introductory and concluding chapters to *Identity and Global Politics* (2004), Patricia M. Goff and Kevin C. Dunn offer a summary of where the study of identity stands in IR. They acknowledge that although “there is no ‘consensus’ on what identity is, how it ‘matters,’ or how best to study it,” they nevertheless find it productive to unpack the concept to increase clarity about what it entails. They find that arguments for the relevance of identity align along four dimensions (Goff and Dunn 2004, 4-8). First, most identity scholars accept that identity is defined against an Other. Identity is inherently *relational*; one cannot have self-definition without a sense of what one is not. Second, despite some approaches that argue identities are fixed, natural, and easily bounded, many argue that identity is *fluid and unstable*, and that this fluidity itself should be an object of study. Thirdly, and perhaps most uncontroversial, the rise of critical, constructivist, feminist, and poststructuralist theories have made it almost a given that identities must be thought of as socially *constructed*. Although the factors which are most influential in the construction of identities remain debatable (for instance, which actors, institutions, practices, etc. are most important in identity construction?), the question of whether identities are constructed seems settled in the critical literature. Finally, accepting that identities are *multiple* allows for a wider range of research questions than the assumption that identities are singular and monolithic. Recognizing both the multiplicity of identities and that national or state identities are not always the most important or consequential leads to a broadening agenda that asks questions about why some identities take prominence over others at different times, and how different strands of identity interplay with each other.

While most constructivists and poststructuralists largely subscribe to these arguments about identity, poststructuralists have perhaps pushed the furthest in terms of historicizing and deconstructing previously take-for-granted identities. It should be noted, however, that constructivists and poststructuralists turn to language in different ways given their often differing epistemological and ontological commitments. François Debrix (2002, 203), for example, argues that constructivist strategies toward language “point toward normative principles and want to reflect the salience and rules of social norms and activity.” By contrast, poststructuralism tends to emphasize the performative aspects of social practices (Debrix 2002, 203). Additionally, while “constructivist language emphasizes the importance of reconstructive work... poststructuralism highlights the presence of deconstructive play” (Debrix 2002, 203-4). Self-styled constructivists often study rules, norms, and how changes in identity can explain political changes. Many poststructuralists emphasize the constitutive aspects of discursive representations and how both subjects and knowledge are bounded and produced by discourses. Poststructuralist scholars pursuing these lines of critique argue that identities are constructed through discourse, and that consequently there are no extra-discursive foundations upon which identities may be stabilized, such as nature or other “objective” material factors. In contrast, constructivists often hold that the world is not language “all the way down,” but hold to some “rump materialism” upon which social construction is grounded (Wendt 1999).

The works of several scholars demonstrate the poststructuralist stance of seeing the world as discourse indeed “all the way down.” David Campbell’s well-known arguments about foreign policy offer a seminal example. For him, states are performative entities insofar as they “do not possess prediscursive, stable identities . . . with no ontological status apart from the many and varied practices that constitute their reality, states are (and have to be) always in a process of

becoming” (Campbell 1998 12). This of course stems directly from his assumption that “there is nothing outside of discourse” (Campbell 1998, 4). Maja Zehfuss’s deconstructionist critique of constructivist theories of identity similarly conceptualizes identities as purely discursive. She shows that “identities as they are defined in discourse fail to be logically bounded entities. Identities are continuously articulated, rearticulated and contested, which makes them hard to pin down as explanatory categories” (Zehfuss 2001, 338). Janice Bially Mattern (2005, 12), too, accepts that “it is narrative and narrative alone that constitutes identity; the entirety of what makes international identity real is the shared stories among the people who represent or speak on behalf of states about who they are in the world and who they are in relation to one another.” For her, identities are best “treated as infinitely contingent down to their magnetic foundations – which are not really foundations but instead another layer of social process prone to interruption” (Mattern 2001, 360; see also Doty 1996 and Walker 1993).

What these observations have in common is not only that identity is discursive, but also that a discursive epistemology must be combined with a linguistic ontology if we are to more fully grasp the dynamics, and politics, of identities. Such epistemological and ontological commitments entail three kinds of claims, argues Jennifer Milliken. Discourses are, first, seen as “systems of signification which construct social realities” (Milliken 1999, 229). Discourses are also *productive* of the things defined within them; discourses bring people and objects into realms of social interpretation and intelligibility such that they can have an impact on social life. Both of these claims lead to a third, which is that discourses require constant rearticulating and “maintenance,” in order to remain effective, and that an analytical focus on the “play of practice” of discursive struggles is central to a discursive approach (Milliken 1999, 230). More recently, Lene Hansen’s text on “security” as discourse offers several chapters of methodological

guidance to scholars working within linguistic/discursive ontologies and epistemologies. “The adoption of a discursive epistemology,” Hansen explains, “implies that the poststructuralist analytical focus is on the discursive construction of identity as both constitutive of and a product of foreign policy. Consistent with the ontological emphasis on language, the practical epistemological focus is on how identities and policies are articulated” (2006, 23). In other words, poststructuralist discourse analysis involves analyzing how texts construct politics through rhetorical or linguistic structures. Texts are analyzed not for how they represent some “deeper” reality, but rather how words, sentences, and narratives within texts themselves construct social reality.

Epistemological commitments to discursive construction within texts offer alternative perspectives on a variety of concepts traditionally central to IR. While the theoretical advantages gained by discursive approaches are many, one particular aspect of the linguistic turn in IR is a deeper and more nuanced understanding of power. A more social approach to power moves the debate beyond the terrain of purely material and overtly coercive understandings of the concept. Charlotte Epstein (2008) describes how constructivists have been able to shift the debate about power beyond materialism to more social factors. However, by “wanting to be ‘part of the debate’” with neorealists and neoliberals, constructivists unwittingly helped to both reproduce essentialist understandings by accepting debate in terms of “ideas versus material” factors, and to nearly evacuate power completely in one of their main research areas, the study of norms (Epstein 2008, 8-9). Discursive power “has been neglected” by constructivists, she argues, “because insufficient attention has been paid to the construction of *meaning* rather than ideas or norms” (Epstein 2008, 9, emphasis in original). Discursive power is the power to cement one articulation as “common sense,” while removing the contingency of the moment where other

possible articulations could have been instilled as dominant. This is the power of “common sense.” It “is a form of power that *does not need to coerce* because it commands consent – in fact, operating at the level of meaning and social interactions, it works consent from within, for it sets the terms that makes these interactions possible in the first place” (Epstein 2008, 10).

Raymond Duvall and Michael Barnett’s (2005) typology of different conceptualizations of power is helpful in clarifying the theoretical stakes in this move. For them, “productive” power concerns “the social processes and systems of knowledge through which meaning is produced, fixed, lived, experienced, and transformed” (2005, 55). In other words, through discourse, subjects and social relations are produced as meaningful. “Thus,” they continue, “to attend to the analysis of productive power is to focus on how diffuse and contingent social processes produce particular kinds of subjects, fix meanings and categories, and create what is taken for granted and the ordinary in world politics” (2005, 57). Through these lenses, power is analyzed within texts both at those moments of openness that are subsequently foreclosed by a powerful discourse, and how one discourse is able to solidify itself as dominant at the expense of others.

However, as I indicated earlier, it seems apparent that there is much more to discursive power and the power of identity than these perspectives acknowledge. In studies of the war on terror that adopt a constructivist or discursive approach, for example, it is frequently recognized that something *beyond* merely rhetoric and symbolic meaning is at work. Yet, these recognitions are usually noted briefly without any substantive elaboration or analysis. The focus of most, if not all, of these studies is upon the rhetorical strength of articulations deployed by political elites, not upon this “something else” that would seem to offer a much deeper understanding of why certain discourses and identities “gain currency” or “resonate” with the audiences of those elites – that is, with the everyman or everywoman for whom the elites presume to speak. Existing

work on discourse and identity argues that it is the rhetorical influence of words themselves that not only has the power to create political subjects and identities, but to foreclose the possibility of other meaningful discourses or identities from becoming “common sense.” Yet, scholars in other disciplines have recognized the limits of such approaches. Humanities scholar Marshall Alcorn (2002, 106-7) argues although current forms of discourse analysis have made strides in our understanding of language, they have also “oversimplified our understanding of signification.” In examining racism, for instance, the strength of differences felt by some cannot be accounted for on a merely linguistic level:

differences that matter in the recognition of the other reflect differences in *jouissance* not differences in signification per se. The violent hatreds generated by racism, for example are grounded, not in any logic of the signifier, per se, but in the conflicts of disavowed forms of *jouissance* that are in bodily experience not mental representations (Alcorn 2002, 107).

Jouissance, as the following chapter explains, is the name Lacanian theory gives to an affective experience that cannot be directly represented in discourse. Viewed as a form of generalized affect, *jouissance* is in this regard Lacan’s answer to the question of “what else” is operating through signification in addition to semiotic and cognitive meaning. Affective investment and dis-investment in certain discursive elements can help us better understand discursive power beyond what current forms of discourse analysis offer. Alcorn (2002, 17) continues,

Because of a kind of adhesive attachment that subjects have to certain instances of discourse, some discourse structures are characteristic of subjects and have temporal stability. These modes of discourse serve as symptoms of subjectivity: they work repetitively and defensively to represent identity.

Such a perspective raises three key questions that are relevant to this discussion. First, what explains the “resonance” that discourses have with receiving audiences? That discourses always build upon, and are grounded in the legitimacy of, broader historical discourses surely provides part of an explanation. Ernesto Laclau’s (1990) term “sedimentation” nicely captures

the influence of settled historical understandings of “common sense,” even if, ultimately, no understanding is ever truly “settled.” Yet, existing constructivist and poststructuralist approaches do not seem to account for precisely how rhetorical power works to naturalize (to “sediment” in Laclau’s terminology) particular understandings of the world as “common sense.” The dominance of a discourse is only apparent after it has become dominant, and analysis of this change typically proposes that this discourse “must have” crowded out other discourses. Such analyses leave open the question of the emotional and/or affective “resonance” that powerful discourses must somehow “have” in order to effect such changes in dominance. In short, existing discourse theories in IR leave open the question of how discourses gain social traction. Why exactly do some discourses become “common sense” and some do not? What exactly is involved in the “grip” that discourses have over people?⁷

Second, what exactly accounts for how the moment of contingency of hegemonic attainment is erased, which then naturalizes the meaning of a given discourse? Once again, the usual approach is conceived in retrospect: analyses of hegemonic power are typically offered *after* they have become hegemonic, thus assuming that what was at work at the moment of contingency was the foreclosure of other political possibilities. From a discursive approach, there is nothing too controversial about this. Rarely, however, do we really gain much more of an understanding than this; here is often where (almost anecdotal) explanations about discourses “resonating” and “gaining currency” are offered to explain their power beyond the structure or *form* of words and narratives themselves. Yet, I propose there must be something at work beyond merely the contingent social construction of a hegemonic discourse to render the *force* by which such a discourse covers over the moment of indeterminacy. Not all discourses are created

⁷ Here and elsewhere I borrow Jason Glynos’s (2001) terminology of “gripping.”

equally, and we can reasonably assume a kind of affective investment in a dominant discourse that, were it to be identified, can more fully account for its social power.

Third, and closely related, what exactly is the relationship between affects/emotions and discourse in the context of political “common sense”? Conventional approaches may argue that language merely expresses more basic feelings, that language is the transparent medium through which affects (in addition to intentional meaning) are delivered. For example, a realist approach to fear may offer this explanation; fear is natural or basic emotion, and it exists independent of language and has real effects regardless of the rhetoric used to express it. However, most of the literature of concern here would likely reject such a correspondence theory of language reflecting some “deeper” material reality. Instead, constructivists and poststructuralists introduce more social complexity to the issue by arguing for the centrality of language to human social reality.⁸ Yet, as shown below, even within the existing critical literature this relationship has not gained much analytical or conceptual attention. Even those scholars who adopt explicitly discursive perspectives have yet to engage in this line of questioning. If we accept that affects are not transparently reflected through language but are rather shaped and channeled through language, these relationships merit our attention. In this sense, a crucial question emerges: how does looking at emotions/affects deepen our understanding of discourse, and vice versa?

In light of the shortcomings of constructivism and post-structuralism outlined here, there are at least two emerging literatures in IR that may speak to these questions.⁹ First, the literature

⁸ Again, constructivists and poststructuralists often turn to language in different ways (Debrix 2002). Also, while it is safe to say that nearly all poststructuralists focus heavily on discourse in one sense or another, some constructivists emphasize more than others the role of language in social construction. For constructivist work that emphasizes language and linguistic rules, see Onuf (1989) and Kubalkova, Onuf, and Kowert (1998). For constructivist work that does not, see Finnemore (1996; 2004), Katzenstein (1996), and Wendt (1999).

⁹ For other useful overviews of constructivism in IR, see Barkin (2010), Checkel (2004), Dessler (1999), Farrell (2002), Guzzini (2000), Locher and Prügl (2001) and Palan (2000).

on emotions is quickly becoming one of the most innovative areas of research in the discipline. A number of scholars have not only signalled the need for IR to pay attention to the political significance of emotions, but several have also studied the significance of particular emotions in specific political contexts. Most relevant to this essay, scholars of emotions have recently began thinking about the relationship between emotions and identity. Thus, an examination of this literature is necessary to determine what insights it may hold with regard to the power of language and identity, to see if it helps to further understand the “grip” of language and identity. A second emerging body of research that may also offer insights is the literature of ontological security. The claims of this literature that actors need a stable sense of self may also offer insights into the questions raised above. In reviewing the relevant portions of these literatures I hope to show that despite their innovations and insights neither emotions nor ontological security literature as they are currently formulated in IR theory offer satisfactory answers to the questions at hand.

Emotions and Identity

The events of September 11, 2001 sparked a new interest by IR scholars in the emotional and affective dimensions of political life.¹⁰ While promising as a whole, the most relevant products of this literature for the questions posed above are those studies that address the emotional dimensions of identity. Neta Crawford, in the article that seems to have kicked off recent interest in the topic, touched upon some implications the study of emotions may have for the concept of identity. She approvingly cites several authors who argue that emotional significance is context-dependent, and that emotions can be understood as shared expectations that a group has about collective behavior (Crawford 2000, 129). Others have addressed the

¹⁰ In addition to the works cited below, see Clarke, Hoggett, and Thompson (2006), Harkavy (2000), Hymans (2006), Saurette (2006), Löwenheim and Heimann (2008), and Mercer (2010).

individual versus collective nature of emotions. Karin Fierke (2004, 484), in a study of solipsism and trauma, finds that both “individual identity and emotion are bound up in the political unit. The emotions may remain disguised in individuals, but, to be translated into political agency and identity, they must be put into words by leaders, who give meaning to the individual experience by situating it in a larger context of group identity.” Here, Fierke draws a distinction between individual and collective emotions, finding a linkage between the two levels in how elites give public expression to emotions. Jonathan Mercer addresses a similar problem in explaining how emotions can be used for “group-level” explanations. He finds that the old individual-versus-collective problem in social explanation does not necessarily cause a roadblock to using emotions as explanations. One does not have to reify a group to discuss group-level emotions, nor must one reduce the group to the characteristics of an individual. Instead, “the resolution to this levels-of-analysis problem can be found in understanding that people have multiple identities at different levels of abstraction at different times” (Mercer 2006, 297). Additionally, “identity is a feeling,” he argues (2006, 297). “Emotion is necessary for an identity to cause behavior. Other variables contribute to identity, but even in the case of ideas or material interests it is an emotional connection with a group that gives identity its power” (2006, 297-8).

Other IR scholars have elaborated upon these themes. In their perceptive review of the IR emotions literature, Roland Bleiker and Emma Hutchison draw upon sociological theory to argue that emotions “are an active component of identity and community” (2008, 123-4):

Emotions help us make sense of ourselves, and situate us in relation to others and the world that surrounds us. They frame forms of personal and social understanding, and are thus inclinations that lead individuals to locate their identity within a wider collective. As Sara Ahmed suggests, emotions are an intimate part of the attachments that bind individuals to particular objects and to others; they ‘colour’ the relational ties that can come to constitute identity and belonging. Feelings of both pleasure and pain are illustrative here. An encounter that brings pleasure can create a certain kind of attachment to whatever brings joy.

Meanwhile, a painful or regrettable encounter may create a similar attachment, perhaps a 'negative' one, to the object or person that inflicted the pain. The emotional nature of identity and communal belonging is implicit here, because our sense of identity and belonging are constituted by the way we attached and situate ourselves within the social world.

Bleiker and Hutchison nicely capture the ways in which emotions/affects help to form bonds of community that constitute collective identities. Andrew Ross, in his assessment of constructivism's ability to conceptualize emotions, also discusses the emotional constitution of community in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks (Ross 2006).

Ross's examination of emotions is perhaps the most thorough attempt to date in IR to conceptualize from a constructivist perspective how emotions produce effects. He reviews the study of emotions in the social sciences in recent decades, examines the ability of soft (i.e., Wendtian) constructivism to handle the conceptual and theoretical problems emotions pose, and offers some initial steps "toward a theory of affective identity" (2006, 210). It is the latter that is most directly relevant to this discussion. Here, Ross explores two main issues: the symbolic versus "inarticulable" dimensions of emotions, and the usefulness of September 11, 2001 as a case study to illustrate how central emotions are to politics. Criticizing constructivism's assumption that identities are "meaning-laden representations...that have all the coherence and determinateness of consciously held beliefs about social roles," Ross submits that scholars should look to "non-conscious" processes to uncover how emotions and identity are bound together. He finds that as "poststructuralists and others at the margin of constructivism are recognizing, we can support the contention that identities involve roles, symbols, and other forms of social meaning and still want to learn about the nonconscious processes that reproduce and transmit them" (2006, 210).

In pointing out the shortcomings of instrumentalist versions of identity, which assume that people consciously reflect upon the identities they adopt, Ross argues that poststructuralist

research has gone the farthest in terms of approaching the “non-conscious, affective dimension of identity” (2006, 211). He points to David Campbell’s work on ethnic identities and performativity as an example of the promise that poststructuralist theory holds in this regard. Identity in this sense refers to repeated performances that are not caused by or reflect a pre-given identity, but instead continually construct identity, which only appears coherent and whole afterwards. Ross finds that “Campbell tends to view performance from the perspective of the product it engenders – the discursive representation of ethnic identity – rather than the bodily performance itself. His deconstructionist analysis reveals the need for more direct investigation of affectivity as part of the non-representational or ‘mystical’ dimension of language” (2006, 211). Ross also cites Jenny Edkins’s work on trauma as an example of how certain events can shatter and disrupt otherwise stable identities, and how such disruptions can highlight the “inarticulable” dimensions of identity. “For Edkins,” he describes, “trauma exceeds the conscious awareness of intentional agents . . . It is beyond the realm of what we expect as intentional action” (Ross 2006, 211). Ross rightly sees significant potential in studying these difficult aspects of identity. “While emotions may at times be mystical and ineffable, these qualities should not bar constructivists from studying them,” he maintains (2006, 212). Neither, I argue, should it bar constructivists or poststructuralists from pushing the theoretical envelope of compelling work on this issue that has already begun.

While Ross’s exploration of these possibilities is instructive, he unfortunately offers little in the way of systematic theorization of how to actually go about studying these unfamiliar aspects of identity. He does, however, raise a few possible conceptual trajectories towards what such research may look like. For instance, he suggests that “circulations of affect” are one way to account for “public enthusiasm for nationalist mobilization or military intervention” (2006,

199). These circulations differ from purely subjective, or individualistic, “feelings” in that affects “cut across individual subjects and forge collective associations from socially induced habits and memories” (2006, 199). However, these quite intriguing suggestions propose more questions than answers. For instance, when discussing Edkins’s work on the “inarticulable” aspects of trauma, he suggests that perhaps “trauma is a version – an especially complex and intense one – of the affective experience that characterizes the everyday life of micropolitics” (2006, 211). He does not elaborate, however, on how his Deleuzian perspective sheds light on this, or even what this statement exactly means. It appears to mean that a trauma-like experience is part of everyday social reality, but nevertheless remains under-theorized. A bit later, he makes the compelling suggestion that the U.S. response to September 11, 2001 demonstrates that “emotions are strictly neither individual nor collective,” but are rather “nonsubjective” (2006, 213). “An affect,” he argues, “is not a property of an individual but a capacity of a body that brings it into some specific social relation, such as a nation or political movement” (2006, 213). “A collective identity,” he continues, “is sustained by habits and memories shared by members of a group . . . a collective identity thus expresses not an aggregate of individuals but a block of affect cutting across multiply attached and continually adapting agents” (2006, 214). This points in an intriguing direction, but Ross leaves open the question of how this works, or how to account for it in theoretical terms. How exactly does one connect affect “as a capacity of a body” to symbolic or discursively constituted identity?

Similarly, in asking whether Americans actually felt vengeance or anger after September 11, 2001, he finds that “one way of responding to these questions is to view these affective responses not as coherent ‘feelings’ . . . but as affective energies whose precise form is subject to the vicissitudes of public discourse” (2006, 212). If we accept that affects are not “feelings”

whose nature is purely subjective to self-contained individuals, but instead entail a distinctly social element bound in some way to discourse (as Laclau and Lacan propose), then it seems that affects must indeed somehow be linked to “public discourse.” However, the relationship between “public discourse” and affects is left open in Ross’s account. It is unclear if emotions and affects are directly communicated through public rhetoric, whether their spread and communication is primarily visual in terms of images and pictures, or if they are transmitted in another manner. He hints at the importance of both, pointing out that “as September 11 became more distant, as visual reminders of it became fewer,” the “denouncing of Saddam Hussein, broadcasting homeland security warnings, and memorializing 9/11,” in addition to “catchy slogans, casual body language, and ambiguous forms of religious discourse” allowed the Bush administration to tap into “popular energies without directly appealing to people’s capacities for political judgment” (2006, 213). Exactly how affects are integrated with, bound to, shaped by “public discourse” is, finally, unclear in Ross’s account.

The bulk of Ross’s article is devoted to both a review of existing research on emotions and a critical evaluation of “soft” constructivism’s ability to theoretically handle emotions. Yet, the links between discourse, discursive power, and emotions/affects remain unclear. Epstein (2008, 10) argues that discursive power is “a form of power that *does not need to coerce* because it commands consent – in fact, operating at the level of meaning and social interactions, it works consent from within, for it sets the terms that makes these interactions possible in the first place.” While I agree in general terms, it seems that something must be at work in discursive power beyond “the level of meaning,” which “works consent from within.” Emotions research suggests that discursive power at least partially relies upon an emotional resonance. Emotional resonance, however, does not seem to be strictly coterminous with a discursive power that works at the

“level of meaning.” If we accept Ross’s arguments that emotions do not always (or perhaps even mostly) work on a conscious or cognitive level, discursive power must work at some register beyond strictly cognitive “meaning.” Additionally, accepting that Epstein’s (and many others) Foucauldian arguments regarding power working through disciplinary practices and other forms of “consent from within,” we must also ask: what exactly is this “within?” What “part” of the subject does power “grab” that accounts for its “grip?” In sum, no studies in the IR literature on emotions have offered sustained reflection on this question, or have systematically theorized how emotions and affects may work to reinforce discursive power, or how exactly emotions and affects may solidify, or conversely, weaken identities.

Concurrently, does the literature on emotions offer any insights into the question of how a discourse becomes instilled as the “common sense” of a society? In other words, does studying emotions shed light on what happens when a discourse becomes hegemonic, whereby it erases the contingency of its own dominance, facilitating a “forgetting” that it is but one “common sense” among others that could have taken its place? This research potentially suggests that hegemonic attainments draw their strength from the emotional attachments people have to the dominant discourse; that the moment of “forgetting” is supported by peoples’ attachment to the message that eventually becomes dominant. Yet the description of this process is nearly tautological; discourses become hegemonic because people are attached to them, and we know this (after the fact) because the discourse became dominant. If emotions/affects are as central to political and social life as this literature argues, then there would seem to be a deeper explanation *in terms of affect* of what happens when the socio-historical contingency of a discursive struggle is erased and a particular discourse becomes what we call “common sense.” In the following

chapter, I argue that Lacanian theory, specifically the concept of fantasy, offers a more complete understanding of the hegemonic moment.

Lastly, the emotions/affects literature, as this point, seems to offer little in the way of systematic theorizing on the relationship between emotions/affects and language. While most of the IR emotions/affects literature seems to be guided by broadly constructivist assumptions, little attention has been paid to how emotions/affects and discourse infuse each other. Ross's consideration of poststructuralism's attention to the "inarticulable" aspects of identity is instructive here. Ross asserts, for example, that Campbell's "deconstructionist analysis reveals the need for a more direct investigation of affectivity as part of the non-representational or 'mystical' dimension of language" (2006, 211). Yet he leaves open what this exactly is meant by this.

In pointing out "non-representational" aspects of language likely somehow relate to emotions and/or affects, Ross actually points to, without directly pursuing, a concern that is central to the relationship between discourse and emotions/affects. If we accept that there must be some affective component to the political efficacy of certain discourses (or, those that become hegemonic), this component must determine how it is that some discourses dominate and others do not. This, in turn, points to a number of possible ways that the relationship between discourse and emotion/affect can be conceptualized. Observing that some discourses resonate more than others, and assuming that there must be an emotional/affective component underpinning the resonance of discourses, emotions/affects would seem to be an element that is somehow bound up with discourse, yet in some ways distinct from discourse. If emotions/affects were conceptualized as conterminous with discourse, then this would likely lead to the conclusion that every discourse is equally infused with emotion/affect. This is clearly not the case. To be able

to differentiate between more and less resonant discourses, emotion/affect must be theorized as overlapping, yet not co-extensive, phenomena. If they are viewed as partly but not always overlapping, then we will be better able to differentiate between those discourses that become sites of affective/emotional investment for people and thus become more hegemonic than those that do not become sites of widespread affective/emotional investment.

To the best of my knowledge, no one has yet explored these questions in IR. As the following chapter elaborates, the “non-representable” dimensions of language are precisely what a Lacanian ontology can at the center of IR theory. For Lacan, every discourse and identity is constituted around a loss or absence, something that is posited by subjects as missing yet is the very condition of possibility for the construction of a discourse or identity. The concept of the Lacanian Real tries to account for that which is outside of, inexpressible in, discourse, even as it determines the form and effect of discourse. In Lacan’s view *jouissance*, or a form of generalized affect, is part of the “inarticulable” dimension of social reality. Lacan offers a theory of discourse that combines with a model of identity and *jouissance* to understand how all three coalesce in movements that constitute human social life.

Ontological Security and Identity

Before moving to a discussion of the Lacanian-inspired framework employed in this dissertation, however, I will consider another body of IR theoretical literature which offers some promise in answering the questions I have raised. Recent research on ontological security in world politics suggests some potential answers to the questions of what accounts for the power or “grip” of discourses and identities beyond their socio-historical contingency. Jennifer Mitzen (2006) and Brent Steele (2005; 2008), among others, argue that states have a basic need for identity stability, which is achieved through the pursuit of ontological security. An overview of their work suggests that while ontological security may offer a more complete understanding

than does the current emotions/affects literature of the state's drive for identity stability, it leaves unanswered crucial questions about this drive, and its relationship to language.¹¹

The claims of ontological security scholars are often introduced through a comparison to basic notions of physical security. Mitzen, for instance, introduces her notion of ontological security by exploring its implications for the security dilemma. It is a long-standing argument of realist IR theory that in anarchy, a state's attempt to secure its physical self, even if for purely defensive reasons, threatens the security of other states.¹² As Mitzen reminds us, "an important premise of security dilemma theory is that the security states seek is physical, the protection of their territory and governance structure from others who can cause material harm" (2006, 342). Security dilemmas caused by uncertainty about others' intentions leads to spirals of insecurity, such as arms races, which threaten the survival of all parties. Yet, physical security is not the only kind of security that states seek. These scholars argue that states also strive for *ontological* security, which Mitzen defines as "the need to experience oneself as a whole, continuous person in time – as being rather than constantly changing – in order to realize a sense of agency" (2006, 342). Steele's definition closely parallels Mitzen's. He argues that "nation-states seek ontological security because they want to maintain *consistent self-concepts*, and the "Self" of states is constituted and maintained through a narrative which gives life to routinized foreign policy actions" (Steele 2008, 3, emphasis in original). Mitzen and Steele do not deny that states pursue physical security and survival, but instead argue that an ontological security perspective supplements traditional security theories, which have accounted for only physical survival.

Mitzen contends that states can find ontological security in routines that may even imperil their

¹¹ Mitzen and Steele have offered the most in-depth discussions of ontological security so far in IR, which is why I focus on their work in this section. Other IR scholars have also drawn upon the concept of ontological security, notably McSweeney (1999) and Huysmans (1998).

¹² For the classic statement of the security dilemma, see Herz (1950).

survival, if the situation offers the state a stable set of expectations that solidify a continuous identity. Steele (2008, 8, emphasis in original) similarly asserts that ontological security “provides a more *complete* understanding of what motivates states in their actions,” rather than traditional, reductive theories of state survival.

While the ontological security perspective is an illuminating new direction in security studies, it nevertheless leaves several crucial questions unanswered about identity dynamics, affects, and the drive for security. Specifically, the ontological security perspectives of Mitzen and Steele seem to share three major shortcomings: they reify the state (while at the same time claiming that they do not), under-theorize the relationship between ontological security-seeking and discourse, and lack an adequate understanding of the role of desire and affect in discourse and identity.

Reifying the State

Both Mitzen and Steele attempt to ground their frameworks by theorizing and analyzing state behavior. Both accept the long-standing conceptual assumption of states as the dominant actors in world politics. Both justify their application of ontological security theory to the state level-of-analysis. Mitzen and Steele both argue that the theoretical focus on states is necessary if an ontological security perspective is to be relevant to international relations. The reason is that ontological security theory is derived from individual-level theories of the self, and draws upon the work of Giddens (1984) to illustrate that individuals seek ontological security. But, Mitzen acknowledges that “states are not human beings and their behavior might be subject to different logics” (2006, 351), and offers three primary justifications for “scaling up” ontological security from the individual to the state level. First, she argues that the “state as a person” assumption made by scholars is just as valid for an ontological security perspective as it is for traditional

security perspectives.¹³ This assumption is valuable insofar as it sheds light on the real behavior of states when they seek both physical and ontological security (Mitzen 2006, 352). Her second justification is that “assuming that states seek ontological security points to the ontological security needs of their members” (2006, 352). In other words, the development and maintenance of routines with other groups (states) secures the sense of continuity and stability of individuals within the state. If it is reasonable to assume that inter-group routines helps stabilize group members’ senses of self, then it is no less reasonable to assume that states themselves are ontological security-seekers. Finally, Mitzen argues that the “micro-foundational assumption” of ontological security-seeking helps to explain “macro-level patterns” that otherwise may elude theoretical explanation (2006, 352). Pointing to other literatures that offer insights into broad state behaviors through reference to more micro-level theories (such as the foreign policy psychology studies of Jervis [1976]), Mitzen finds that assuming states are ontological security-seekers can provide similar explanations (2006, 352).

Steele (2008) criticizes Mitzen’s justifications while at the same time offering his own account for why an ontological security perspective should be applied to states if it is to be relevant for world politics. Steele points out that Mitzen’s view of state ontological security satisfying the ontological security of its constituent individuals is problematic in that she homogenizes the state’s constituent members. No meaningful differentiation is made among members of the state in Mitzen’s account. This is problematic because it “fundamentally obscures the political and normative nature of the ontological security process” (Steele 2008, 17). In doing so, Mitzen misses out on the political processes through which state identity is contested among different state leaders. Additionally, Steele finds that Mitzen’s framework

¹³ For different views of the usefulness of this assumption, see the forum on “Is the State a Person?” in *Review of International Studies*, 2004, 30 (2).

downplays the importance of how states seek ontological security through narratives. This falls short of offering methodological guidance for where to “look for” ontological security seeking in state behavior (Steele 2008, 18, 58).

For Steele, conversely, emotions and narratives provide a justification for applying an ontological security perspective to states. He (2008, 16) sees “the strongest evidence for the pervasiveness of individual-to-collective ascription has been demonstrated by research on the use of emotion as an ontological basis for state behavior.” Pointing out that mainstream approaches such as neorealism, neoliberalism, and soft constructivism implicitly assume that some emotions operate at the state level (“fear and hate,” for instance), Steele contends that emotions provide a link between different levels-of-analysis. He writes, “individuals are emotionally connected to the nation-state. The state agent creates an emotional connection that fetishizes the *authority* of a nation-state to promote the ‘national interest’” (2008, 16, emphasis in original). “Indeed,” he continues, “the need for ontological security is uniformly driven by emotion even though the behavior that serves the social construction of self-identity (of course) varies” (2008, 17).

State agents are, in fact, how Steele deals with the individual-collective “problem.” Since state agents (leaders) represent their state on the world stage, they effectively “are” the state; they make choices and have the capacity to carry out decisions to allocate resources (2008, 18). State leaders have the authoritative resources to make decisions that embody state action, but more importantly, leaders are the agents that articulate state identity during those times when it is threatened. Steele argues, “it is in those moments when the state is challenged ontologically that a state leader must ‘actualize’ the presentation of the state...*ontological security obtains for states because state agents seek to satisfy the self-identity needs of the states which they lead*” (2008, 19, emphasis in original). Ontological security is sought through the articulation of

“biographical narratives” about whom or what the state is, and how the state understands itself.

When states are threatened or their identities are challenged, biographical narratives are deployed by state agents in order to avoid shame, what Steele argues states experience when their biographical narratives do not coincide with their actions (2008, 12-13).

Mitzen’s and Steele’s arguments for why ontological security must be understood with reference to states meshes unproblematically with existing routines in IR. As both of them reiterate, the discussion of individual-collective attributes and the assumption that states act “as if” they were individuals is widely adopted for heuristic reasons. While Mitzen overlooks some of the deeper problems with this pervasive assumption, Steele does discuss the potential criticism that ontological security perspectives reify the state in problematic ways. He acknowledges that treating the state as a person may ignore the sometimes violent policies that states enact to deal with internal “others” that pose a challenge to the consistency of the state’s biographical narrative as articulated by state agents (2008, 64). He contends that rather than reifying the state, an ontological security perspective can help us understand the drive that pushes states to sometimes jeopardize certain segments of their own population in order to attain narrative consistency and security (2008, 64). Furthermore, Steele asserts that what “is reified in ontological security research is not the ‘state’ per se but the idea of the state or, more importantly, the self-identity of the state that takes on a ‘reality’ for its citizens. It is the placement of the ‘self’ of the state in international society that matters for the security interests of states, and this Self can be problematized” (2008, 65). Thus Steele admirably deals with the state-as-an-actor problem. Nonetheless, from the theoretical perspective offered in the following chapter, both Mitzen and Steele do seem to unnecessarily reify the state. While Mitzen’s attempt to illustrate the relevance of an ontological security perspective for the security dilemma guides

her to theorizing about states, Steele's more nuanced discussion recognizes some of the pitfalls in doing so.

Yet, I argue that this move is problematic. Assuming that pre-given states seek a stable sense of self through time seems to posit a phenomenon that needs explanation. That is, if the quest for ontological security is what gives states a sense of self and coherence, is not this process of seeking, in a way, constitutive of the state? In Mitzen's case, positing that pre-given state actors seek ontological security says little about how or where this "drive" is located "in" the state. Although she specifies that her version of ontological security focuses on dynamics and situations that are located "in-between" states (2006, 343), a more complete understanding would specify the state-level mechanisms through which the "drive" for security is satisfied (or not satisfied). Steele's framework does offer such an understanding in arguing that narrative is the vehicle through which ontological security is sought.

The biographical narrative is important to self-identity because it is the locus through which agents 'work out' their understandings of social settings and the placement of their Selves in those settings. Actors, with varying degrees of success, are using narrative as *the* form of 'discursive consciousness' through which agents create meanings for their actions. That is the ontological importance of narrative, and for our purposes a narrative used by state agents 'breathes life' into the nation-state. Indeed, narration is the most political of acts a state agent can execute in that it organizes what is 'the state' (Steele 2008, 71-2).

While state agents do indeed "use" narratives to construct states' self-identities, the role played by narrative is much more extensive than Steele acknowledges. Rather than only theorize narrative as something state agents "use" to secure state identities, state leaders should be also be theorized as subjects performatively (re)producing the narratives they articulate. We should recognize that not only do state leaders deploy historical narratives in order to articulate a stable national identity, but that state leaders themselves are subjects positioned within state discourses that they are helping to maintain and strengthen. More importantly, "the state" itself only gains

social presence when articulated in discourse. As many in critical IR have argued, states are social and discursive constructions; they do not exist “out there” apart from the discursive practices that constitute them. Campbell’s (1998) work on the performance of identity is useful here. He argues that

States are never finished as entities; the tension between the demands of identity and the practices that constitute it can never be fully resolved, because the performative nature of identities can never be fully revealed. This paradox inherent to their being renders states in permanent need of reproduction; with no ontological status apart from the many and varied practices that constitute their reality, states are (and have to be) always in a process of becoming. For a state to end its practices of representation would be to expose its lack of prediscursive foundations; stasis would be death (1998, 12).

In a sense, Campbell and other IR scholars have been arguing for some time that the articulation of state discourses by state agents is ontologically necessary for the continued existence of “the state.” Mitzen argues that “states are not human beings and their behavior might be subject to different logics” (2006, 351). Perhaps, but from Campbell’s perspective, and from the theoretical framework offered in the following pages, both individuals and states are socially constructed. Both become meaningful objects/actors/agents within social and political reality when articulated, named, and positioned *within a discourse*. From here, it is a short step to argue that discourses themselves should be the analytical focus. Building upon Campbell, Lene Hansen (2006, 23) explains that “the adoption of a discursive epistemology implies that the poststructuralist analytical focus is on the discursive construction of identity as both constitutive of and a product of foreign policy Consistent with the ontological focus on language, the practical epistemological focus is one how identities and policies are articulated.” Rather than justifying an assumption of pre-given state actors that secure their identities through the deployment of stabilizing narratives, ontological security scholars should focus more explicitly on how the state itself is socially (re)produced through discursive practices. Campbell’s

perspective offers one compelling argument for how to theorize such practices. My perspective, in turn, adds an understanding of how these practices are produced through dynamic interplays of language, identification, and more importantly, desire and affect, when these terms are grasped from a perspective that accounts for their relation to the structure of discourse.

Ontological Security and Desire

Another critique can be made of this tendency in the ontological security literature. Again, IR ontological security scholars begin by assuming a pre-given state has an identity that must be secured by recourse to routines over time.¹⁴ As the next chapter explains, Lacanian theory argues that lack or loss is constitutive of every identity; the subject *qua* subject for Lacan can only (appear to) cohere around an absence of something that would seem to make it whole. This loss can be viewed as an inexpressible *affective* dimension of identity which has effects within discursively constructed social reality. Rather than assuming that pre-given states seek ontological security through the deployment of narratives, Lacanian theory puts lack at the center of theorizing about identities. As Ernesto Laclau explains, “the key term for understanding this process of construction is the psychoanalytic category of *identification*, with its explicit assertion of a lack at the root of any identity; one needs to identify with something because there is an originary and insurmountable lack of identity” (1994, 3). In this sense, I take a step back from where ontological security scholars like Mitzen and Steele begin. There is no such thing as a fully-formed identity that persists through time; “identity” is a political project that is never complete. From this point, then, what we have is not *identity*, but *identification*, political processes that attempt to fill the absence that gives rise to the ever-persistent incomplete self.

¹⁴ In this sense, Mitzen’s and Steele’s approaches to ontological security seem to illustrate the kind of desire Roxanne Doty saw at work in Alexander Wendt’s *Social Theory of International Politics*. That is, their reliance upon the “state” as a foundation perhaps says more about the disciplinary practices of IR than “it does about what is happening in the world” (Doty 1999, 139).

One of the major focuses of the Lacanian perspective I offer is the notion of lack, and how it accounts for the ultimate frustration of any kind of full *identity*.

Although my analytical focus shifts because of the step back I take from where ontological security scholars begin, my framework (developed in the following chapter) shares some a few conceptual similarities with the approaches of Mitzen and Steele. In one sense, I agree that what Mitzen and Steele call ontological security is indeed a kind of “basic need” as Mitzen argues (2006, 343). A relatively stable identity seems to be necessary for social action, and the drive for this stability surely must fit into our theoretical understanding of world politics. Additionally, Steele’s (2008, 72) understanding of the performative aspect of language fits with the analyses offered in the following chapters. Yet, current understandings of ontological security are incomplete insofar as they lack a model of the subject that fully incorporates the discursive and affective aspects of identity. Put differently, ontological security frameworks have no theory of the subject as such, the subject for which security (purportedly) is utmost. Steele, particularly, emphasizes the centrality of narrative in his ontology, but offers little explanation of how subjects (whether individuals or states) are structured through different narrative or discursive elements. I offer such a model, and more importantly, offer an understanding of how *desire* is channeled through discourse and the role it plays in structuring identification. I argue that different forms of discourse entail different relations of desire, depending upon how a discourse positions a subject with respect to desire. It is this kind of understanding of desire that ontological security studies lack that can more adequately explain the “grip” of discourse and identification, or in their terms, the drive for ontological security.

I mention *desire* at this point because, from a Lacanian perspective, the ontological security program is essentially talking about a form of desire, albeit in different terms. Mitzen

and Steele argue that states seek ontological security because they require a stable sense of self in order to realize agency; i.e., they need a stable set of expectations about themselves and about the future. As Mitzen says, “the claim that ontological security is a basic need begins with the proposition that actors fear deep uncertainty as an identity threat. Such uncertainty can make it difficult to act, which frustrates the action-identity dynamic and makes it difficult to sustain a self-conception” (2006, 345). Similarly, Steele stresses that states “seek ontological security because they want to maintain consistent self-concepts” in order to avoid experiencing shame (2008, 3). Implicitly, Mitzen and Steele recognize that the *lack of* what we might call “complete” ontological security is what prompts states to seek it. States lack that which they believe will make them fully secure.

This formulation approaches the Lacanian notion of desire as constitutive of the subject as such. For Lacan, desire emerges from the absence inherent in identity construction and social life generally. Subjects do not begin with identities that they must keep secure and maintain, but instead are constructed around an absence, an outside of the Imaginary and Symbolic forms by which their identity is constructed, or what Lacan calls the Real. No identity is ever fixed, complete, or whole because of the instability of language and structures within which it is constructed. The subject’s emergence into the system of language (or what Lacan calls the Symbolic order) introduces a lack around which the subject’s identity is constructed. This lack of what the subject feels will make it “whole” – the Imaginary form of the subject – is what sparks the desire to “fill” the lack. In a sense, desire is a kind of existential defense against the paralysis of non-meaning, that which resists or exceeds the systems of resemblance and difference by which the subject understands itself. As subjects of lack, people seek Symbolic recognition within their discursively-constituted worlds in order to make sense of themselves and

others; they cannot be envisioned as subjects if they do not adopt a signifier as their own, one that identifies them to others. “Father,” “student,” and “American” are common examples of signifiers that we “adopt” for ourselves, with which we identify, which position us in a set of social practices that offer Symbolic recognition and the kind of ontological security that Mitzen and Steele discuss. Given this constitutive incompleteness (or what in Lacanian theory is called the *split*, or divided, subject), I focus more on how this lack has effects on discursive reality. In Mitzen and Steele’s terms, Lacanian theory finds ontological *insecurity* to be fundamental to the human condition – that is, more fundamental than ontological *security*; it drives the desire for identification, which remains in this respect unsatisfied.

Read in this manner, what Mitzen and Steele call ontological security can easily be subsumed under a broader framework that incorporates the role of language, desire, affect, and identification. I argue that Lacanian theory offers a more comprehensive understanding of the constitutive interplay between these different aspects of social reality, and offers methodological guidance for how to analyze different forms of desire within discourse. Lacan’s theory of discourse offers a model of how decentered subjectivity (the split subject), identity-bearing signifiers, knowledge, and desire form different relationships within different kinds of discourse, which offers insights into the discursive power of identity. This framework offers an understanding that takes full advantage of the notion that identity is linguistically constituted, which more completely incorporates the role of language than does Mitzen or Steele. Mitzen, for instance, focuses largely on how states seek ontological security through physical routines in security competition (2006, 353-61), which, as Steele points out (2008, 58) significantly downplays the role of language in the construction of identity. Steele himself does emphasize the role of narratives in constructing the state’s self, but in keeping the analysis at the level of

broad narratives his framework lacks an understanding of the power that certain powerful signifiers have in “holding” subjects. Such words and tropes play a significant role in both Laclau’s and Lacan’s thinking. These “master signifiers” (or, in Laclau’s terminology, “nodal points”) are “one of the main elements that give discourse purchase on a subject” (Bracher 1993, 24). Familiar political examples of such signifiers include “justice,” “the people,” “freedom,” and “democracy.” These and other signifiers provide a “ground” for the subject’s fantasy of itself; they are powerful precisely because of the affective investment the subject has in them. Master signifiers structure the messages that discourses carry by signifying the values in which subjects are invested. In this way, master signifiers define the “readability” of a discourse (Lacan 2007, 189; Bracher 1993, 24). When master signifiers are stitched together through discursive processes into what Laclau calls “chains of equivalence,” political identities emerge, and are eventually grafted together into the kinds of narratives that Steele emphasizes. Indeed, as shown in the following chapters, master signifiers/nodal points are the (ultimately empty) anchors around which discourses and narratives are structured; they are the words and values from which discourses draw the meanings they can have for those who participate in those discourses.

Desire also plays a role in another theoretical gap that Mitzen and Steele leave open. A Lacanian reading reveals that the drive for ontological security is a form of desire for a stable sense of self.¹⁵ Bringing in the notion of lack, we can argue that the lack of ontological security prompts states to seek it through routines and the articulation of consistent narratives. However,

¹⁵ On a side note, Mitzen’s understanding of ontological security seems to be rooted in a broad Hobbesian understanding of the human condition. Citing Giddens, Mitzen (2006, 346) argues that “all social actors intrinsically know that behind the routines of daily life, ‘chaos lurks.’ Constant awareness of such chaos would generate tremendous anxiety, making it extremely difficult to reconcile competing threats and take any action at all.” Ironically, this assumption about ontological security remains embedded within a Hobbesian (or broadly realist) understanding of an inherently threatening and “chaotic” world, and inherently threatening “others.”

a crucial element is missing from Mitzen's and Steele's accounts. If, as both Mitzen and Steele imply, "full" ontological security is ultimately impossible, then how do we understand the persistent drive to seek it? Something must account for the gap between, on one hand, the assertion that ontological security is impossible, and on the other hand, the breakdown of the process that would seemingly occur if states realized the futility of their pursuit. Mitzen (2006, 348) argues that "the need for ontological security is so deep, and our attachment to routines so profound, that we rarely see ontological insecurity in daily life. At the individual level it only emerges when we cannot help it, when our cognitive-affective organization of the environment is ruptured, as in cases of trauma." Her answer is that routines create forms of "basic trust," which lets actors put aside uncertainty about their environment, allowing them to function (2006, 346-7). Although Steele focuses more on the importance of narratives than routines, he similarly finds that "'healthy' ontological security can never be realized" (2008, 63). Steele's answer for what keeps this process going is a productive level of anxiety: "what keeps these routines going, what motivates agents, what *reminds* them that they are human, is the anxiety of daily life. While agents seek to overcome this anxiety through reflexive routines, it is never completely resolved. The anxiety is precisely what motivates the agent to perform those actions" (2008, 60-1). For Mitzen and Steele, then, basic trust and anxiety (respectively) explain the drive for ontological security.

These notions share some similarity with what Lacanian theory observes concerning the role of narrative in the drive for identity. Subjects seek identity stability through the chaining of master signifiers to other signifiers, and the thereby apparently consistency of the social practices that subjects believe entails with such signifiers. However, what a Lacanian understanding adds is that there is always a fundamental split in every such identity. While Steele focuses his

analysis on “periods of disjuncture in the narrative of state Selves,” since “within that disjuncture the disembodiment of a state Self is constructed” (2008, 9), Lacanian theory argues that *every* identity is *always already* decentered, divided, or split. Every subject constructed within discourse is divided between its representation by a signifier, and a missing, inexpressible part of itself that drives the desire for “wholeness.” This split is not something opened only during times of trauma – though it may be most powerfully expressed by them – but rather is *constitutive* of being a subject within language, it is ontological, since (as the next chapter argues) representation in language itself introduces lack into being. This absence of “wholeness” is what sparks the subject’s desire to “fill” it, even as this absence cannot be “filled,” since it is constitutive of the subject’s existence in discourse; the subject can only exist as a desiring subject. Consequently, the Lacanian answer to why subjects desire and keep pursuing wholeness through continuous identifications is that fantasy holds out the promise of such wholeness. As Slavoj Žižek (1997, 10) explains, “fantasy is the primordial form of *narrative*.” Steele’s framework seems to be in broad agreement with Lacanian theory on the point that fantasy or narrative is the story through which subjects makes sense of their selves.¹⁶ Simultaneously, though, fantasy serves a much deeper function for subjects.

Fantasies are constructs that “cover over” the antagonism, or split, inherent in identity. Subjects are unable to deal with the non-meaning, or absence, around which their identities cohere. Fantasy constructions thus allow the subject to “hide” this split, and offer the promise that it can be healed through identification with various objects (such as master signifiers, or other objects of desire). Fantasies, then, channel the desire for fullness that subjects seek.

According to Žižek (1997, 7), “a fantasy constitutes our desire, provides its co-ordinates; that is,

¹⁶ The following chapter explains how a specifically Lacanian notion of fantasy is far from the conventional meaning of the term.

it literally ‘teaches us how to desire’” As the following chapters argue, it is this kind of synthesis of desire, language, and identity that offers a more comprehensive understanding of the power of identity (or more accurately, identification) and discourse than does the current ontological security literature.

Ontological Security and Affects

Finally, the ontological security literature also shares with Lacanian theory ideas about the role of emotions and affects in identity, particularly anxiety. Mitzen, Huysmans, and Steele all discuss how anxiety plays a key role in the quest for ontological security. Returning to the point about “chaos lurking” behind the comforting veil of trust and routines, Mitzen (2006, 346) asserts that “constant awareness of such chaos would generate tremendous anxiety, making it extremely difficult to reconcile competing threats and take any action at all.” Anxiety, here, is the deluge with which an actor finds him/herself in when confronted with the possibility of the myriad of events that could harm him/her. Unable to deal with this flood of information, the actor relies upon and maintains basic trust and routines to institute a level of certainty that can enable its agency. “Humans need to ‘make sense of their world’,” Mitzen says, “and when there is insufficient information or meanings are unsettled, individuals suffer anxiety” (2006, 348-9). Maintaining routines that keep uncertainty at bay provide an important emotional function of “‘inoculating’ individuals against the paralytic, deep fear of chaos” (2006, 347). Jeff Huysmans (1998) makes a similar argument about the role of what he calls *angst*. In some contexts, the loss of the ability to prioritize threats leads to a perpetual crisis within which the normal principles ordering society cease to offer the roadmaps they once did. He argues, “the multiplication of threat experiences in everyday life could translate into an experience of chaos and *Angst*” (1998, 243).

Steele elaborates on anxiety and the role it plays in ontological security-seeking. He agrees that anxiety is produced when ontological insecurity arises when routines break down (Steele 2008, 51-2). Anxiety differs from other affects, such as shame and fear. Fear arises when physical survival is threatened; anxiety, in contrast, comes about when one's sense of self is challenged (2008, 51). Shame, in contrast, "is a private sense of transgression and produces a deeper feeling of insecurity because it means that someone behaved in a way he or she felt was incongruent with their sense of self-identity" (Steele 2008, 53). States experience shame when they are unable to reconcile their past or present actions with their biographical narrative as articulated by state agents (2008, 15). Steele disagrees with Mitzen, however, on the role that anxiety plays in the maintenance of routines. Anxiety arises not from events beyond our control, as Mitzen implies, but rather from possible actions within our control. Citing Kierkegaard, Steele says "dizziness" and anxiety results from our knowledge of this freedom (2008, 61). The creation of routines shields us from this anxiety by reducing the "dizzying" sense of the possibilities of agency (2008, 61). Although actors engage in routines to alleviate this anxiety, they can never completely do so. It is this drive, that remains unresolved, that motivates the search for ontological security (2008, 61).

I agree broadly with some of the arguments concerning anxiety offered by Huysmans, Mitzen, and Steele. But, within this broad agreement lie several differences between ontological security as articulated by these scholars and the Lacanian framework I wish to propose. To begin, Lacan devoted one of his entire yearly seminars to unpacking and elaborating upon his ideas about anxiety.¹⁷ For him, anxiety similarly plays a similar role in the subject's search for

¹⁷ To the best of my knowledge, Lacan's major work on anxiety has not been translated into English. Therefore, I rely upon the work of a few of Lacan's contemporary translators and interpreters, such as Bruce Fink (1995), Roberto Harari (2001), and others.

stability. However, although anxiety does play the role of a driving force in Lacanian theory, it is not the same kind of force that Mitzen and Steele describe. For them, anxiety is tied to agents' need to delimit the possibilities of agency and/or prioritize the world of possible threats that confront them. For Lacan, in contrast, anxiety is inextricably tied to lack. The "originary lack" (in Laclau's description) around which every subject is constituted sparks the desire to identify with the social resources of the Symbolic order that offer some sense of direction and meaning (again, signifiers, or "identities," like "father," "student," "Democrat," etc., and embedded within fantasy discourses that offer a sense of affective security). Desire is what motivates the drive for Symbolic recognition, to *be* someone or something according to one's place in the Symbolic order; the subject always strives to continue desiring, to be a "desiring being" (Fink 1995, 61). Anxiety arises when this constitutive lack is itself lacking, when this motivating absence cannot be joined in a productive way to signifiers. Since subjects can only exist as subjects within discourse, the loss or absence that sparks the desire to seek recognition in the Symbolic is *necessary*. Without lack there is no desire, and without desire there is no subject, strictly speaking. Strangely, then, anxiety is experienced expressly when the subject actually approaches that object that it believes will "make it whole," but which it must not obtain if it is to continue to desire. As the next chapter discusses, the desire for "wholeness" is constitutive of being a subject within language, yet when "wholeness" is approached, desire begins to evaporate. In terms of child development, for instance, Lacan argues that what "is most anxiety producing for the child is when the relationship through which it comes to be – on the basis of lack, which makes it desire – is most perturbed: when there is no possibility of lack, when its mother is constantly on its back" (quoted in Fink 1995, 103). To maintain our desire as subjects, we must keep, as it were, a healthy distance from the Thing that promises to satisfy our desire. This is

why desire constantly shifts from one (provisional) object to another; once we reach something we believe is “It,” our desire for it fades, and moves on to the next avatar of the necessary Thing.

Other subjects also play a crucial role in the Lacanian notion of anxiety. Mitzen, Huysmans, and Steele do not explicitly relate the experience of anxiety within the self to others. Each seems to argue that anxiety is a mainly “internal” affect, that anxiety is experienced when one is confronted with the bewildering array of daily threats that confront them, or when facing the “dizzying” freedom that arises when routines break down. These forms of anxiety do undoubtedly play a role in securing the subject. Lacan, however, adds a twist to the role Others play in the experience. Anxiety also “arises when the subject is confronted by the desire of the Other and does not know what object he is for that desire” (Evans 1996, 12; see also Harari 2001, 227). Anxiety, then, is not merely the experience that results when one is unable to prioritize threats posed by dangerous Others, unable to deal with the “chaos” that “lurks” beneath routines, or when one is confronted with the possibilities of agency. The question of “what we are” to Others is anxiety-provoking because it expresses a lack of knowing what one *is* for the Other. Bruce Fink explains:

Rather than anxiously waiting to find out what you are, you may well prefer to jump to conclusions (precipitate answers) about what the Other wants of you, with you, from you, and so on. The unknown nature of the Other’s desire is unbearable here: you prefer to assign it an attribute, any attribute rather than let it remain an enigma. You prefer to tie it down, give it a name, and put an end to its angst-inducing uncertainty. Once it is named, once you conclude that *this* is what the Other wants of you – to stay out of the way, for instance – the angst abates, and you can set about trying to make yourself scarce (1991, 61).

In this sense, Lacan concluded that anxiety was “the paradigmatic affect,” and hence played a much deeper role in structuring the subject than other affects (Stavrakakis 2007, 209).

This notion of anxiety, therefore, does not necessarily have threatening connotations that

Mitzen's understanding implies, and adds an understanding of the role Others play in anxiety that is in contrast to Steele's understanding (see Steele 2008, 32).¹⁸

The notion of anxiety also has bearing on Lacan's theories on different forms of discourse. As discussed in the following chapters, Lacan theorizes that subjects deal with anxiety through different forms of discourse. This is similar to Huysman's, Mitzen's, and Steele's arguments that actors deal with anxiety by constructing narratives and routines that constrict the social environment into more manageable narratives, but what Lacan adds is an articulation of how different *kinds* of discourses, or discursive structures, position subjects in different relationships to desire and anxiety. For example, in a form of discourse Lacan terms the Master's discourse, anxiety is suppressed through identification with a dominant signifier. A speaker engaged in this discourse "has so successfully identified with his master signifiers that he actually believes himself to be whole, undivided, self-identical" (Bracher 1994, 121). Yet this "wholeness" is actually illusory, since every subject is always divided, or split. In another form of discourse, termed the Hysteric's discourse, anxiety is not suppressed, but rather appears as the most overt factor in a discourse. Whereas the Master's discourse veils the split or incompleteness of identity, the Hysteric's discourse is openly driven by it. Characterized by

¹⁸ Steele's neglect of the role that Others play in anxiety touches upon a more general passing-over of the role that Others, or difference, play in what he terms "self-identity" construction. He argues that his focus on "self-identity" is a reaction to what he views as overly other-focused views of identity (see Steele 2008, 29-35). Yet, this reaction may bend too far back the other way. For instance, in arguing against Katzenstein's (1996, 24) view that state identities emerge from interactions within different social contexts, Steele says "that identities of states emerge from their *own project of the self*," and that "before I can even treat another, I must experience the self (208, 34). Even though he agrees Others are needed for the self to evolve, "the ontological security-seeking process of the Self must not necessarily depend upon the relationship we have with others" (2008, 48). While Steele's shift of focus to the under-examined "internal" dynamics of the self is admirable, I argue that difference is *unavoidable* in the construction of the self. Indeed, from a Lacanian perspective, there is no originary "self," strictly speaking. The "self" is a lack, and only comes to "be" through identification processes with objects "outside" of it. In this sense, I reject the distinction Steele makes between "self-identity" and "social dependence" (2008, 63). Curiously, Steele finds that a critical account of ontological security would benefit from a deconstructive perspective that could bring out the discrepancies between state actions and its biographical narrative (2008, 65). Yet, he ignores the most innovative aspect of a deconstructive perspective, that the "outside" is unavoidably constitutive of the "inside."

desiring, questioning, and/or protesting, Hysterical discourses are articulated by those subjects who are driven by their anxiety; they seek the security and stability of a master signifier that they lack, which they believe will alleviate anxiety (Bracher 1994, 109, 122). Lacan's models of these and other discourses allow us to trace the relationships between anxiety, desire, knowledge, and divided subjectivity in particular discourses. In short, Lacanian theory offers a more comprehensive understanding of the role of anxiety in identity-seeking, identification, and discourse than has been considered in IR. More importantly, it offers a deeper understanding of how affects combines with other discursive elements to produce the power of discourse and identification.

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed several IR literatures that potentially shed light on what accounts for the power of discourse and identity. Many studies in IR conceptualize identities as not naturally given, but rather as contingent social constructions that can change over time. Yet, few have examined the power of discourses and identities beyond their contingency as socio-historical constructions, and few have explored the relationships between discourse and affects/emotions. Consequently, few have offered sustained insights into how we can understand the “grip” or “hold” that discourses and identities have over subjects. The literatures reviewed here all offer potential answers these questions. Yet, the constructivist, poststructuralist, emotions/affects, and ontological security literatures all have important theoretical gaps, and fall short of offering a more comprehensive understanding of the major questions posed here. The theoretical framework offered in the next chapter combines insights from the theories of Ernesto Laclau and Jacques Lacan, and offers one answer for how the interplay of discourse, identity, affect and desire can more fully account for discursive power.

CHAPTER 3 THEORIZING DISCOURSE, AFFECT, AND IDENTIFICATION: LACAN WITH LACLAU

The purpose of this chapter is to develop a theoretical framework that can aid our thinking about why and how discourses become politically successful, and why some discourses gain more social traction than others. The framework will be applied to specific cases of recent American foreign policy in subsequent chapters, demonstrating that those aspects of identity, affect, and subjectivity that have thus far received little theoretical attention are, in fact, necessary to investigate if we are to gain a deeper understanding of the politics of discourse, affects, and identity. In developing this framework, I draw upon the theories of Ernesto Laclau and Jacques Lacan, who, together, have not been the source of much published thought in IR theory. I hope to demonstrate the extent to which discourse is structured by and infused with affect, and in doing so hope to gain greater analytical purchase on identifications and discursive power, thus offering a more comprehensive understanding of the social construction process.

The chapter proceeds as follows. First, I offer an overview of Laclau's approach to social analysis, focusing on a number of his concepts that combine to give an account of how political boundaries and identities are produced, maintained, and broken down. Laclau's framework has been employed by a few scholars in IR, but not enough that might warrant a briefer overview. In this sense, Laclau's framework has in some ways a closer proximity to what many International Relations (IR) scholars are already familiar in terms of social construction, identities, and discourse. Also, Laclau's work overlaps with, and some of his concepts are drawn from, Lacanian theory. This observation paves the way for the second section, where I move from Laclau's concepts of discourse, equivalence, difference, and discursive hegemony to an overview of Lacanian theory. Lacan's theories of identification, discourse, and affect are complex, and wherever one chooses to plunge in one gradually must bring in the entire range of concepts. I

attempt to guide the reader on a (necessarily condensed) tour of Lacanian theory through a series of steps. Finally, in the third section I combine insights from both Laclau and Lacan to offer a framework that is able to theorize both the political production and maintenance of identities and the complex dynamics of affective attachments that underpin them.

Identity and Hegemony in Laclau

Argentinian-born political theorist Ernesto Laclau's approach shares many of the assumptions about ontology and epistemology underlying much of the existing discourse research in IR.¹ He agrees that we do not have access to reality outside of discourse, which is defined as a "differential ensemble of signifying sequences in which meaning is constantly renegotiated" (Torfing 1999, 85). As Laclau, in his oft-cited collaboration with Chantal Mouffe (1985, 108) clearly explains, "the fact that every object is constituted as an object of discourse has *nothing to do* with whether there is a world external to thought, or with the realism/idealism opposition What is denied is not that such objects exist externally to thought, but the rather different assertion that they could constitute themselves as objects outside of any discursive condition of emergence".² In other words, such a theoretical approach does not deny the existence of an "objective" reality – a world that is actually "out there" - but argues simply that such a reality can only be made sensible to us through our descriptions of it; i.e. through discourse. Through discursive practices, signifiers, meanings, and identities are brought together to form particular constructions of the world. These practices do not merely reflect or describe

¹ Laclau's work has been more influential in political theory than IR. His most well-known work is probably 1985's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (co-authored with Belgian political theorist Chantal Mouffe) and his solo work has been the subject of sustained commentary, including a recent edited volume. See Critchely and Marchart (2004). For his major solo works after *Hegemony*, see Laclau (1990; 1996; 2005). Laclau's work has also inspired the so-called "Essex School" of discourse theory. See Howarth, Norval, and Stavrakakis (2000).

² David Campbell (1998a, 254) notes, with some frustration, that he has included this quote three times in his work, and that this repetition has been necessary due to continuing critiques based on misunderstandings of what this theoretical claim entails. "I would be a rich person if I had had a contribution in any currency from respondents each time they say something along the lines of 'yes, but what about the external reality/material conditions/ real world!'"

social relations that pre-exist their linking within discourse; rather, such relations do not exist for speaking subjects outside of the discursive practices that constitute these relations. Since there is no extra-discursive ground upon which meanings can be said to rest, meanings and identities are always in flux, and more importantly, are never beyond political contestation. This non-foundational view of the political takes center stage in Laclau's framework. Social and political relations, "which are articulated as sets of discourses, are always political constructions involving the construction of antagonisms and the exercise of power" (Howarth 2000, 104). Politics is played out not between agents or actors that have fully-formed identities prior to political struggle. Rather, politics is the very process through which identities are constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed, and through which discourses struggle against other discourses to achieve dominance. The "war on terror" in the years immediately following September 11, 2001 could be viewed as a hegemonic discourse, more significant in this respect than any "objective" foundation that is supposed to exist for it (see Croft 2006). It arguably defined the dominant perspective on national security and world politics, while simultaneously excluding other constructions of what the September 11 attacks would mean (a "criminal act," etc.).

Laclau both elaborates upon and moves beyond these ideas by developing a novel theoretical apparatus to account for the construction of identities and political boundaries, in addition to the achievement of discursive stability and the limits of discursive construction. For instance, most post-positivist identity scholars in IR have recognized the fluidity of identity as based upon the instability of language itself (see Goff and Dunn 2004). Laclau develops this idea by theorizing instability not only as fluidity, but also in terms of the constitutive limits of identity. "Every identity," he argues, "is dislocated insofar as it depends on an outside which both denies that identity and provides its condition of possibility at the same time" (1990, 39).

Full identities are “always already” dislocated and unattainable because of their relationship with an exterior identity which both makes the identity possible and which prevents its ultimate fixity or closure. Exclusion is thus constitutive of discourses, and consequently of identities; exclusions and dislocations “show the points where identity can no longer be stabilized in a meaningful system of differences, but is contested by forces which stand at the limit of that order” (Howarth 2000, 106).³ To illustrate, Laclau (1990, 39) discusses what happens to the lives of workers when capitalism is introduced into their culture. The effects of this introduction are typically understood as the ruin of traditional communities and the divorce of the worker from a close relationship with the land. This event ruptures the workers traditional identities, and they can respond by forming unions, destroying factories, and so on – that is, the disruptive external force that sparks the construction of new identities to deal with the dislocating event. Dislocations, then, threatens identity while simultaneously providing the “ground” for the emergence of new articulations of identity.

The construction of an exterior identity, however, cannot occur through reference to a positive, natural difference located outside of discourse. Rather, it can only be represented through groups, or chains, of signifiers (e.g. words and phrases) that suppress differences among “internal” elements of an identity in relation “external” elements of an other. A common political example is of a society that reaches a sense of its own unity through the demonization of a particular group within the population (“Jews,” “immigrants,”); all, of course, socially constructed through meaning-making signifying practices (Laclau 2005, 70). The effect of this externalization, or “othering,” simultaneously performs another operation: in relation to the

³ Furthermore, dislocations are those events that constitute the “limits of order” that shatter everyday systems of meaning. They are destabilizing insofar as existing social constructions of meaning are unable to make sense of the event. In this way, dislocations spark the desire, and the need, for new social constructions that *can* make sense of them. The events of September 11, 2001 could be viewed as an example of dislocation, insofar as peoples’ reactions were initially ones of stunned silence. See, for example, Edkins (2002, 244-5).

excluded, all other differences within this society become equivalent to each other, insofar as their rejection of the excluded is what they have in common. Thus, relations of equivalence (or similarity) minimize differences between the internal elements of an identity, while relations of difference break down equivalences and emphasize their differentiation. For instance, “evil” in the war on terror was initially a foundational signifier – a master signifier in Lacan’s terminology – around which the discourse revolved, and through its frequent articulation and reiteration with other terms, such as “barbarian,” “terror,” “war,” “murder,” etc., its meaning within the discourse took on the meanings of those terms. “Evil terrorists” were “barbarians” and “murderers;” the differences between these signifiers were suppressed or blurred insofar as they came to have the same meaning in relation to what they meant to American identity. Relations of difference were simultaneously at work in the construction of differences between the signifiers that constituted U.S. identity in relation to an other against which that identity was presumed to stand. “Good,” “justice,” “Western civilization,” and “liberty” were articulated in opposition to “barbarian,” “terror,” etc.

In this way, practices of equivalence and difference are mutually destabilizing.⁴ Constructing links through groups of signifiers subverts differences within the discourse in question, yet difference and exclusion is necessary for any identity to cohere into something meaningful. As Laclau and Mouffe (1985, 112) point out, “even in order to differ, to subvert meaning, there has to be *a* meaning.” All social identity is split between its exclusion of an external element, which both links and separates it from other identities, and its equivalential ties with other identities in relation to the excluded (Laclau 2005, 78). In this way that we can conceptualize the blockage, or failed completeness, of identity. “All identity,” Laclau (2005, 70)

⁴ Lene Hansen (2006) calls these logics of “linking” and “differentiation.” Roxanne Doty (1996) is another one of the few IR scholars who has drawn upon these ideas from Laclau and Mouffe.

maintains, “is constructed within this tension between the differential and the equivalential logics”. While these logics account for the relational dimensions of identity that much of the IR identity literature has recognized, what they add (in addition to the other concepts discussed here) is a theoretical understanding of how the tension between inside and outside is (re)produced and articulated on the level of the signifier.

If logics of equivalence and difference account for the construction of political boundaries, the question remains of how to relate the unstable nature of identities to the fixity that these phenomena have (if temporarily) in social life. How are identities constructed through linking words and phrases in groups (i.e. the U.S. as “good, democratic, and free”) if their meanings are unstable? Many approaches that stress this fluidity have tended to downplay the temporary fixity that identities do attain (Stavrakakis 2007, 68).⁵ Simply because identities are social constructions without “natural” or primordial foundations does not mean that they cannot attain partial stability. To shed light on this frequently neglected characteristic of identities, Laclau develops the concept of the *nodal point*. This is a signifier that “creates and sustains the identity of a certain discourse by constructing a knot of definite meanings” (Torfing 1999, 98). In other words, nodal points are the discursive anchors that bind together groups of words and concepts into sensible and meaningful statements and narratives.⁶ “Democracy,” “order,” “freedom,” “the people,” and “the nation” are terms that are so general and ambiguous that they function as temporary “centers” of discourses and identities. “Center” here does not refer to some essential or extra-discursive ground upon which identities are founded, but instead means a temporary, unstable fixation which provides the condition of possibility for both meaning and

⁵ This is evident, for instance, in the four themes expressed in Goff and Dunn’s (2004, 1-8) recent review of the identity literature in IR; ‘alterity; the fluidity and dynamism of identities; the fact that identities are multiple; and, the fact that they are constructed’.

⁶ Laclau’s concept of the nodal point is close to Lacan’s master signifier, a similarity I will return to shortly.

contestability. They constitute the reference points through which other concepts in the discourse draw their meaning. Yet, the more terms a privileged signifier is grouped with, the more its meaning is stretched across other terms, the more emptied of clearly discernable reference it becomes. As discussed in the following chapters, “freedom” functioned as a nodal point in the discourse of the war on terror. The more terms with which “freedom” was articulated with, or the increasing number of facets of the war on terror for which it became the ultimate reference point (bringing “freedom” to Afghanistan and Iraq, as a justification for domestic surveillance, for pre-emptive military strikes, and so on), the more its meaning was emptied as it was stretched to represent a wider and wider span of relations between them.

Despite their ultimate ambiguity, nodal points are necessary for understanding what is perhaps Laclau’s best-known theoretical concept: hegemony. Put simply, hegemony defines the “common sense” of a society such that other possible ways of articulating a “common sense” are marginalized. More specifically, it is the achievement of a dominant construction of socio-political reality through the “expansion of a particular discourse of norms, values, views, and perceptions through persuasive re-descriptions of the world” (Torfing 1999, 302). This discursive expansion defines not only a society’s common sense, but also the configuration of legitimate (i.e. “internal”) identities within what is accepted as common sense. This involves the construction of relations of equivalence and difference organized around nodal points. As David Howarth explains, “‘the hegemonic relationship’ refers to the way in which a particular signifier (‘the people’, ‘nation’, ‘revolution’) is emptied of its particular meaning and comes to represent the ‘absent fullness’ of a society’s aspirations” (2004, 262). In other words, nodal points function as stand-ins around which a society is socially constructed, although society itself is never a “finished” construction, because of dislocations that always destabilize its constituent

identities and discourses. Laclau (1996, 44) elaborates in his example of the role of the signifier “order” in Hobbes:

Let us consider the extreme situation of a radical disorganization of the social fabric. In such conditions – which are not far away from Hobbes’s state of nature – people need *an* order, and the actual content of it becomes a secondary consideration. ‘Order’ as such has no content, because it only exists in the various forms in which it is actually realized, but in a situation of radical disorder ‘order’ is present as that which is absent; it becomes an empty signifier, as the signifier of that absence. In this sense, various political forces can compete in their efforts to present their particular objectives as those which carry out the filling of that lack. To hegemonize something is exactly to carry out this filling function. (We have spoken about ‘order’, but obviously ‘unity’, ‘liberation’, ‘revolution’, etcetera belong to the same order of things. Any term which, in a certain political context becomes the signifier of the lack, plays the same role. Politics is possible because the constitutive impossibility of society can only represent itself through the production of empty signifiers.)

In other words, in the state of nature, “order” functions as the signifier of that which is *constitutively* missing. There is no transcendental meaning of “order” in this situation simply because it is a stand-in for anything that would alleviate “disorder.” Politics is the competition between different social groups that offer a meaning for “order” that might appeal to the people who seek it, whatever it may look like, as long as it is not the “disorder” of the state of nature. Such powerful signifiers are necessary for hegemony precisely because their contestability allows for the bringing together, or discursive linking through equivalence, of various identities and political projects around a common point of (ultimately unstable) unification. In the contemporary U.S. context, for instance, we may include “democracy,” “justice,” “freedom,” and “American” as nodal points that function as the discursive anchors around which a vast and changing web of American political discourse coheres. Nearly every political force in American politics claims for itself the mantle of “freedom” or “justice” or what is “truly American,” all of which empties these terms the more they are claimed by opposing forces and in changing contexts.

Through the systematic integration of these concepts, Laclau's theoretical approach offers a novel account of the social construction of hegemonic discourses and identities.⁷

However, Laclau himself, in his most recent writings, recognizes that his approach does not go far enough in explaining or analyzing discursive power itself. Responding to a set of criticisms of his work (2004, 326), he has pointed to the need to move beyond the analysis of strictly discourse, and investigate its "non-rhetorical" aspects:

A second step needs to be taken. For what rhetoric can explain is the *form* that an overdetermining investment takes, but not the *force* that explains the investment as such and its perdurability. Here something else has to be brought into the picture. Any overdetermination requires not only metaphorical condensations but also cathectic investments. That is, something belonging to the order of *affect* has a primary role in discursively constructing the social. Freud already knew it: the social link is a libidinal link. And affect . . . is not something *added to* signification, but something consubstantial with it. So if I see rhetoric as ontologically primary in explaining the operations inhering in and the forms taken by the hegemonic construction of society, I see psychoanalysis as the only valid road to explain the drives behind such construction – I see it, indeed, as the most fruitful approach to the understanding of human reality (emphasis in original).

Rather than merely examining the rhetorical structure of discourses, Laclau acknowledges that the next step in discourse analysis (and, I argue, social construction studies more generally) should be the pursuit of how affective investments in discourses and identities further endow these social phenomena with the power that they have. Additionally, he argues that "affect is not

⁷ Laclau's ideas about hegemony should be differentiated from its original source in Marxist literature, Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci's work constituted a significant shift in Marxist thinking because of his emphasis on the importance of cultural factors for creating the "common sense" for a society. In classical Marxism, of course, class conflict was rooted in the objective material conditions of the proletariat and bourgeoisie. Gramsci moved away from this economic determinism in arguing that a winning anti-capitalist coalition is not strictly rooted in class, but must be forged through the political creation of "collective wills" that are not reducible to class. Hegemony, in Gramsci's view, was forged through "wars of position" whose outcome could not be traced back to an economic foundation (see Gramsci 1971). However, in their deconstruction of the history of Marxism, Laclau and Mouffe point out that Gramsci's argument about the forging of hegemony through the creation of "collective wills" ultimately rested upon "a *single* unifying principle in every hegemonic formation, and this can only be a fundamental class." Thus, Gramsci's thought depended upon an essentialist foundation. Laclau and Mouffe, drawing upon Foucauldian, Derridean, and Lacanian insights, remove all such foundations, and argue that political relations are solely constructed through discourse, where no discursive elements articulated together have any intrinsic or natural relation, and have no extra-discursive grounding. For these reasons, they are often labeled as belonging to the school of thought known as post-Marxism. See Laclau and Mouffe (1985, 47-91).

something which exists on its own, independently of language; it constitutes itself only through” chains of signifiers bound together through nodal points (Laclau 2005, 111). Consequently, “the complexes which we call ‘discursive or hegemonic formations’,” he argues, “. . . would be unintelligible without the affective component” (Laclau 2005, 111). In a sense, we can plausibly presume that new discourses and identities would not be articulated in the first place without some emotional or affective desire to do so.

Desire, Affect, and Identification in Lacan

The theories of Jacques Lacan offer substantial insights on these questions. Although Lacan, who was a practicing psychoanalyst and theorist, has not been the source of much thinking about international politics, he has had a considerable influence on many fields in the humanities and social sciences in recent decades.⁸ His writings often expand beyond the realm of the clinic, exploring the social construction of the subject, the role of language in the relationship between the individual and society, and, crucially, the role of desire and affect in social reality.⁹

⁸ To the best of my knowledge, the only other empirical application of Lacanian theory in IR is in the realm of post-Cold War Russian foreign policy. See Heikka (1999). Jenny Edkins (2003) uses some Lacanian concepts in her analysis of trauma, yet does not develop a systematic discourse theory in the manner that I do here. Similarly, Edkins (1999) provides a useful introduction to the theories of Lacan and others, but despite the title of her book (*Poststructuralism and International Relations: Bringing the Political Back In*), there is very little discussion of the relevance of these authors to specific issues and problems in international relations.

Although Lacan argued that his approach to psychoanalysis, elaborated in his writings stretching from the 1930s to the 1970s, constituted a “return to Freud,” he in fact developed a framework that extended far beyond Freud. Part of this was because Lacan was immersed in, and contributed to, many of the insights of the “linguistic turn” in social theory in the mid-20th century, insights that Freud (writing in the late 19th and early 20th centuries) did not have access to. While Lacanian theory remains largely unexplored in IR, it has been widely applied in disciplines as varied as literary theory (Jameson 1977), film studies (Metz 1982; Mulvey 1975; McGowan 2007), geography (Callard 2003), legal studies (Schroeder 2000), organizational theory (Hoedemaekers 2008), planning studies (Hillier and Gunder 2003), and social scientific methodology (Glynos and Howarth 2007).

⁹ Slovenian social theorist Slavoj Žižek has done much to apply Lacanian theory to culture and politics, and my understanding of Lacan is influenced by him. I also draw upon others whose work employs Lacanian theory either in psychoanalysis, such as Bruce Fink, or in the study of culture and politics, such as Mark Bracher, Yannis Stavrakakis, and others.

Master Signifiers

One of the closest points of conceptual affinity between Laclau and Lacan is in the similarity between their concepts of nodal points and master signifiers, respectively. For Lacan, nodal points (or in his terminology, master signifiers [*points de capiton* in French]) are privileged discursive points precisely because they are those words in which subjects are most affectively invested. These points are “one of the main elements that give discourse purchase on a subject”; “master signifiers are able to exert such force in messages because of the role they play in structuring the subject – specifically in giving the subject a sense of identity and direction” (Bracher 1993, 24-5). As Lacan argues, “a signifier is that which represents a subject for another signifier;” that is, the subject is always constituted in discourse, rather than having some natural, pre-constituted identity (Lacan 1981, 207). These privileged discursive points not only offer temporary fixity to groups of signifiers tied together in discourses, but their power lies in their ability to render an individual as a *subject* in a specific set of social relations. Master signifiers are those words that we turn to when asked who we are in discourse: “student,” “father,” “daughter,” “Democrat,” “American,” etc. These are words that we accept as our own, as defining ourselves and others, and are those around which our identities, and our understandings of others’ identities, cohere. As Slavoj Žižek (1989, 113) explains, “the subject is always fastened, pinned, to a signifier which represents him for the other, and through this pinning he is loaded with a symbolic mandate, he is given a place in the intersubjective network of symbolic relations.” This “symbolic mandate” functions as a kind of call; in accepting a master signifier as his/her own, this call constitutes the beliefs, values, and practices that is expected of one who identifies his/herself as “student,” “Democrat,” “American,” and so on.

Lacanian theory combines this understanding of the interpellative power of master signifiers with an innovative approach to identification and desire. As Lacanian scholar Yannis

Stavrakakis contends, “the ideological *capitonnage* effected through a semiotic nodal point has to be supported by a knotting at the affective level of *jouissance* in order to stick. Symbolic power and authority finds its real support in the emotional dynamics of fantasy and (partial) enjoyment”(Stavrakakis 2007, 21). In other words, the role that master signifiers play in structuring discourses and identities cannot be explained solely by their linguistic or rhetorical representation. To unpack this formulation, and to introduce a discussion of the Lacanian concepts of the three registers, desire, *jouissance*, and fantasy, we must further interrogate the hailing power of master signifiers. When faced with a “mandate” of a master signifier, the subject is confronted with a question of what exactly is expected of her/him in her/his investment in the set of relations offered by the master signifier. When an American, for instance, is hailed by a discourse structured around the master signifier of “freedom,” the subject, in a sense, responds with a question – “yes, of course, I am a subject of ‘freedom’, but what is expected of me? What am I to do, and how am I to relate to others, in accepting ‘freedom’ as my master”?

Desire in the Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real

It is here that we can locate the importance of the Lacanian notion of desire. Desire refers to the gap opened in the subject when hailed by a master signifier (Lacan 2006, 690-1; Žižek 1989, 111). When faced with this mandate, the subject must have an “answer” if s/he is to go on as a subject within the system of social relations offered by the master signifier or discourse in question. It is this gap, or lack, introduced by the signifier that stimulates desire to fill it. When our hypothetical American is successfully hailed as a supporter of “freedom,” his/her desire is sparked to engage in the duties and practices that s/he understands are called for with such identification. The hailing introduces a lack that the subject “feels” must be “filled” with the appropriate beliefs and practices. Yet, there is no objective “answer” that society can offer the subject in its quest to realize its submission to a master signifier. There is no single

ideology or set of beliefs in American culture, for instance, that can offer our American subject a fixed “answer” to what practices identifying as a believer in “freedom” entails. The subject’s cultural context offers nothing that can satisfy the desire to fully and completely identify with a master signifier, since there is no natural or primordial identity of “one who supports freedom” that is fixed or incontestable. Since subjects must adopt some signifiers as their own if they are to make sense of themselves and communicate with others within discourse – again, as conceived by Lacan as the social condition of language – desire *always and inevitably* persists as long as the subject exists as a subject in discourse.

Desire itself, though, has no object. “In its essence,” writes Bruce Fink (1995, 90), “desire is a constant search for something else, and there is no specifiable object that is capable of satisfying it, in other words, extinguishing it”.¹⁰ This leads to a paradoxical situation: desire for a signifier that the subject can assume as its own sparks the search for identity, yet none is able to fully represent the subject. Desire, then, remains unsatisfied; a fully stable identity always remains out of reach, and the search for identity stability continues. Indeed, desire does *not seek satisfaction*, “rather, it pursues its own continuation and furtherance – it merely seeks to go on desiring” (Fink 1997, 51). It is this quest for a sense of fullness that leads to perpetual processes of *identification*, rather than the construction of fixed and conclusive *identity*.¹¹

Subjects need “to identify with something because there is an originary and insurmountable lack

¹⁰ The Lacanian notion of “object,” as discussed below, does not necessarily refer to physical objects. Objects that are desired by subjects are most often symbolic objects, such as master signifiers that promise a stable identity.

¹¹ Charlotte Epstein (2008, 169) makes this point when arguing that “identity is not a fixed, static, and preimposed category,” but is instead “an active process of *identification*. It demands active recognition on behalf of the individual.” While her claim is similar to the one I make here, her analysis remains on the purely discursive level, and neglects to incorporate the necessary dimensions of desire that spark identification processes in the first place.

of identity” (Laclau 1994, 2-3)¹². Consequently, the construction of an (ultimately unstable) identity is only possible through continual processes of identification with culturally available social constructions, such as political ideologies, narratives, and values (Stavrakakis 1999, 36). In other words, subjects must identify with societal discourses if they are to have a place in that society. However, due to the instability and contestability of any discourse (such as conflict over the “true” meaning of an ideology, belief system, or social role), a fixed and uncontested identity is impossible, since there is no extra-linguistic foundation upon which any “identity” may be grounded.

The desire to assume a master signifier is only one aspect of identification, and is an expression of one desire among several kinds. One of the most oft-repeated notions in Lacan’s (2006, 222) corpus is that the subject’s “desire finds its meaning in the other’s desire...because [the subject’s] first objective is to be recognized by the other.” With this dictum, Lacan emphasizes that desire is never truly individual, but is always channeled and given form by the social. From this, a typology of desire in discourse can be developed along three dimensions.¹³ First, desire can take the form of a “desire to be” (narcissistic desire) or a “desire to have” (anaclitic desire). Second, the Other can be either the subject or object of desire; in other words, the subject can desire to be recognized by the Other, or can desire to possess the Other as a means to wholeness. With both narcissistic and anaclitic desire, one can have both passive and active forms, corresponding to the desire to be recognized and loved by the Other (passive

¹² This simply means that there exist no natural or primordial identities. If there were, the issue would be one of subjects “finding” or “recognizing” their identity, rather than constructing it (Laclau 1994, 2-3).

¹³ Since, to the best of my knowledge, Lacan’s major work on desire and identification has not been translated into English, I rely upon Mark Bracher’s (1993, 19-52) discussion of this typology. Bracher (1993, 19-20) himself notes that the “taxonomy of desire that I am presenting here [was] not developed systematically by Lacan in each of the three registers,” although each form of desire was discussed by Lacan “in various ways and various contexts” over his multiple-decade career.

narcissistic), the desire to become the Other (active narcissistic), the desire to have the Other in order to achieve a sense of wholeness of oneself (active anaclitic), and the desire to become an object of desire for the Other as a means of the Other's wholeness (passive anaclitic). The Other here does not necessarily need to be another person; "it" can be an object or an institution that the subject believes will bring it a sense of wholeness if the subject's relation to it can be fixed. For example, the object of desire can be symbolic (such as a valued master signifier) or physical (such as money). These desires are experienced in different ways in each of the three registers of human subjectivity: the Imaginary, Symbolic, and the Real (see Table 1 below).¹⁴

Identification, then, works not only at the rhetorical or Symbolic level, but also involves other registers that are intimately bound up with the discursive structures of Symbolic identification. While Symbolic identification through signifiers works on the desire to emulate, embody, and obey the ideals valued by the Symbolic Other, Imaginary identification works largely through images of the body. More specifically, images of bodily integrity and well-being are central to desires evoked in the Imaginary.¹⁵ Imaginary desire is engaged whenever bodily representations are threatened within images or discourses. This desire is engaged in political discourses, for instance, when the "body" of the "nation" is represented as wounded or under

¹⁴ Lacan argues that human subjectivity is experienced through these three registers. Identification with master signifiers, as discussed above, occurs within the Symbolic, or the realm of discursive relations made meaningful through difference, which can be roughly understood as culture or society. As master signifiers (and all other signifiers) are shared social and intersubjective resources, the Symbolic is the realm within which people "deal with the ideals that have been inculcated in them by their parents, schools, media, language, and society at large, embodied in grades, diplomas, status symbols, and so on" (Fink 1997, 33). Closely related to the Symbolic is the Imaginary, which is the register of subjective images and representations upon which one's self-image is based (Lacan 2006, 75-81). Bracher (1993, 23) adds that the "Imaginary is constituted by schemata of memory and cognition." Although analytically distinct, the Imaginary and Symbolic overlap closely. The Imaginary is always structured by the Symbolic order since the only resources from which the Imaginary can emerge are the social resources of the Symbolic (Evans 1996, 82-3). The Real is that which is excluded from language, which is inexpressible. As discussed below, included in the Real is *jouissance*, a generalized form of affect, and the ultimate object-cause of desire, object *a*.

¹⁵ Ontological security, as currently discussed by IR scholars, fits well with narcissistic Imaginary desire.

threat. As Lacan argues, discourse is constructed around “choice images which all have a specific relation with the living existence of the human being, with quite a narrow sector of its biological reality, with the image of the fellow being. This imaginary experience furnishes ballast for every concrete language, and by the same token for every verbal exchange,” and “is what gives human language its weight, its resources, and its emotional vibration” (Lacan 1988, 306). Of course, these different types of desire are not mutually exclusive. Multiple desires can be evoked simultaneously by the same discourse, and in practice, each of these desires may shade into one another. Yet, acknowledging the multiplicity of desire along these dimensions broadens the scope of our understanding the effects of discourse as it is currently understood in IR. As Bracher (1993, 52) argues,

The value of this taxonomy of desire – four basic modes in each of three registers – lies not in its capacity to serve as a totalizing system for describing and categorizing the various elements of discourse. Its value lies rather in its demonstration of the multifariousness and complexity of desire and in its function as a kind of checklist prompting us to search a given text or discourse for interpellative forces that might not be immediately evident.

Understanding desire in this way helps us better account for the power of discourses and identifications beyond their rhetorical construction. As the following chapters demonstrate, for example, prominent texts constructing American foreign policy discourses strongly evoked many of these kinds of desire, which helps us better understand their resonance.

Based on this typology, we may draw some initial expectations about what kinds of discourses are more resonant than others. If people identify with certain master signifiers and other discursive resources because they offer some level of security (security of the “self,” we might say), then those discourses that reinforce common identities would presumably “resonate”

more than those that threaten the security of the “self.”¹⁶ In other words, discourses that evoke and satisfy narcissistic desires would, more often than not, be more resonant than those discourses that do not evoke and satisfy them. Discourses of patriotism, with their reassurance of who “we” are through their copious offerings of valued master signifiers, routinely evoke and satisfy narcissistic desires to be secure (see, for example, Stam and Shohat, 2007). In this sense, we can expect to see dynamics of narcissistic desires play out more in politics than anaclitic desires (the desire to have or possess), although anaclitic desires are by no means absent from political discourses.

The Real and *Jouissance*

Desire does not exist in isolation, and it can only be more fully understood in relation to the Real, *jouissance*/enjoyment, and fantasy. While the Real is one of three registers of human subjectivity, it is one that has not been widely discussed in IR. The Imaginary and the Symbolic, the registers of ideals, images, and discourse, have been more thoroughly explored by existing studies of social construction. Given its multi-faceted and paradoxical “nature,” the Real deserves a more detailed elaboration. Desire in the Real is inextricably bound to the idea of the subject as “lacking,” or more precisely, as constituted by a foundational lack. For Lacan, the human drama of existing as a subject within language is characterized by loss. Taking a position within the Symbolic order introduces a divorce between the “real,” or direct contact with the world, and humans’ access to the Real, that which remains outside of discourse; that which is sacrificed with the introduction of language is any possibility of our unmediated access to the Real (Stavrakakis 1999, 34). Humans employ the most basic cultural tool at their disposal,

¹⁶ I use the word “self” here carefully, and for clarity’s sake. Lacanian theory does not assume anything like an originary self or ego. The self, for Lacan, is a lack, and only comes to have an impression of its “self” through identifying with the social resources of the Symbolic order.

language, to try to attain this unmediated access to the Real, but the very use of language makes this impossible. Language is an unstable and fluid system, never a fixed structure or set of structures. Words can never fully exhaust our attempts to use them to capture the Real, nor can they allow a full articulation of identity with ourselves.

Lacan's concept of the Real can be understood in at least a couple of different ways. First, it can be understood as that which has not yet been discursively articulated, a "presymbolic real" (Fink 1995, 27). This, for instance, can be thought of in terms of as an infant's experience of the body before his/her socialization into language; a state of the body's relation to itself, without the mediator of language. In the Lacanian narrative of the subject's development, as the child is socialized into the Symbolic and is forced to use language to satisfy its needs – because the others upon whom it depends (parents, siblings, caregivers, etc.) have already crossed this divide – it becomes progressively more removed from the Real. This progressive alienation within language, the progressive distancing of the Real, is what sparks the desire to return to a conjectural wholeness.

Second, the Real can also be understood as disruptions of the Symbolic order, a Real "after [the introduction of language] which is characterized by impasses and impossibilities due to the relations among the elements of the symbolic order itself" (Fink 1995, 27). Žižek frequently focuses on this second notion of the Real as something akin to "limits" of the Symbolic order. For him (1989, 173), the Real "in itself is nothing at all, just a void, an emptiness in a symbolic structure marking some central impossibility." Since no social entity can ever constitute itself fully, there is always a desire for its further articulation and construction. This constitutive incompleteness is also, in a sense, the intrusion of the Real into the process of social construction. However, these two notions of the Real as something like "the real out there" that

resists total incorporation into language and the Real as disruptions of Symbolic reality are not mutually exclusive. Each notion of the Real attempts to understand the limits of social construction, and what blocks the “full” construction of any “identity.”

Although the Real is by definition extra-discursive, that which escapes social construction, it holds a central place in a Lacanian theory of discourse. Unlike the conventional constructivist or poststructuralist view that the entirety of human social reality is discursive, that “there is nothing outside of discourse” (Campbell 1998b, 4), Lacan argues that crucial aspects of subjectivity cannot be represented and articulated in discourse. In one sense, the Real is a kind of unmediated affective experience that is diminished once the body is socialized into language. This affect is lost once one speaks, since language itself is then introduced as the medium through which one experiences social reality, rather than direct experience through the body. Put a bit more dramatically, “the symbolic order kills the living being or organism in us, rewriting it or overwriting it with signifiers, such that being dies...and only the signifier lives on” (Fink 1995, 101). Language introduces a fundamental lack of “real” being, a lost sense of completeness, which is impossible to recover within the Symbolic, since it is the language of the Symbolic itself that introduces the lack. The subject *qua* speaking subject is, therefore, caught in a bind; it must assume a position within the Symbolic if it is to have its (biological) needs fulfilled by others who are already positioned there, but to do so requires a loss that is experienced as affect.

Lacan calls this form of affect *jouissance*, or as it is often translated, *enjoyment*. It is “a pre-symbolic, real enjoyment which is always posited as something lost, as a lost fullness, the part of ourselves that is sacrificed when we enter the symbolic system of language and social relations” (Stavrakakis 1999, 42). *Jouissance* has been described as both “a kind of existential

electricity” (Daly 1999, 227), and “an excessive pleasure and pain...that something extra that twists pleasure into a fascinating, even unbearable intensity” (Dean 2006, 4).¹⁷ While *jouissance* entails a sense of (conjectural or fantasized) wholeness of the “self,” it also involves a corresponding sense of frustration of the “self.” While desire is always oriented towards the promise of *jouissance*, it is never truly attained. There is always a frustration (or, lack of being) in relation to wholeness precisely because it is never reached. We search in vain for a foundation that does not exist – it never existed and cannot be made to exist – yet this is desire that propels our continual identification processes.¹⁸

In a Lacanian perspective, *jouissance*/enjoyment manifests itself in all areas of social and political life. Žižek offers numerous examples of this un-representable, and always frustrated, form of affect. When a believer describes his profound religious experience to a skeptic and cries, “‘You don’t really understand it at all! There’s more to it, something words cannot express!’ he is the victim of a kind of perspective illusion: the precious *agalma* perceived by him as the unique ineffable kernel which cannot be shared by others (non-believers) is precisely *jouissance*” (Žižek 1997, 50). The enjoyment he finds in his experience is something that he cannot put into words, yet it is the very thing that organizes his existence as a subject of a set of social relations (in this case, religion). A more explicitly political example is Žižek’s analysis of nationalism. For him, national identity is not reducible to a laundry list of cultural characteristics

¹⁷ For further discussions of *jouissance* and its place in Lacanian theory, see Declercq (2004), Evans (1998), Nasio (1998), and Miller (2000).

¹⁸ One may reasonably ask whether *jouissance* is another way of talking about human nature, or something akin to it. If *jouissance* is a pre-discursive affective force that helps to propel identification processes, it may seem like a kind of essence or foundation upon which identification is based, or determined. Glynos and Stavrakakis (2004, 209) offer both an acknowledgement of this concern and a reasonable rebuttal. “For in talking about *jouissance* one is always walking on the threshold of essentialism...However, one should not forget that, even if thinking about the real qua *jouissance* seems to flirt with a certain essentialism, it nevertheless remains ‘essentially’ unrepresentable and always in a state of irresolvable tension with the socio-discursive field” (Glynos and Stavrakakis 2004, 209). In other words, *jouissance* as affect does not hide a foundationalism in Lacan’s framework, since it is not a determinate that pushes the subject in any specifiable or predictable direction.

that define precisely what it means to be a member of a group. An individual's Symbolic identification with characteristics of culture is a necessary element of nationalism, but this overlooks how enjoyment is organized through the Symbolic networks of culture. Who "we" are is indeed constituted through our language, religion, rituals, and so forth, yet there is always *something else*, beyond the cataloging of such characteristics, that *really* makes us identify with a group.¹⁹ This un-representable Thing is enjoyment itself (Žižek 1993, 201):

All we can ultimately say about it is that the Thing is "itself," "the real Thing," "what it really is about," etc. If we are asked how we can recognize the presence of this Thing, the only consistent answer is that the Thing is present in that elusive entity called "our way of life." All we can do is enumerate disconnected fragments of the way our community organizes its feasts, its rituals of mating, its initiation ceremonies, in short, all the details by which is made visible the unique way a community *organizes its enjoyment*.

Enjoyment, then, is the un-nameable "excess" that permeates the numerous rituals that performatively re-produce the nation. That no national ritual alone satisfies or fulfills the desire promised (in terms of achieving a "harmonious" society or national unity, etc.) ensures that desire is displaced to other sources of identification. Enjoyment is Real in the Lacanian sense that it always escapes our attempts to put it into words, yet it is the affective element that binds people to their identifications beyond purely rhetorical effects. It is the Lacanian answer to Sara Ahmed's (2004) question of why identities "stick".

This affective dimension, which is always shaped by and circuited through discourse, has been largely overlooked in the discourse and identity literature in IR. For example, rather than examining the mere social constructed-ness of the "war on terror" to explain its durability, we should theorize about the aspects of this discourse that offer its audience points of identification

¹⁹ Related to this, desire driving nationalism can be viewed as passive narcissistic desire in the Real, "where a group of people conceive of themselves as embodying something extra that makes them valued more highly by the Other (Nature, God, Global Society) than other groups..." (Bracher 1993, 44-5).

underpinned by *jouissance*. From this perspective, the centrality of the signifier “freedom” in the “war on terror” is not due solely to its ambiguity and functioning as a nodal point. Rather, it functions as a nodal point precisely because it is an ultimately irrational final “sticking point that serves as the very condition for the subject’s submission to the ideological hail” (Dean 2006, 10). When interrogated to the point of circularity, “freedom,” as a ground either for social identities, for discourses of terrorism, or a political ideology, is revealed as tautological. “Freedom” functions as the final referent from which contemporary discourses of terrorism draw their meaning, and eventually becomes its own ground. It is through such words that subjects become affectively tied to discourses: “the last support of the ideological effect (of the way an ideological network of signifiers ‘holds’ us) is the non-sensical, pre-ideological kernel of enjoyment” (Žižek 1989, 124). “Freedom” functions as a discursive sticking point precisely because people are affectively invested in it. Consequently, it is a site of contest among competing political forces that attempt to hegemonize its content, or meaning.

Lacan’s concepts of the Real and *jouissance* offer a new angle and additional theoretical depth to understanding affects and emotions as they have been discussed so far in IR. As elaborated in the previous chapter, much of the recent literature on emotions in IR has focused upon the shortcomings of mainstream schools of thought in addressing emotions. Andrew Ross (2006), in his discussion of David Campbell’s work on ethnic identities, touches upon some issues that approach Lacan’s ideas about *jouissance*. Ross recognizes the need to investigate the non-conscious, and even “mystical and ineffable” dimensions of emotions. Commenting on Campbell, Ross (2006, 211) proposes that “his deconstructionist analysis reveals the need for a more direct investigation of affectivity as part of the non-representational or ‘mystical’ dimension of language”. The perspective Ross offers, however, does not move much beyond

stating the case for the need to examine these dimensions of language. While his assessment of the limits of constructivism is illuminating, and his proposition that “non-representational” phenomena should be on the research agenda of IR emotions scholars is admirable, Ross does not offer a theory of discourse, does not explain the relationship between discourse and emotions, does not offer a theory of identity that explains how these elements combine to produce political outcomes, or more importantly, does not say how researchers should integrate “non-representable” phenomena into the theorizing process.

Indeed, Ross does not push far enough in elaborating the limits of constructivism and poststructuralism. Constructivist and poststructuralist arguments that reality is *entirely* socially and discursively constructed not only ignore the “mystical and ineffable” dimensions of identity, but they ironically border on a new kind of essentialism. As Stavrakakis (1999, 65-6) argues, when constructivists argue that there is nothing outside of social construction, “social construction” itself ironically begins to border on becoming the “essence” of the social world. This position not only borders on reifying social construction as such, but the very possibility of new social constructions does not seem to fit within a constructivist framework. If social construction envelops the entirety of human social reality, construction begins to look like a kind of closed system in which the production of new constructions is limited to what already exists (Stavrakakis 1999, 67). Instead, there must be something outside of social construction that sparks or stimulates the production of new social constructions. Moreover, if this something was indeed “outside” of social construction, it would necessarily be external to language, and thus inexpressible. Although inexpressible, it would have discernable effects within socially constructed reality.

It is this extra-discursive and inexpressible aspect of human social life that a Lacanian framework not only acknowledges, but puts at the very center of theorizing. If constructivists and poststructuralists are to make headway towards understanding non-rhetorical basis for the power of discourse and identity, theorizing must systematically account for these factors and elaborate their relationship with those aspects of identity that IR scholars have already proved adept at analyzing, namely, the symbolic, textual, and discursive elements of identity. As this chapter has argued, Lacanian theory offers a useful way to begin to think about how that which is non-representable in discourse nevertheless has effects on language. In turn, if it has effects on discourse, it has effects on identity since, as many IR scholars agree, identity exists within discourse. At this point, a crucial question remains unanswered: if “identity” is always an impossible project, what *drives* subjects to keep identifying? The relationship between desire, *jouissance*, and fantasy offers an answer.

Fantasy and Object *a*

Although *jouissance* is the visceral dimension that binds the subject to that with which s/he identifies, it is always felt as lost to the subject. This loss, a perpetual sense of incompleteness, is that towards which desire is always oriented. As Stavrakakis explains, “desire, the element that keeps everything going, is animated by the quest for a lacking/impossible fullness, around the promise of encountering *jouissance* – and *jouissance* always has the connotation of fullness” (Stavrakakis 1999, 45).²⁰ Desire, for this reason, has no final object; since nothing can alleviate lack, desire moves from one object to another. If it is the *promise*, then, of reaching *jouissance*, and not the *achievement* of *jouissance* or sense of

²⁰ For another discussion on the relationship between desire and *jouissance*, see Braunstein (2003).

wholeness itself that drives identification, then this promise must be theorized in relation to desire and *jouissance*.

The Lacanian concept of fantasy provides this link. Lacan's notion of fantasy is far from the conventional understanding of the term as some imagined scenario in which desires or achievements are fulfilled. Rather, Lacan understands fantasy as the frame through which the subject pursues the promise of capturing a lost (though never achieved) sense of wholeness. In this respect, fantasy is a much more fundamental part of social and political reality than is usually presumed. Although there is always a blockage to achieving full "identity," the subject's desire is nevertheless sparked to overcome the blockage. Yet, there is nothing in the Symbolic order with which the subject can identify to accomplish this. Although the subject may seek Symbolic identification in master signifiers that promise a stable identity, or in Imaginary identifications of images of bodily integrity, such identifications never fully eradicate the sense of lack. As such, Lacanian theory argues that not only is the subject structured around a lack, but the *Symbolic order itself is lacking*. Returning to our hypothetical American subject who is faced with a "mandate" in accepting the master signifier "freedom" as his/her own, fantasy emerges precisely at the point where the subject "asks", "what am I to do in accepting 'freedom' as my master?" Since there is no fixed or uncontested "answer" to this question available in the Symbolic order, the subject constructs a fantasy imagining what this Other must want from him/her.²¹ As Žižek (1989, 114-15) elaborates,

On a theoretical level . . . fantasy functions as a construction, as an imaginary scenario filling out the void, the opening of the *desire of the Other*: by giving us a definite answer to the question 'What does the Other want?', it enables us to evade

²¹ The Lacanian "big" Other refers to the system or culture that subjects perceive as conferring recognition on the actions through which they seek identification; in short, the Symbolic order itself. Jodi Dean (2006, 11) offers the helpful example of how subjects experience the state as the Other: "instead of experiencing the state as myriad forms and organizations, branches and edicts, presences and regulations, say, in our daily activities, we posit the state as a kind of entity, an other, aware of what we are doing..."

the unbearable deadlock in which the Other wants something from us, but we are at the same time incapable of translating this desire of the Other into a positive interpellation, into a mandate with which we can identify.

In other words, fantasy is the frame through which subjects learn how to desire. Since the subject is unable to find a fixed “answer” to the question of what the Symbolic Other demands of it, s/he must, in order to make sense of his/herself, locate *some answer* to this question.

Through fantasy, the subject constructs a narrative that allows it to continue desiring, and thus offers a “promise” that s/he might still yet reach *jouissance* through continued identifications.

Crucially, this fantasy construction not only channels the subject’s desire for a stable sense of self, but also, from the subject’s perspective, fulfills what it believes the Other wants from it.

The subject learns to desire what the Other desires; in other words, desire is always channeled through the Symbolic order, through discourse. Thus, as Žižek (1997, 9) argues, “the original question of desire is not directly ‘What do I want?’, but ‘What do *others* want from me? . . . at its most fundamental, fantasy tells me what I am to my others.”

As the narrative through which the subject’s relationship to *jouissance* is channeled, the perpetuation of desire plays a crucial role in the construction of fantasy. Yet, how does fantasy sustain desire? What is it about certain discourses that engage subjects such that they become affectively invested in them? This role is reserved to one of Lacan’s central, and most paradoxical, conceptual innovations. Through fantasy, the subject’s desire is oriented toward an object that it believes will repair loss, which holds out the promise of “identity” and the realization of fullness if attained. This is what Lacan terms object *a* (*objet petit a* in French), the object-cause of the subject’s desire.²² Object *a* is the focus of the subject’s fantasy. Although the subject’s desire for identification moves from object to object, these are only the temporary

²² *Objet petit a* is typically translated as “object *a*” in English. The small *a* is drawn from the French word for “other,” *autre*.

incarnations of desire, rather than the cause of desire. Object *a* is the term Lacan attaches to the extra-discursive, ineffable Thing that drives subject's continuous processes of identification. It is a Real target of desire, which the subject feels has been lost to it, yet it was only at the point of the subject's entry into the Symbolic order where the loss was introduced. Hence the paradox of object *a*: it is a part of the subject's being that fantasy posits as lost, yet this "lost" part was never available to the subject. It is the Real part of the subject's being that it pursues through identifying with various symbolic objects that seem to embody "it," yet it is these very attempts to symbolize "it" that pushes the lost sense of wholeness further away.

As Ian Parker (2005, 171) explains, object *a* "is not empirically real, but is an analytically fruitful device to explore the orientation of a speaker, around which they move in a manner that does not reduce their orientation as only being to another empirically present speaker." It is the role of fantasy to veil the impossibility of "reaching" object *a*. To continue to exist as a subject within the Symbolic order, to continue as a desiring subject, fantasy offers the hope of covering over loss by promising the possibility of attaining wholeness by offering various objects that purport to cover over loss. Rather than realizing the ultimately radical contingency of everyday life, and the impossibility of satisfying one's desire, the subject posits that *something* must be the cause of its desire. (Actually satisfying one's desire would be unbearable, as this would entail the cessation of desire and therefore the end of the subject *qua* subject of desire). The subject therefore *retroactively* presumes an object that must have caused its desire:

In this precise sense, *a* is the object-cause of desire: it does not effectively pre-exist desire as that which arouses it, it merely gives body to its inherent deadlock, to the fact that desire is never satisfied by any positive object; that is to say, apropos of every positive object, the subject's experience will always be "this is not that" (Žižek 1996, 144).

Via the promise of the object *a*, fantasy masks the contingency of everyday identifications, and constitutes the narrative which one's desire bearable. In contemporary consumer society, for

instance, money obviously functions as one manifestation of object *a*, as the thing that will fill the lack in peoples' lives (Bracher 1993, 44). Žižek offers Coca-Cola as an example of a particular consumer product that can temporarily fill this role. Coke is advertised as “the real thing” that will bring satisfaction (or fill lack), the “unattainable X, the object-cause of desire” (Žižek 1989, 96). Yet, once Coca-Cola is consumed, dissatisfaction and lack re-merge, fueling desire for the next object.

In offering the subject a way to avoid the realization that that his/her identifications are always acts of failure, fantasy offers rationalizations for why desire will always be frustrated. Politically, fantasy “is a means for an ideology to take its own failure into account in advance” (Žižek 1989, 126). This is accomplished through a number of functions (Žižek 1997, 3-40). First, not only does the concept of fantasy offer an explanation for why desire will always be frustrated, but it also explains this frustration to the subject by attributing it to an other. Second, fantasy tells the subject what the fulfilled desire would have been had it not been frustrated by this other. Finally, fantasy suggests to the subject a way to deal with this frustration – typically by removing the frustrating other. This can be incorporated, for example, as part of an explanation of nationalism as not only a product of socially constructed differences, but one that incorporates the inexpressible dimension of *jouissance* as crucial to explaining processes of “othering.”

If identity itself is a slippery, ambiguous, and insecure experience, then the political creation and maintenance of the ideological appearance of a true, natural identity can only depend on the production of scapegoats . . . Only thus I can be persuaded that what is responsible for the impossibility of realizing my (universalized) identity, what is limiting my identity, is not the inherent ambiguity and contingency of all identity, its reliance on processes of identification, its social and political conditioning, but the existence or the activity of a localisable group: the Jews, the immigrants, the neighboring nation, and so on. If my identifications prove incapable of recapturing my lost/impossible enjoyment, the only way these can be

sustained is by attributing this lack to the ‘theft of my enjoyment’ by an external actor (Stavrakakis 207, 198).

The construction of others who are made responsible for the success or failure of fantasy involves not only the construction of difference, but concerns the way identifications (of individuals or communities) are structured in a relationship to always-absent *jouissance* or sense of wholeness. The affective experience of *jouissance*, then, is crucial for the construction of threatening others. Or, more accurately, the perceived loss or theft of *jouissance* is the crucial factor. Practices of “othering” frequently involve a sense that the other has “stolen” the ineffable Thing that makes “us” who we are. As Žižek (1993, 203) observes, “we always impute to the ‘other’ an excessive enjoyment: he wants to steal our enjoyment (by ruining our way of life) and/or he has access to some secret, perverse enjoyment. In short, what really bothers us about the ‘other’ is the peculiar way he organizes his enjoyment...the smell of ‘their’ food, ‘their’ noisy songs and dances, ‘their’ strange manners, ‘their’ attitude toward work,” and so on.” The non-meaning at the heart of human experience is, in a sense, impossible to live or function with. Since people must have some degree of stability offered by identifications and fantasies, the uncertainty and ambiguity (the lack of wholeness or *jouissance*) that remains is projected onto an other that stabilizes one’s own sense of self.

The Split Subject

We can now address one of Lacan’s most important theoretical contributions, the split subject. As is evident, the Lacanian subject is far from notions of a unified subject, the Cartesian subject, or any other approach that accepts the idea of a stable and originary ego that provides a foundation for agency. The “error” of these approaches, Lacan (2006, 705) argues, “consists in taking the very phenomenon of consciousness to be unitary, speaking of the same consciousness...” Conversely, Lacanian theory also denies other contemporary conceptions of

the subject, such as those that see the subject as being hailed into various subject-positions. In these approaches, the subject adopts for itself multiple social roles, depending on the particular discourse within which it is articulated.²³ Instead of viewing the subject as merely constituted by various discursive positions, none of which can be said to represent its “essence,” we should instead focus on the *subject as lack*. That is, we should explore how the extra-discursive dimensions of social life affects discursive reality. As Žižek (2005, 276) points out, “the stake of the entire process of subjectivization, of assuming different subject-positions, is ultimately to enable us to avoid” the loss (the real) at the heart of being a subject. Put differently, if we strip away the various subject-positions that a subject adopts for his/herself, what remains is not another subject-position, but rather a gap or lack in the discursive structure that has been covered over by the subject-positions (Žižek 1989, 175). This gap is not merely rhetorical, but is ontological. The gap between the subject as defined by a signifier, and that which always escapes Symbolic representation, embodied in the term “object *a*,” is the Lacanian split subject.

Lacan’s notion of the split subject substantially complicates the notion of identification. Lacan introduces the concept of the *gaze* to elaborate how individuals become subjects through identification with something outside of Symbolic representation, object *a*. Individuals seek recognition as subjects within the Symbolic order by identifying with various objects and ideals, yet in order to act they must assume they are acting under the gaze of an other that sees their actions as significant and meaningful. Identification with the gaze is identification with the perspective from which subjects appear as admirable to themselves. Žižek contrasts this from more common notions of identifying with images. Identification with images is closer to how we conventionally think about the issue, such as identifying with images in “which we appear

²³ For a recent example of this conception of the subject in IR, see Epstein (2008).

likeable to ourselves,” such as with film and sports stars (Žižek 1989, 105). However, identification with the gaze is “identification with the very place *from where* we are being observed, *from where* we look at ourselves so that we appear to ourselves likeable, worthy of love” (Žižek 1989, 105). I identify with a film star insofar as I want to be like him/her, yet I also implicitly identify with the imagined position from which I see myself as identifying with the celebrity. Thus, whereas identification with images entails identifying with representations within the Symbolic (i.e., within discourse), the gaze as such is, in a sense, outside of representation, and in that sense is closer to the Real.

Lacan elaborates on the notion of the gaze in relation to the subject’s perpetual sense of incompleteness and object *a*. The more conventional way of thinking about identification is, through this perspective, incomplete. One identifies with a celebrity, or a community or a nation, not merely because one admires the other’s qualities, but one admires the other’s qualities because of an imagined perspective outside of both the subject and the other through which it is seen as admirable *to desire* to become like the other, to take on those qualities (beauty, athletic prowess, intelligence, etc.). It is a way of “*seeing oneself seeing oneself*” that evokes identification with the other (Lacan 1981, 74, emphasis in original). The subject acts as if it is being seen by an other whose gaze confers recognition and approval, and a more secure sense of self. Furthermore, “the gaze I encounter is . . . not a seen gaze, but a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other” (Lacan 1981, 84). The gaze is not, then, a seen perspective of another individual, but gaze from the vantage of a more general other that is unseen yet presupposed. The gaze, in this sense, can be understood in conjunction with the targeted object of fantasy. The subject is guided by a fantasy that promises the alleviation of lack by reaching the missing Thing that will make it complete, yet the Thing itself cannot be made present in the discourse, the only

field in which such a Thing might be signified. The subject imagines that something that is “missing,” something that must have sparked its desire, but the existence of this Thing is only retroactively presupposed by the subject who is seeking an explanation of his/her desire. Thus, not only does the subject imagine an object that will satisfy his/her desire, but the object itself is imagined *as gazing back* at the subject. The object is felt as conferring recognition to the subject not only in pursuit of it, but in the imagined scenario when the subject finally achieves wholeness by joining with the object. “What determines me, at the most profound level... is the gaze that is outside” (Lacan 1981, 106).²⁴ The subject desires to occupy the place from which the object gazes back at it, but this place is nothing other than the subject’s fantasy of the field that includes the subject and the object, a staging of their encounter between the subject and the missing object. Fantasy allows the subject to represent that it can occupy this place, the place of the object, but this is merely the subject’s retroactive presupposition of the possibility of realizing its desire and attaining *jouissance*. Truly reaching this position is impossible simply because it is nothing other than the avoidance of a lack, the Real; there is nothing “at” the place of the object.

The elusive and inexpressible object of fantasy, then, is not only an illusory object that is presupposed by the subject as having caused his/her desire, but also has effects within the Symbolic insofar as the subject also imagines the recognition conferred upon him/her through its pursuit. “When the subject looks at an object, the object is always already gazing back at the subject, but from a point at which the subject cannot see it” (Evans 1996, 72). The gaze of object *a* imagined by the subject remains unseen because it is an aspect of the Real, outside of the

²⁴ Žižek (2006, 17) puts it this way: “the subject’s gaze is always-already inscribed into the perceived object itself, in the guise of its ‘blind spot,’ that which is ‘in the subject more than the object itself,’ the point from which the object itself returns the gaze.”

Symbolic, but it also determine the structure of the Symbolic. The gaze of object *a*, then, is a central aspect of the affective attachment to the fantasy that promises the fulfillment of reaching the missing Thing. Desire constitutes the subject insofar as it guides towards the affective experience of *jouissance* that pushes beyond the limits of Symbolic representation.

My use of the terms “subject” and “object” in discussing these relationships should not, of course, lead to the conclusion that there is a strict ontological separation between subject and object. As is evident, Lacanian theory collapses boundaries between “subject” and “object,” between inside and outside, and the concepts of the gaze and object *a* subvert the notion that language (or, the Symbolic order) is a mere mediator between the speaking subject and a reality of objects “out there.” The subject, moreover, overlaps with the Other (in its role as a representative of the Symbolic order) in identifying with object *a* (Žižek 1994, 178). Žižek illustrates this point through some useful geometric imagery:

Here again we are dealing with the topology of ‘curved’ space in which the inside coincides with the outside: identification with the object is not external to the Symbolic, it is an identification with the ex-timate kernel of the Symbolic itself, with that which is in the symbolic more than symbolic, with the void at its very heart (1994, 178).

Ex-timacy is Lacan’s term for expressing this fluid movement and interchangeability “between” the “subject” and “object.”²⁵ The object, and the gaze imagined as if positioned from the vantage of the other, are both interior and exterior to the subject. It is something that is believed to exist in the Symbolic order, external to the subject. Yet the subject’s desire for the object constitutes the subject as such; without desire and its presupposed object there can be no subject as such. So, the object is at the same time internal to the subject, standing in for the anticipated endpoint of the fantasy that constitutes the subject’s “want-to-be” (Lacan 2007, 151). The object is

²⁵ Lacan often utilized surface topology (such as Moebius strips) and the topology of knots to visualize these relationships. See Ragland (2004).

exterior to the subject in one sense, yet fundamentally interior in another. It constitutes an “intimate exteriority” (“extimacy”) as Lacan (1992, 139) puts it. The missing object that the subject feels will make it whole, object *a*, is “something strange to me, although it is at the heart of me” (Lacan 1992, 71). The subject is divided, split between its partial representation in a signifier embedded within a fantasy, and that which escapes representation. It is split between its own gaze towards the object and the imagined gaze projected back towards the subject from outside the subject. The split, or lack, of subjectivity is both the condition of possibility and impossibility of identification processes. Since identification is always a precarious practice, a fully-formed “identity” is illusive. This loss of self is the absent center around which identification processes cohere. This is precisely the role of the subject’s fantasy – to veil the impossibility of the self, fantasy forms a screen through which loss can be avoided, and which guides desire towards the illusory wholeness (*jouissance*) for which the subject strives for through identification processes.

This view of the “self” contrasts significantly with prevailing understandings in much of both constructivism and poststructuralism. Alexander Wendt (1999, 224), for example, defines identity as “at base a subjective or unit-level quality, rooted in an actor’s self-understandings.” The meanings of these understandings “will often depend upon whether other actors represent an actor in the same way, and to that extent identity will also have an intersubjective or systemic quality” (Wendt 1999, 224). Collective identity, consequently, involves not only the subjective self-understandings that a particular actor has, but involves an expansion of subjective knowledge about oneself to an Other. In Wendt’s (1999, 229) words, “identification is a cognitive process in which the Self-Other distinction becomes blurred and at the limit transcended altogether. Self is ‘categorized’ as Other. Identification . . . always involves

extending the boundaries of the Self to include the Other.” Poststructuralists such as David Campbell push this logic further. For him, the “constitution of identity is achieved through the inscription of boundaries that serve to demarcate an ‘inside’ from an ‘outside,’ a ‘self’ from an ‘other,’ a ‘domestic’ from a ‘foreign’” (Campbell 1998, 9). Difference is essential for the construction of the self, even if the self has no “essence” outside of its social and linguistic construction (see also Neumann 1996; Walker 1993; Zehfuss 2002).

This notion of the split subject does not deny the importance of others, or the necessity of demarcating boundaries. Rather, it builds upon these ideas by taking a theoretical step back and interrogating the condition of possibility upon which the notion of a groundless “identity” is based. The “self” relates to “others,” or, engages in identification practices against those who are “different” from it. Yet, this process can only begin if there is some desire to do so. One could plausibly argue that constructivists and poststructuralists already assume that desire is at work here; after all, *something* must account for why subjects seek to differentiate themselves from others. However, this covers over a complex set of dynamics that are necessary for understanding why some discourses are appealing while some are less appealing. The new perspectives on the social construction process that this chapter offers interrogate precisely into those aspects of self-and-other that necessary for understanding the desire for social constructions in the first place. In Lacanian theory the “self” does not come into being through differentiating itself from an other whom it sees as merely different. Rather, the “self” is nothing but an empty space that is marked in structures of the Symbolic order by signifiers that are pinned there. One does not start out as a “self,” but only comes to identify because it is initially lack, a Symbolic nothing. Its lack sparks the desire to “be” a “self,” i.e., to have a place in society, culture, the Symbolic order. The subject desires to fill its lack with Symbolic objects

that promise a whole sense of self. Others – that is, “actual” others who are distinct from the self – factor into this process in number of ways, but in politics these others are often fantasized as having “stolen” the very experience that the “self” seeks as its own. “They” appear to have what “we” do not, yet this fantasy is merely the ambiguity and incompleteness of the self projected onto an other. If others have what we want (“our” missing *jouissance*) then the filling of the self’s lack seems to be within reach, if the Thing they “have” is seen as a possibility. This, however, is the subject’s way of dealing with its intrinsic incompleteness and ambiguity. If it can pinpoint an object that it believes caused its desire, then its recovery would seem to promise the satisfaction and fulfillment of that desire. But, desire is never-ending, and fantasy allows the subject to keep believing as if such ultimate satisfaction is possible. In short, conventional disciplinary understandings of identity and the relations of self-and-other have largely neglected to explore these complex dynamics of desire and affect, and their role in politics.²⁶ Lacan’s notion of the split subject thus introduces substantial complexity to these formulations, and this complexity is essential to a more complete understanding of the political implications of desire and affects.

Affects, Emotions, *Jouissance*

With the above groundwork laid out, some conceptual distinctions need still to be made between conventional understandings of emotions, on the one hand, and Lacanian concepts of affect. Although Lacan has been criticized for neglecting the affective realm in favor of a focus

²⁶ This point is emphasized by contrasting Wendt’s (1992, 404-5) story of “ego and alter” and Žižek’s (1993, 218) analysis of the bonds of community. Wendt’s narrative posits two actors, ego and alter, encountering each other for the first time and having no prior history of either antagonism or cooperation. Through this story, Wendt originally intended to demonstrate that realist and rationalist assumptions about behavior could not be assumed or imputed prior to their social interaction. Ego and alter’s identities are produced through their mutual recognition and social interactions, rather than being given by nature. However, this logic must be taken further by incorporating the inescapably affective dimensions of social interaction. As Žižek (1993, 218) argues, “individuals do not form a community through the mutual recognition of the ego and its Other, but through the mechanism of affective identification, through the intermixture of partial affects where one ‘passion’ echoes another and thus reinforces its intensity.”

on language and signification (see Green 1999), he in fact offers a nuanced understanding of the complex relation between affect and signification. Indeed, for him, being a subject is *always* an affective experience that pulsates between loss and wholeness. Identification is a “drama whose internal pressure pushes precipitously from insufficiency to anticipation” (Lacan 2006, 78). In pursuing the promise of a whole sense of self, the subject continually experiences both frustration and satisfaction – satisfaction in associating itself with those valued signifiers (often partial manifestations of object *a*) that confer a sense of being and security, and frustration in never being able to fully overcome the sense of loss that drives the identification process.

One distinction to make here is between emotions and affects, which can help us to theoretically untangle what is at stake in identification processes. The terms “emotions” and “affects” are frequently used in overlapping ways. Andrew Ross’s exploration of constructivism and emotions is one example. He (2006, 216) distinguishes between “cognitive ‘feelings’ and corporeally mediated ‘emotions’ or ‘affects’,” in which feelings are those effects which are “fully available to consciousness.” This, initially, is a useful distinction. Not only have few IR scholars bothered to investigate the differences between conscious and non-conscious (or unconscious) dimensions of emotions, but in doing so Ross opens the conceptual door to a de-centered approach to the study of emotions.²⁷ Once emotions are viewed not as only individualistic, subjective, or conscious motivations, then the analytical focus is able to shift to the broader cultural currents upon which collective emotions are carried. Drawing upon Brian Massumi (2002) (who in turn draws upon the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari), Ross’s (2006, 199) brief discussion of “circulations of affect” points in this direction.

²⁷ Wendt (1999, 278) notes in passing that the “role that unconscious processes play in international politics is something that needs to be considered more systematically, not dismissed out of hand.”

A slightly different approach is taken in much of the Lacanian literature, which more fully specifies the relation between affects and representation. Just as Lacan rejects the notion of an autonomous ego, he also rejects the long tradition that separates rationality from emotion, or passion.²⁸ Lacan sees affects as inextricably interwoven with signification, and consequently tied to what we may call “rational” agency within the field of the Symbolic. Fink has elaborated a Lacanian position on this ultimately false distinction in a clinical setting.

What, in effect, is affect, and how is it supposed to be distinguished from the intellectual? Affect is essentially amorphous – an amorphous quantity or substance, we might say metaphorically. It is common to hear patients say that it was only on Monday that they realized they had spent the entire weekend in some sort of depressed state, indicating thereby that the signifier ‘depressed’ was only added to the state or attached to it three days into it. The state itself, if we can even speak in such a way, is often indefinable, indeterminate, and it does not come with a preset label. The attachment to it of a ready-made label like ‘depression’ may have little effect at all on the state, especially when it is provided by someone else, whether a well-meaning friend or a mental health professional. It is, in fact, a sign of improvement when the patients themselves are able to put some kind of label on it and to say ‘I was in a bit of a funk over the weekend and I think it was because of *x*, *y*, or *z*.’ In this latter case, the process of symbolization has already begun (2004, 51).

Fink’s observations offer a perspective that echoes a number of themes in the discussion so far. He makes clear that affects are essentially unrepresentable, “amorphous” in the sense that they cannot be immediately captured by our systems of meaning. Indeed, the patient’s weekend “funk” was, at the time, not strictly meaningful in a way that s/he could articulate. We may even say it was close to a mood, or disposition.²⁹ The affect only came to have meaning, to exist within the Symbolic, once a name was attached to it. Naming retroactively signifies the condition that was felt, but as Fink implies, this name is likely not a description that entirely captures the mood that was experienced. If the affect was something readily identifiable, the

²⁸ For a recent critical view of this tradition, see Damasio (1994).

²⁹ In a discussion of the formal aspects of Lacanian theory, Karen Ror Malone (2008, 191) defines affect as “not only emotion, but also [as] general demeanor, mood, etc.”

patient could have presumably attached a label to it before having lived with it for three days and afterwards determining that “depressed” best described it. And, it was only after the “indeterminate” feeling was brought into Symbolic existence through the signifier “depressed” could the patient work through it. The patient could only speak about the affect once s/he could bring it, however imperfectly, into discourse.

This illustrates the kind of relationship that Lacanian theory sees between affects, emotions, and discourse. As Glynos and Stavrakakis explain,

For example, we can grasp a basic Lacanian insight by drawing a distinction between affect and emotion. If affect represents the quantum of libidinal energy, we could say that emotion results from the way it gets caught up in a network of signifiers (or ‘ideas’ in Freudian terms). It is because of this, according to Lacan, that emotions such as depression or anger can deceive: their meaning and significance is a function not of their intrinsic properties, but rather of the subject’s universe of meaning and the way that fantasy structures this. It is for this reason that Lacan cautions against the lures of emotions, paying special attention to the ‘letter’ of what is said and the displacements of affect. This suggests that a key aspect of understanding the significance of emotions in the organization of social practices involves trying to map them in relation to the underlying fantasies that organize a subject’s affective enjoyment (2008, 267).

If affects, then, are “amorphous” and “indeterminate” states of mood or disposition that remain outside of discourse, which are difficult to articulate but nevertheless have an impact on Symbolic reality, then emotions can be viewed as the “feelings” that signifiers “represent” once we attach them to affects, thereby conferring on them discursive reality. This is a useful way to understand the relationship between affects and emotions since it allows us to draw a conceptual distinction between affects and language, rather than seeing them as conterminous. The study of affects and emotions should not equate affects strictly with their discursive representations, and should maintain a theoretical sense of the “distance” between affects and their textual representations, a sense which should remain with the analyst during the study of those

representations.³⁰ As Stavrakakis points out, conceptualizing affect and discourse as distinct yet mutually engaged phenomena allows us to differentiate between those discourses that do not gain social traction, those that do not “hold” subjects, and those that do. If affect and discourse were viewed as coterminous, every discourse could be seen as an equally successful site of identification and affective investment. In other words, to neglect the differences between the two registers (the Symbolic and the Real) may lead to the conclusion that all discourses or signifiers are equal sites of affective investment, which is clearly not the case (Stavrakakis 2007, 99-100). Some discourses have stronger affective appeals than others, and the reason is because some offer stronger or more secure fantasies of the “self” than others. Discourses that offer less-defined or weaker fantasies of the “self” will tend to be less affectively appealing.

These ideas offer a perspective that allows the analyst to uncover the gaps of a text, and how those gaps are (partially) sewn through master signifiers and other elements that attempt to cover over these gaps. A Lacanian account of the affective dynamics of the split subject, identification, and desire certainly involves studying textual representations, with “text” conceived here both broadly and narrowly. Yet, it also involves thinking about how that which is *not* marked in the text may still drive the overt manifestation of emotional representations, while “still paying special attention to the ‘letter’ of what is said.” The affective appeal of the promise of the object *a*, as the following chapters demonstrate, is often the strongest attraction of a discourse, yet because the object of fantasy is always missing, never quite there, this in turn drives the desire for its possession or attainment. As Fink (1997, 215) points out elsewhere, “there is a kind of basic equivalence between affect and *jouissance*.” Although this may involve

³⁰ Roland Bleiker and Emma Hutchison (2008, 128-9) make a similar point in arguing that the analysis of representations is crucial to studying emotions because, ultimately, “examining these representations is as close as we can get to understanding emotions.”

some unconventional epistemological and methodological implications, theorizing the limits of discourse through the concepts of *jouissance*, object *a*, and fantasy is useful if we are to deepen our understanding of not only the mutual inter-penetration of affects and their representations in world politics, but also if we are to expand our understanding of the social construction process itself.

Lacan offers a few analogies that are useful for thinking about the relationship between the Symbolic and the Real, or, the relationship between discourse and that which escapes it. If we accept that affects (rather than emotions) are most often inexpressible, the links between the Symbolic and the Real must be conceptualized in a manner that does not view them as co-extensive, yet allows for their overlap. In the spaces where the two do overlap, discourse and affect are not two separate entities that come together, but rather mutually infuse to the extent that discourse *is* affective such that subjects become invested in it. The discourses of the Symbolic channel Real affects, and Lacan offers the metaphor of a hydroelectric dam to illustrate this process. Just as we cannot access affects (which are Real affects) directly, and can only posit their force within the language we use to discuss them, we cannot know the force of a river without studying the structure of a dam that channels its flow. We may presume that the river has forceful potential, but we can only work with that potential once it is channeled through the dam, where its force can be manipulated directly. As Lacan (cited in Boothby 1991, 62) elaborated,

To say that the energy was in some way already there in a virtual state in the current of the river is properly speaking to say something that has no meaning, for the energy begins to be of interest to us in this instance only beginning with the moment in which it is accumulated, and it is accumulated only beginning with the moment when machines are put to work in a certain way, without doubt animated by something which is a sort of definitive propulsion which comes from the river current.

It is only through the dam that the river is shaped in a way that allows it to be utilized. Yet, once it moves through the mechanics and passages of the dam, it is never quite the same as it was before passing through, even if we now have a better sense of, and may effectively make use of, its force.

The relationship between *jouissance* as affect and signification is similar. Affect itself is inexpressible and remains in the register of the Real, outside of representation. The Real, though, exerts effects upon the Symbolic, and affect can only become meaningful when represented in the Symbolic as emotionally-charged signifiers. Discourse gives contour and shape to affect, channeling it towards signifiers with which we typically name emotions. Yet, like the dam which both shapes and impedes the river, discourse both shapes and impedes access to the forces of affect. It is the introduction of the subject into language, where the imagined wholeness of *jouissance* is presumed to have been lost, that the subject must resort to language to try and “re-capture” – the lost object of fantasy. Language mostly impedes affect, yet also shapes what “little bits of *jouissance*” that the subject can experience in fantasy (Miller 2000, 37). Fantasy promises an encounter with the Thing (e.g., a harmonious life with no problems, a pure Nation without antagonisms, etc.) that will fill the constitutive negativity of the subject.

The notion of “filling” can also be understood through Lacan’s metaphor of a vase. A vase is a cultural artifact used for a range of purposes, but the very act of creating it introduces a lack into the space that is to be used. The vase is manufactured around a space that is enclosed by the vase, giving it shape and introducing emptiness where before there was merely space. The creation of the vase also opens the possibility of filling it, of plugging up the emptiness that had before been formless space. The vase “creates the void and thereby introduces the possibility of filling it. Emptiness and fullness are introduced into a world that by itself knows

not of them. It is on the basis of this fabricated signifier, this vase, that emptiness and fullness as such enter the world, neither more or less, and with the same sense” (Lacan 1992, 120). The subject, in this sense, also seeks to be filled. It seeks the fullness that it feels is missing, yet it was only with the subject’s (partial and incomplete) representation in discourse that introduced the sense of lack in the first place. The vase shapes the empty space that it surrounds; language gives shape to the subject as lack. Through identification processes, sparked by desire, the subject seeks to fill the lack, to heal its division.

Although discourse mostly impedes affect, there are variations of *jouissance*/affect which the subject can experience within the field of discourse, through partial or provisional substitutes for the object-cause of desire. The “little bits of *jouissance*” that the subject is able to experience indeed point towards affective variations in the subject’s pulsations between fullness and loss (Miller 2000, 37). *Jouissance* in this regard has connotations both of pleasure and pain, satisfaction and dissatisfaction, and the subject’s identification processes are constantly balancing between these two poles. Satisfaction and dissatisfaction are both aspects of the partial *jouissance* that subjects can experience and the imaginary “full” *jouissance* that the subject always anticipates yet never attains.

Both the pleasurable and frustrating aspects of *jouissance* are tied to fantasy. The pleasurable aspect of *jouissance*, its positive appeal, consists in the imagined or projected fullness that the subject is promised in fantasy. Fantasy stages an encounter with the lost object *a*. The appeal of the lost object derives precisely from the promise it holds – the enjoyment that will be experienced when attained. Reinstating “justice” that has been denied, building a more perfect “democracy,” or reclaiming the “true” meaning of the “revolution” – each of these formulations of a resolution of lack involves a master signifier that is in itself empty and without

natural meaning. Yet, such signifiers are often the anchors around which political promises are expressly constructed; hence they frequently play central roles in national fantasies. The true enjoyment promised, however, is just that – a promise that fantasy implies without ever delivering directly. Thus, true “justice” will be recovered if we do *this* (which cannot be done); a more perfect “democracy” is ours if we only pursue *that* (which is unattainable); the meaning of the “revolution” will be honored if only we . . . and so on. Each of these pronouncements anchored in master signifiers embodies both the promise of fullness *and* its lack. “Justice,” “democracy,” and “revolution” are always just out of arms’ reach, but the enjoyment that they are projected to embody is never fully attained.

This is the frustrating aspect of *jouissance*. Fantasies never completely deliver all that they promise, particularly in terms like “true justice” or “real democracy.” This frustration reintroduces lack, which then sparks the subject’s desire for another object (another partial manifestation of object *a*) that does seem, at least provisionally, to offer wholeness. Some common events can be understood as momentary attainments of something approaching full *jouissance*. As Lacan argues, “at this unique instant demand and desire coincide, and it is this which gives to the ego this blossoming of identificatory joy from which *jouissance* springs” (quoted in Stavrakakis 2007, 197). “A national war victory or the successes of the national football team are examples of such experiences of enjoyment at the national level,” Stavrakakis (2007, 197) points out. Yet, such experiences are fleeting. The joyous relief of a war triumph subsides, the elation of a sports victory quickly settles, and lack is felt again. Thus, the *jouissance* is only limited, and desire continues its (ultimately never-ending) search for the “right” missing object lift all of the provisos on desire. As Lacan (1998, 111) argues, “‘That’s not it’ is the very cry by which the *jouissance* obtained is distinguished from the *jouissance*

expected.” When the subject approaches that which it believes will make it whole, it realizes that the imagined wholeness does not live up to the promise of the fantasy. That is, paradoxically, the closer the subject gets to *jouissance*, the more desire fades, and the more anxiety sets in, since it is only through desire that we have subjectivity.

In practice, the methodological implications of these formulation of the relation of affect to discourse is that Lacanian theory places less emphasis on specific emotions than on how discourses channel, and give direction to, affects that are expressed in emotions. In other words, instead of examining the role of defined emotions and specific emotional representations, Lacanian discourse analysis combines a theoretical understanding of affect as *jouissance* with the need to account for the *lack* orienting any text, along with the role of master signifiers and the split subjectivity that depends on master signifiers for its healing. Rather than studying, for instance, how the overt representations of revenge (Harkavy, 2000), humiliation (Saurette, 2006), or shame (Danchev, 2006) play out in specific political contexts, the theoretical ideas offered here, when combined with Lacan’s theory of the “four discourses” (see below) offer a way to think about, and empirically analyze, the ways in which discourses channel affects so as to *lead to* the explicit textual representations of specific emotions. Every text that constructs a subject (which is nearly every text, especially political texts) is driven by something that is absent from it. Uncovering the loss of “self” in political texts points to the fantasy that every text deploys in order to cover the loss, which in turn allows us to see how the text shapes desire towards the affective experience of securing a whole sense of self.

The Four Discourses

Among the most innovative aspects of Lacan’s work were formal mechanisms by which he proposed to communicate his theories. Crucial to our investigation of the relevance of his thought for IR are Lacan’s Four Discourses, each of which entails a different configuration

between four basic elements common to all speech acts.³¹ As Bracher (1994, 127) observes, “Lacan’s theory [of the Four Discourses] can provide the means of determining the dialogical discursive structure of any given speech act, text, or discourse, and on that basis, the means for gauging the psychological and (thereby) socio-political functions it might serve for its producers, as well as the psychological and (thereby) socio-political impact it might have on various types of receiving subjects”. Thus, although Lacan initially developed this model in a clinical setting, it can be used to describe the fantasies, desires, and identifications of any discourse that “moves” or “grips” subjects.

In this framework, a discourse is depicted as a structure composed of four discursive positions (Agent, Other, Product, Truth) which can be occupied by four elements (master signifier S_1 , system of knowledge S_2 , split subject $\$$, and object a). The first two positions of the model are relatively straightforward. For each discourse, there is an Agent that “sends” a message and an Other that “receives” it.

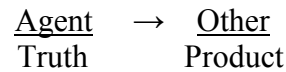
Agent → Other

The position of the Agent represents the most active or prominent aspect of the discourse. In “sending” or framing a message to an Other, the Agent calls upon the Other (this interpellation is represented by the arrow →) as a subject. The Agent’s message aims at achieving an effect. The effect produced in the Other as a result of the hailing process constitutes the third position in the model, the Product.

Agent → Other
Product

³¹ The following discussion of the four discourses draws on Alcorn (2002); Bracher (1994); Lacan (2007); Verhaeghe (1995); and Žižek (1998).

Finally, underpinning the position of the Agent is a Truth. More precisely, the position of Truth provides the ground or support for the possibility of Agency, yet this Truth is ignored or repressed by the Agent (as represented by the bar —).



Each of the two positions above the abar (Agent, Other) represent manifest or overt factors that are active in the discourse, while the two positions below the bar (Truth, Product) represent the latent, implicit, or repressed factors at work in the discourse. The positions on the left of the diagram (Agent, Truth) represent those factors active in the sending Agent, while those positions on the right of the diagram (Other, Product) represent factors active in the receiving subject.

Four elements can occupy each of the four positions of the diagram. Each of these corresponds to an aspect of the theoretical framework outlined above. To represent the master signifier – the privileged term that represses the “originary lack” of “identity” and offers the subject a stable identification – Lacan uses the symbol S_1 . Returning to our hypothetical American subject, we can imagine how s/he would adopt the master signifier “freedom” as his/her own, anchoring the subject with a stable sense of who s/he is. “Freedom” has certain meanings within American culture, and it is from this culture that the subject absorbs what it means for him/her. “Freedom” draws its meaning from its relationship with the cultural network of other signifiers that constitute American society; what is “means” is drawn from its differences and connections to a “battery” other signifiers whose knowledge is pinned to the Symbolic chain by the master signifier. Lacan uses the symbol S_2 to represent this system of knowledge.

However, as discussed above, subjectivity entails a split between a subject’s existence as defined by a master signifier (or more generally, as defined by discourse), and that part of itself

that it must give up in order to exist (that is, to be represented) within language. Subjectivity as something signified forces a split between gaining recognition within one's Symbolic context and conjectural ontological completeness. Lacan uses the symbols $\$$ and a , respectively, to represent the divided subject and object-cause of desire, that part of the subject that is "lost" and if "found" would provide the foundation for being the subject pursues. Yet, as I outlined earlier object a is the *result* of the subject's being in language. The object a is only *retroactively* posited as lost; moreover, the subject cannot exist *as a subject* without this loss, and without an ongoing relation to this retroaction. This "lost object" is thus a concept useful in understanding how people become affectively invested in a discourse and/or identification. As Bracher argues, "the a figures that lack of being that causes all desire, and it underlies affect as well. And as the cause of desire and the ground of affect, the object a is what animates the psychology of the group or the masses" (1994, 114).

The nature of the relations between these four elements (S_1 , S_2 , $\$$, a) are determined by the positions they take within each of the four discourses. Lacan maintained that there are four basic types of discourse. Each of these configurations can be understood as representing different social links corresponding to different kinds of intersubjectivity or social effects of discourse: the Master's Discourse, the discourse of power, governing, or commanding; the Hysteric's Discourse, the discourse of desiring, questioning, or protesting; the University Discourse, the discourse of educating or indoctrinating; and the Analyst's Discourse, the discourse of analyzing, transforming, or revolutionizing (Bracher 1993, 53).³²

³² Although the names Lacan gave to each of these formalizations illustrate their development in a clinical setting, their formal dynamics do not limit them to such contexts. In other words, the Hysteric's discourse is not restricted to analyzing individual hysterics "on the couch." Similarly, nor are the University and Analyst discourses only applicable in educational or analytic settings.

Master's Discourse

$$\frac{S_1}{\$} \rightarrow \frac{S_2}{a}$$

University Discourse

$$\frac{S_2}{S_1} \rightarrow \frac{a}{\$}$$

Hysteric's Discourse

$$\frac{\$}{a} \rightarrow \frac{S_1}{S_2}$$

Analyst's Discourse

$$\frac{a}{S_2} \rightarrow \frac{\$}{S_1}$$

The Master's discourse is the model of the others, and is thus a kind of starting point for discussing the discourses, since it is in the Master's discourse that discursive elements seem to most intuitively match with their structural position. Beginning with the Master's discourse in the diagram above and moving clockwise, each of the discursive elements also shift clockwise one position.

The Master's Discourse

In the Master's discourse, S_1 , the master signifier is in the position of agent. S_1 is the word or phrase that pins the meaning in a discourse, is the dominant term or discursive anchor to which the meaning of other terms and phrases refer back. The other signifiers, S_2 , occupy the structural position of the other in the discourse. $S_1 \rightarrow S_2$ indicates that the master signifier functions as the principle of order for signifiers constituting S_2 . These two are the overt, apparent aspects of the Master's discourse at work. Beneath the bar — are the latent or unspoken aspects at work. In the position of product is object a , the object-cause of desire, and in the position of truth is the split subject $\$$.

Here the master signifier (as the Agent) represses its founding truth; that the Master, like every other agent existing as a subject, is divided. Yet it hides this division by presenting itself as The Master who is complete and lacking nothing. Hence it gives the impression that it is not a divided subject. The Agent, in such a case, "has so successfully identified with his master

signifiers that he actually believes himself to be whole, undivided, self-identical” (Bracher 1994, 121). Paradoxically, to function as a master signifier S_1 this signifier must remain empty; its meaning is only defined by its relation to the system of signifiers S_2 , here in the position of other whom the Master addresses. The receiver of the message from the master, in the position of other, passively accepts the master’s knowledge, and consequently develops no legitimacy of his/her own. This passivity sustains the master in his delusion that he is self-identical. The consequence of this is an effective barrier to *jouissance* for the other. Object *a*, the object-cause of desire, is thus the product, the leftover of the other’s subjection to the master; once the authority of the master is accepted, a certain *something* is denied to the receiving other that cannot be allowed within the system of knowledge S_2 proclaimed by the master; hence, it is unspoken and excluded (under the bar —) from discourse. Only the Master can decide what is legitimate and illegitimate; the other’s role in this, and thus the other’s desire, is excluded. However, *a* remains under the *potential* control of the other, a factor that will be decisive in the potential questioning and revolutionizing of the Hysteric and Analyst discourses, respectively.

However, the master has no access to object *a* in this discourse. In “filling the function of the master . . . the speaker loses something: the *a*, the cause of his or her desire” (Bracher 1994, 121). Object *a* is lost to the master signifier S_1 ; it is outside the social construction of reality as defined by the master signifier S_1 . In this way, the absence of *a* is mad present in this discourse, as the meaningful product – a negativity at the source of desire – of the Master’s discourse. Since *a* is that part of the subject $\$$ that escapes symbolization, the more the master attempts to symbolize and articulate what is missing, the more *a* is more effectively distanced from the master. Consequently, in this discourse, the subject is always separated from *a*. To go

on as a desiring subject, then, the subject constructs a fantasy that gives it the illusion that it is in a true position of mastery.

Lacan's formal symbolization of fantasy is $\$ \diamond a$, which can be read as the split subject in relation to a (Fink 1995, 174), with the "lozenge" \diamond representing all of the various positions or relationships that the subject may take in relation to the object-cause of desire a . In the Master's discourse, fantasy is under the bar, the truth of the divided subject and the object-cause are under the bar. As Bracher (1994, 117) points out, it is only in the Master's discourse where $\$ \diamond a$ is repressed, and kept out of sight; the split subject's $\$$ relation to object a is conditioned by the dominance of S_1 and S_2 .

Perhaps the most fitting example in politics of the Master's discourse is that of an absolute monarchy. The king has unlimited authority, and what he proclaims has the status of Truth, no matter what hidden anxieties or problems he may have. The position of a doctor within the discourse of medicine (Verhaeghe 1995) is analogous. A doctor functions under the master signifier of "doctor," which hides his division as a subject within medical discourse. Acting under the master signifier, the doctor hails the patient as an object to be acted upon and who will passively accept the doctor's medical knowledge simply for reasons of submission or deference to the master signifier because "the Doctor knows what s/he is doing." So long as the patient can be reduced to the battery of symptoms (S_2) interpretable from the position of S_1 , treatment may be effective. But some aspect of the patient's suffering escapes that reduction – as is common in the clinic of psychoanalysis – the limits of the Master's knowledge may be revealed. The doctor has no access to the missing object-cause of his/her desire as long as s/he continues to operate within the master's discourse. If s/he assumes a different position with respect to desire, s/he may form a different relationship to desire, but then s/he will no longer be

operating within the master's discourse, but rather another discourse. In other words, s/he will no longer be playing the social role of "doctor" in which s/he is presumed to possess reliable control of the treatment.

Bracher offers a more explicitly political example of this discourse as exemplified in Ronald Reagan's 1980 Republican Presidential Convention acceptance speech. As Bracher observes (1993, 119-20) that "this speech derives much of its force from its insistent imposition of master signifiers (S₁), which are often used to ward off feelings of deficiency and lack and provide a sense of security and identity". Bracher offers a brief excerpt of the speech to illustrate.

Work and family are at the center of our lives, the foundation of our dignity as a free people. When we deprive people of what they have earned, or take away their jobs, we destroy their dignity and undermine their families. These are concepts that stem from an economic system that for more than 200 years has helped us master a continent, create a previously undreamed of prosperity for our people, and has fed millions of others around the globe. And that system will continue to serve us in the future if our government will stop ignoring the basic values on which it was built. (Emphasis in original)

Bracher argues that the repetition of terms such as "work," "family," "dignity," "free people," and "system" marks their roles as master signifiers. They act as the reference points from which all other signifiers in the speech ultimately derive their meaning. "Our" "basic values" and "dignity" (S₁) stem from "our" embrace of the overarching economic "system" (S₂) that provided the possibility for our identification with the master signifiers. Throughout the rest of the speech, "America" is offered as the dominant master signifier representing the ideal subject for Reagan's interlocutors, the members of the audience and the television viewers at home. However, as such, "America" is divided between its overt power as a master signifier, and the potential fullness it is lacking. The *jouissance* promised by Reagan's discourse may be lost, not because of a deficiency in our master signifiers S₁ or the system S₂ derived from them, but rather

because of “our” inadequate adherence to the master signifiers S_1 . Thus, “the main thrust of Reagan’s speech is to promise the return of lost jouissance through more complete submission to the master signifier” (Bracher 1993, 120). That is, a stronger submission to “freedom” in the form of free-market liberalism (S_2 , subjected to the S_1 of “freedom” and “the market”).

The Hysteric’s Discourse

The discourse of the Hysteric is reached from the discourse of the Master by rotating each of the four discursive elements (S_1 , S_2 , $\$, a$) clockwise one position. Now, rather than being hidden, the split subject $\$$ is in the position of the discourse’s agent, the most prominent element of the discourse. Supporting the split subject as agent is object a , the object-cause of desire, in the position of latent truth. The “split” of the subject is now front and center, denoting the subject who questions, who is unsatisfied with his/her place in the world, who is actively seeking to heal his/her division. The hysterical subject actively hails, or questions, the master signifier S_1 in the position of the interrogated other. What is produced out of this questioning is a new system of signification S_2 (or system of knowledge, culture, belief system, etc.).

Whereas the Master’s discourse is characterized by submission and deference to the master signifier S_1 , the Hysteric’s discourse is typified by questioning, protesting, or desiring. More specifically, in this discourse the subject $\$$ hails, or interrogates, the master signifier S_1 . This is because the subject’s division or loss is the driving factor behind the subject’s questioning. The questioning subject is unsatisfied by its condition, and it seeks security and stability in the promise of meaning and fullness it imagines it might find in the master signifier. Yet, it does not accept the “answer” provided by the master signifier; it rejects the master’s assertion of itself as The Master, and continues to question or protest – the Hysteric’s characteristic move is to demand of the Master recognition in return. This questioning of the Master by the subject leads to the production of a system of knowledge or beliefs S_2 “within

which the master signifiers take their bearings and assume their force, and within which the hysterical subject can thus find stability. Despite its expression of alienation and division, then, the discourse of the Hysteric remains in thrall to master signifiers (S_1) and a system of knowledge/belief (S_2) that it has not itself embodied and produced” (Bracher 1994, 123). The subject endeavors to ask what it is missing, what is barred — to it. Object a is the latent truth behind the subject’s S questioning, yet it has no direct access to its “missing” part. The subject S questions the master signifier S_1 about its limit, its division, prompting the master to offer a dominant signifier S_1 supported by a system of beliefs S_2 . But none of these satisfy the hysteric. The thing that it seeks, a , is not to be found via the master signifier S_1 or the system of signification S_2 as defined by the master since, strictly speaking, a cannot be articulated within the Symbolic order. As long as the divided subject remains in the position of the agent, s/he will remain a questioning Hysteric, unable to “find” the inexpressible thing that conjectured to be missing. Therefore, the only solution the subject has is to construct a fantasy that explains both why a remains lost, but also holds out the possibility that it may be “found.” This illusory fullness is promised in the security of a master signifier.

The Hysteric’s discourse is found wherever the force of a master signifier, or the Master’s discourse, is unsatisfactory. The questioning subject experiences a state of anxiety and loss, and seeks a stable identity that will overcome this loss. In everyday life, people seek such stability in answers and responses to their questioning offered by counselors, priests, and teachers; similarly, anxious masses seek stable identities in the speeches and master signifiers offered by politicians, just as individuals probe their friends for responses that will offer them a sense of stability (Bracher 1993, 67). A more explicitly political example of the Hysteric’s discourse can be found in the speech given by George W. Bush to a joint session of the U.S.

Congress on September 20, 2001, a little more than a week after the September 11 attacks. As would be expected in a presidential speech during a time of crisis, and in this opening portion of the speech, Bush addresses both the trauma of the attacks, while at the same time offering symbolic reassurance to the nation.³³

Great harm has been done to us. We have suffered great loss. And in our grief and anger we have found our mission and our moment. Freedom and fear are at war. The advance of human freedom the great achievement of our time, and the great hope of every time now depends on us. Our nation this generation will lift a dark threat of violence from our people and our future. We will rally the world to this cause by our efforts, by our courage. We will not tire, we will not falter, and we will not fail.

It is my hope that in the months and years ahead, life will return almost to normal. We'll go back to our lives and routines, and that is good. Even grief recedes with time and grace. But our resolve must not pass. Each of us will remember what happened that day, and to whom it happened. We'll remember the moment the news came where we were and what we were doing. Some will remember an image of a fire, or a story of rescue. Some will carry memories of a face and a voice gone forever . . .

I will not forget this wound to our country or those who inflicted it. I will not yield; I will not rest; I will not relent in waging this struggle for freedom and security for the American people. The course of this conflict is not known, yet its outcome is certain. Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war, and we know that God is not neutral between them.

What are the master signifiers S_1 and system of knowledge S_2 in this discourse? Bush's speech is sprinkled with several master signifiers that promise the audience a reassurance of the security and sense of invulnerability that was shattered the week before. "Our courage," "our resolve," our "patient justice," and our certainty that "God" is on "our" side are all privileged signifiers of contemporary American political culture, and here they offer the promise of re-establishing a security that has been lost. Most prominently, "freedom" is reiterated time and again as the embodiment of who "we" ("Americans") are in distinction to the enemy ("them,"

³³ George W. Bush, "Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People." September 20, 2001. Full text available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>.

“Al-Qaeda,” etc.). “Freedom” is “at war,” and “freedom and security” are bound to and reinforce each other. “Freedom,” then, is the master offered to the audience as that signifier that promises to reassure them of “who they are” and what their place in the world is, evoking a Symbolic passive-narcissistic desire to be recognized as subjects of “freedom.” Concurrently, S_2 is the network or system of signifiers within which S_1 has a privileged meaning – the new “war on terror.” Although it is not explicitly articulated in the speech, the political culture that gives rise to “freedom” as a master to which subjects submit themselves constitutes the system of knowledge that grounds that master as such.

What is the split subject $\$$ in Bush’s discourse? This particular speech was one of a series of “founding moments” of the war on terror discourse in the weeks following September 11, 2001. In this and other public statements from this time, appeals to national identity functioned to reassure Americans of their proper place – *their* place and *their’s* alone – in the world. “Freedom” was offered to the audience as a discursive structure in which they could re-invest themselves and which would offer a stable sense of self and security that would help to repair a loss that was, retroactively, applied to the attacks. The “nation” or “America” (and the terms with which it was articulated as equivalent: “our,” “we,” “we’ll,” “each of us,” etc.) is articulated as the most active part of the discourse. The “nation” is the entity that experiences loss, and feels “grief and anger,” suggesting an Imaginary passive-narcissistic weakness. Despite this loss, however, the “nation/America” is also the entity that is uniquely able to avenge the loss. It is the “nation” which will “lift a dark threat of violence from our people and our future,” and will “rally the world” by example of “our courage.” In this text, the split subject appears to be the “nation” or “America” itself. “Our nation” is split between both lack and promised fullness. The “great harm” and “loss” the nation has experienced is explicitly

articulated as constituting who we are *now* as a nation, yet now – and only now – we are also called upon to perceive our role as that of the only nation that can guarantee a strong and proper execution of the upcoming conflict. The “nation/America,” in the discourse of the war on terror, is comprehensible only in its split as both a victim (of loss) and as the prosecuting agent of what must be done.

Loss is articulated as part of the national identity, something with which “we” all identify, yet at the same time that loss must be overcome by re-establishing the master signifier of “freedom.” “Freedom’s” frequency in this speech reiterates its function as S_1 , as the signifier offered to re-establish the fantasy of a unitary and stable national identity. “Freedom” is the object which the “nation” desires in order to both cover over the loss and which promises the subject the fullness that is posited as having been lost. “Waging” the new “conflict” is offered as that which will heal the wounds just inflicted, and when successfully prosecuted, “life will return almost to normal.” Not only does the fantasy structure of the new “conflict” promise to regain what is retroactively seen as “lost” (ie, a stable, harmonious national self), but also explains away the impossibility of “finding” this “lost” fullness in the construction of a new condition for the realization of desire, a new war, or a war on a new front constituted by the attacks. It promises an engagement holding out the possibility of regaining national unity. In this manner, Bush’s discourse in this particular speech seems to fit well with Lacan’s model of the Hysteric’s discourse.

The split subject in Bush’s discourse seeks a master signifier which will alleviate the sense of loss and which will provide it a sense of security and unity. Supporting the split subject in the position of Truth is the object a . Again, object a is the part of the subject that is posited as lost, but yet is necessary to posit as lost if the subject is to emerge within language. Here, object

a plays no overt role in Bush's discourse. This is to be expected, since object *a* stands for something that is un-nameable – an affect that must shape Bush's pronouncement but cannot be articulated within it, as then an imposture would be revealed. In other words, articulating *that* the "nation" has experienced a loss does not state *what* precisely has been lost. "Great harm" has been done to the nation, which causes it "grief and anger," yet in this text (and many others from this era), what has been lost is seldom articulated and does not seem to be fully articulable. Edkins (2002, 243) recounts this strange phenomenon in the observations of a journalist in New York's John F. Kennedy Airport on September 11, 2001: "No one's talking. They were just staring at each other with their arms dropped to their sides. A pin could drop in the United terminal. No one's saying anything . . . There's several hundred people standing around not knowing what to do and no one's even speaking". This un-nameable, un-representable trauma marking its effects in discourses from this time is the trace of the object *a*. Object *a* itself plays no manifest role in this discourse, but it still plays a role in orienting the discourse and determining the subject's relation to its division, S_1 and S_2 . At the time, various discourses attempted to symbolize what had happened and what exactly was lost; America's lost "innocence," our "way of life" was under attack, another "Pearl Harbor" – a master signifier from an earlier era – "the world changed" on "9/11," were all attempts to impose an comprehensible understanding of what happened. The multiplicity of attempts to symbolize what exactly happened speaks precisely to the *in*-definability of the events. Here, it is the un-nameable insecurity, anxiety, and trauma that is the very driving force of the discourse.

The Analyst's Discourse

The Analyst's discourse is formed by shifting clockwise each of the discursive elements in the Hysteric's discourse. Now, instead of constituting the latent truth of the subject (as in the Hysteric's discourse), object *a*, the object-cause of desire, occupies the structural position of

agent. Consequently, this shifts the subject \$ from the position of agent to the position of receiving other. In the position of product is the master signifier S_1 , while the system of signification/knowledge S_2 occupies the position of latent truth supporting the a in the agent position. Bracher explains that it is only with the Analyst's discourse can one counter the tyrannical effects of the Master's discourse. Additionally, it is the only discourse that can offer a satisfactory (if ultimately temporary) answer to the Hysteric's questions (Alcorn 2002, 87). To accomplish this, the Analyst's discourse "puts receivers of its message in the position of assuming and enacting the \$ - that is, their own alienation, anxiety, shame, desire, symptom – and of responding to this \$ by producing new master signifiers (S_1), ultimate values, formulations of their identity or being" (Bracher 1994, 123). What does it mean for the object a to occupy the agent position, and to have the subject hailed by it?

In the clinical setting, one of the initial steps the analyst attempts is to elicit from the patient a questioning discourse, or a Hysteric's discourse. By asking few questions, by not leading the patient on, and by concealing the nature of his/her specific interests in the patient's problems, the analyst presents him/herself to the patient as a kind of enigma. This allows for the patient's discourse to go where it may, which eventually provokes a questioning from the patient as to "what exactly does my analyst want me to say?" The response of the analyst to the patient's discourse (which is marked by alienation, anxiety, etc.) is guided by emphasizing what has been left out of the patient's discourse – object a . By acting as the (largely silent and enigmatic) stand-in for the patient's lack, the analyst sparks the subject's desire to identify with something, which then begins the process of finding a new master signifier. This is precisely the aim of the Analyst's discourse: to stimulate the patient into the process of producing his/her own master signifier out of the battery of S_2 , rather than have one imposed from the outside (Bracher

1994, 124). This is why the master signifier S_1 is produced, yet latent, in this discourse. Enigmatic desire stimulates the split subject to seek its own master signifier. Put differently, the *lack* of anyone *telling* the subject who exactly s/he is, and what is the truth of her/his suffering, motivates the subject to produce a master signifier that can fill this anxiety-producing absence and give meaning to it. Although the analyst acts as the enigmatic “stepping stone” that initially allows the patient to engage in this process, the patient’s presupposition is that the analyst has the knowledge to cure him/her, even if the analyst remains silent during the process (Verhaeghe 1995). This is why knowledge S_2 occupies the position of latent truth supporting the analyst (here representing object a) in the agent position. There is a system of knowledge shoring up the analyst’s position as enigmatic desire, but it remains out of view of both the agent (analyst) and receiver (patient).

A helpful example of the Analyst’s discourse can be found in an application to legal practice (Schroeder 2000). When a client first approaches an attorney with a problem, the attorney acts as a legal counselor who listens to the client so as to find the best way to help the client deal with his/her problem. The position the attorney adopts with respect to the client is analogous to the position of the analyst in a clinical setting. “The counseling attorney, like the analyst, sits in the position of the client’s own desire, and interrogates the client in his position as a suffering split subject with a problem to solve” (Schroeder 2000, 68). In many cases, clients approach attorneys not knowing precisely what they want, i.e. what their desire requires of them. They may have a sense they have somehow been wronged, or may have an idea what their problem is, but have no idea how to deal with it. The client approaches the attorney in the first place because, like the analyst, the client supposes that the attorney has the knowledge to help him/her solve a problem, or attain their desire. Like the analyst from the perspective of the

patient, the client's view of the attorney is that of the "subject supposed to know." That is, even though (at the initial stage of legal counseling) the attorney may not reveal the extent of his/her knowledge, the mere perception on the part of the client that the attorney *does know* is enough for the client to begin the process of seeking out options to solve the problem. Consequently, the attorney addresses the client from the position of the object *a*; the attorney acts as a stand-in for the absent object-cause that drives the client's desire as a split subject. Rather than offering the Master's discourse, and commanding or ordering the client, the attorney instead listens to and assists the client, similarly to the manner in which the analyst interprets the patient's speech in the Analyst's discourse. However, the point is not to help the client attain what s/he desires, but rather help the client deal with the blockages that stand in the pursuit of desire. In a similar way, the analyst's mysterious desire does not offer the patient a path by which to attain his/her desire, but instead stimulates the patient to engage in a process of self-interpretation that removes the previous source of anxiety or instability and enables the patient to *name* the signifiers (S_1) that have structured his/her (mis)understanding (S_2). As Jeanne Schroeder argues, "the whole point of helping the client to understand how to symbolize his desire and place it within the signifying chain of law is so that the client can understand what his alternative are and how to deal with them" (Schroeder 2000, 71).

The University Discourse

The fourth and final discourse is obtained from the Analyst's discourse by rotating each of the discursive elements further clockwise one position. Now in the position of agent is a system of knowledge S_2 . The other receiving the message from the system of knowledge S_2 is object *a*. The message of S_2 received by object *a* produces a split subject $\$$. Underpinning the agent in the position of truth is a master signifier S_1 . The University bears a close resemblance to the Master's discourse in one significant respect: they are both effectively controlled by

master signifiers. A master signifier S_1 occupies the agent position in the Master's discourse, repressing the constitutive split of the subject and relying upon the pure force of authority to hail the receiving other. In the University discourse, the master signifier S_1 remains hidden (under the bar \rightarrow), unrepresentable to the overt factors in the discourse (the agent and receiving other). A system of knowledge S_2 as agent means that the power of the agent does not rely upon the sheer force of authority, but rather relies on the legitimacy of "objective knowledge" itself. The system of knowledge S_2 presents itself to the receiving other as neutral, legitimate, and authoritative because it is *not* seen as ideologically controlled by a master. This, however, is illusory, since every system of knowledge/belief/signification (in Lacan's view) is founded upon and held together by master signifiers. This is why a master signifier S_1 is in the position of hidden truth in the University discourse. In the position of receiving other, object a represents the desire of the other to absorb whatever knowledge the agent offers. Yet, although object a appears above the bar \rightarrow in this discourse, this should not be understood as a being an explicitly articulated part of the discourse. As discussed above, object a represents that *something* which is beyond symbolization, graspable only as desire, or lack. In relation to the latent division of the subject $\$$, the position of object a as the receiving other means that what the system of knowledge S_2 is effectively hailing is the *lack* in the subject (represented by object a). The overt object of desire in this discourse is not the *cause* of desire itself, but instead is a stand-in for the subject's lack. The overt manifestation of the desired object is retroactively posited by the subject as having caused its desire.

We see this discourse at work when "the subject says 'the facts compel me,' logical compels me,' or 'rules require the following'" (Alcorn 2002, 83). Education is one prominent example of the University discourse. Students must desire to open themselves to receiving what

the system of knowledge S_2 offers them: “knowledge is received when students repress their self-division and present themselves as desiring of the S_2 offered by the teacher” (Alcorn 2002, 82). But again, Lacan argues that every system of knowledge S_2 is underpinned by a master signifier S_1 . Science is one specific branch of knowledge that relies upon this latent support. In science, “knowledge” is viewed as a legitimate end in itself. The scientific process, scientific research, and scientific funding are all oriented around the idea of “knowledge for knowledge’s sake,” that it is better to accumulate more knowledge about the world than not. Consequently, “knowledge” is the master signifier underpinning scientific discourse, and is not to be questioned. Scientific knowledge S_2 presents itself to audiences as objective and legitimate (its legitimacy, of course, based largely on its perceived “objectivity”), but is silently supported by the unspoken assumption that more scientific knowledge is the goal to strive for (Bracher 1994, 116). The discourse of bureaucracy is another example. Bureaucracies are constituted by rules, protocols, and procedures, all supposedly divorced from emotion and irrationality. Bureaucratic knowledge presents itself as nothing but pure, impersonal knowledge; “individuals are to act, think, and desire only in ways that function to enact, reproduce, or extend The System” (Bracher 1994, 115).

It should be noted that although Lacan’s four discourses may have the appearance of being fixed or rigid structures, their constituent elements (S_1 , S_2 , $\$, a$) and the relative positions they take are mobile and incomplete representations. Master signifiers S_1 are those prominent signifiers to which subjects attach themselves, but are typically ambiguous signifiers that have no intrinsic meaning outside of the systems of signification S_2 that contextualize their meaning. The split subject $\$$ can never be fully represented within discourse, and is always striving after a master signifier that is fantasized to complete desire, although none can. Object a is simply

Lacan's term for the function of lack in a discourse, the place where the subject's missing fantasy object is believed to have been, but is nothing other than the signifier covering over the subject's lack. These different elements weave and flow in and out of representation and relate in different ways within the different forms of discourse.

How are these discourses relevant to politics and, more specifically, to IR? Analyzing texts through the theoretical lens of Lacan's four discourses offers considerable insights into how desire is communicated and how *jouissance* is given contour through discourse itself. The preceding examples demonstrate a crucial aspect of discourse that most IR scholars that have overlooked. As discussed in the previous chapter, for example, most critical studies of American foreign policy after September 11, 2001 focus on constructed-ness or the rhetorical aspects of the war on terror. In doing so, most have emphasized the overt content over the structure of discourse. As demonstrated here, the communicability of desire through discourse is not merely an effect of the content of words and rhetoric, but is also an effect of the relative positions that discursive elements (master signifiers, the subject, and knowledge) take, and those positions within discourse with which hailed subjects identify. In other words, desire shapes subjectivity and identification in different ways, depending upon the position that subjects take with respect to desire. By concisely summarizing the relationships between identity-bearing signifiers (S_1), belief/value/knowledge systems within which subjects exist (S_2), de-centered subjectivity ($\$$), and lack (a), the four discourses offers a method for understanding how these different elements play out in texts, thereby adding significant theoretical and methodological depth to discourse analysis as it is currently practiced in IR. More specifically, Alcorn points out that the four discourses offer a method to analyze broader collective dynamics as they are constructed through various social texts. "First," he argues, "[the four discourses] describe how desire is generated

and circulated by cultural authority. Second, they describe how desire becomes fixated and resistant to dialogic mediation. Third, they suggest that discourse cannot operate as agency except in and through desire” (Alcorn 2002, 67). In other words, they show not only how desire operates through discourse, but offer an understanding of how latent desire can act as a force beyond rational or logical mediation, depending upon which discourse (Master’s, Hysteric’s, Analyst’s, University) subjects operate within. These “irrational” attachments to certain significations are precisely those bonding points in discourse within which subjects are affectively invested, and which drives them to act beyond merely signification as such.

Lacan with Laclau: Psychoanalytic Theory and the Politics of Hegemony

Given the above summary of a Lacanian approach to identification, it may not seem immediately apparent how it may handle the *politics* of affects, discourses, and identification. It is one thing to argue that psychoanalytic theory offers us tools to understand how some elements of discourses appeal to and “grip” people. As Alcorn (2002, 17) points out, because “of a kind of adhesive attachment that subjects have to certain instances of discourse, some discourse structures are characteristic of subjects and have a temporal stability.” Theorizing what it is exactly about some discourses that can help us understand their power in structuring peoples’ identifications is a useful step in the study of discourse in IR.

It may be something else, however, to argue for the political relevance of Lacanian theory, that is, outside of the clinical context in which it was developed. It should be clear at this point that Lacanian theory avoids much of the criticism against psychological and other kinds of psychoanalytic approaches to politics. Most such criticisms charge that it is reductionist to explain collective behavior in terms of the psychological characteristics of individuals. This is problematic since, as Jonathan Mercer explains (2006, 297), using individual-level factors to explain group-level factors reifies the group itself. Stavrakakis, in a discussion of the relevance

psychoanalytic theory to politics, agrees that much of the skepticism towards these approaches is well-founded. “There is no doubt,” he contends, “that psychological reductionism, that is to say the understanding of socio-political phenomena by reference to some sort of psychological *substratum*, an essence of the psyche, is something that should clearly be avoided (1999, 1).

Lacanian theory, however, avoids such theoretical obstacles through the way in which it conceptualizes the relationship between the subject and the socio-symbolic order. Indeed, Lacan does not make a strict distinction between “the individual” and the “collective” in the way that other psychological approaches commonly do, and as critics may anticipate. For Lacan, the subject is unavoidably enmeshed with the social order, the goal of which for psychoanalytic theory is to uncover the consequences for the subject:

Psycho-analysis is neither a *Weltanschauung*, nor a philosophy that claims to provide the key to the universe. It is governed by a particular aim, which is historically defined by the elaboration of the notion of the subject. It poses this notion in a new way, *by leading the subject back to his signifying dependence* (Lacan 1981, 77, emphasis added).

The subject as such, in fact, is constituted by factors that are “outside” the subject in the traditional sense of an “individual level” and a “collective level.” Moreover, if we pursue questions about identity, emotions, and discourse, such a dichotomy breaks down. Mercer argues that the solution to the levels-of-analysis problem in the study of identity is found in the understanding that people have different identities at different levels of generalization. Mercer approvingly cites another study arguing that ““when people identify with a group, the group exists as part of the individual”” (Hogg and Abrams 1988, cited in Mercer 2006, 297). I agree with this formulation, yet the dynamics in this process require a much fuller theoretical elaboration, which this chapter offers.

The subject’s identification with master signifiers and partial manifestations of object *a* through fantasy discourses offers another understanding of the subject’s “signifying dependence”

on the social order than is commonly articulated in IR theory. Due to the subject's "originary lack of identity" (Laclau 1994, 2-3), s/he is always a social subject. In this sense, the levels of the "individual" and the "collective" are not in fact different "levels" at all, but are instead interweaving and interdependent registers where no clear line is discernable between the subject and "society." Furthermore, Lacanian theory argues that not only is the subject incomplete, but due to the "originary lack" of identity, *identification* processes necessarily continue through fantasy discourses. The lack at the "collective level" itself must be taken into account. As discussed above, the theoretical reason why subjects keep identifying with this or that discourse is because the Symbolic order itself is lacking; there is no final stability or security in the discursive resources available in the Symbolic simply because there is no ultimate foundation grounding it. The subject is always left with some unfulfilled desires and frustrated promises of partial *jouissance* precisely because there is no "fixity" to be found through one's identification with social phenomena that have no grounding themselves. As Stavrakakis (1999, 41) explains, the "individual seeks a strong subjective identity in identifying with collective objects but the lack on the objective level means that every such identification is only reproducing the lack in the subject, being incapable of providing the lost fullness of the individual subject." Put a bit differently, "the Social, the field of social practices and socially held beliefs, is not simply on a different level from the individual experience, but something which *the individual him- or herself* has to experience as an order which is minimally 'reified', externalized" (Žižek 2002, lxxii). The subject, in other words, is compelled to experience the social as something relatively stable if it is to seek security in identifying with its resources, even if, ultimately, there is no final grounding to it.

The overlapping relationship between the subject and the Symbolic order allows us to return to Laclau's relevance to this discussion. As noted above, Laclau's approach to politics centers upon the construction of hegemony, or the "common sense" of a society. When combined with his other concepts of nodal points, equivalence, and difference, they offer a systematic accounting of how political frontiers are constructed, and how hegemony is created, maintained, and contested. For our purposes, considerable overlap can be seen between nodal points (from Laclau) and master signifiers (Lacan), and the logic of hegemony (Laclau) and the logic of the object *a* (Lacan). Lacan's notions of identification, affect, and fantasy combined with Laclau's emphasis on hegemonic politics offer us a way to think about the *politics* of identification as the construction "common sense" powerfully underpinned by affective investments.

Sites of Contestation and Investment: Nodal Points and Master Signifiers

As discussed above, nodal points play a crucial role in Laclau's theory of discursive hegemony. Nodal points are those privileged words, terms, and phrases in society that embody collectively held values and ideas. Yet, there is no extra-discursive ground upon which their meanings rest. They are "empty" in the sense that there is no transcendental, fixed meaning that may be attached to them – *even when the subjects who identify with them suppose that such meaning is there* – and it is this ambiguity that allows for them to function as sites of contestation for political legitimacy between different groups. As in Laclau's example of social disorganization in Hobbes's state of nature, society requires an "order" to function, yet "order" only comes to have social meaning once a political project (temporarily) fixes its preferred interpretation of what the term means in that context (Laclau 1996). Indeed, it is this ambiguity that creates the condition of possibility of democratic politics in the first place. The fact that despite the powerful ability of some projects to thus fix the meaning of their society's nodal

points, the incompleteness of any social meaning is what creates space for contestation. As Laclau (2001, 10) argues, “this incompleteness of the hegemonic game is what we call *politics*.”

It is easy to see the overlap between Laclau’s nodal points and Lacan’s notion of master signifiers. As central as they are in structuring the subject’s processes of identification, the master signifiers offered by the Symbolic order are incomplete. They can never fully suture the lack around which our identifications cohere, which prompts subjects to construct fantasies in order to have the stability needed to function as a subject. It is this limitation of the discursive resources of the Symbolic that sparks continual processes of identification, rather than the permanence of an “identity.” It is also this incompleteness that allows for agency in explaining social change, and even social creativity in identification (Ruti, 2008).

What the concepts of the nodal point and the master signifier ultimately try to account for is the relative temporary stability on which basis subjects must proceed *as if* that subjects must have if they are to act as subjects. Although some constructivists and poststructuralists have emphasized the fluidity of identity over its possible stability, they seem to have over-emphasized this fluidity without devoting sufficient attention to how partial stability is achieved (see Goff and Dunn 2004). For Laclau, partial meaning is achieved when a political project succeeds in offering a dominant construction of a field of signifiers, or an ideology. Terms like “the people” and “justice” become nodal points in particular ideologies when linked (through logics of equivalences and differences) to a range of other secondary signifiers whose meaning is ultimately deferred back to the anchors “fixing” the entire grouping. For Lacan, master signifiers offer stability because of their role in structuring the subject’s identity, and in their role of both evoking and satisfying certain kinds of desires (Bracher 1993, 25).

Laclau, in his collaboration with Mouffe, explicitly refers to Lacan's *point de capiton* in offering the concept of the nodal point (1985, 112). Using these insights in political analysis, I argue that we can theoretically account for the centrality of powerful political values in terms of their role not only in structuring peoples' identifications, but also in terms of their constitutive ambiguity which allows them to function as sites of hegemonic contestation. In the contemporary American context, "America," "God," "democracy," "freedom," "justice," "good," "evil," "terrorism," and other widely-cited signifiers function as the discursive anchors around which much political debate centers. Yet, despite their centrality in "defining" values that many hold dear, there is no intrinsic or "natural" meaning for any of these terms. Their shifting signification allows for conflict over which political projects will successfully "fill in" their meaning. William Connolly, in his classic *The Terms of Political Discourse* (1983, 6), is close to Laclau here, and nicely captures the implications of this view of *politics*:

Central to politics, as I understand it, is the ambiguous and relatively open-ended interaction of persons and groups who share a range of concepts, but share them imperfectly and incompletely. Politics involves a form of interaction in which agents adjust, extend, resolve, accommodate, and transcend initial differences within a context of partly shared assumptions, concepts, and commitments. On this reading, conceptual contests are central to politics; they provide the space for political interaction.

Yet, it is not merely (fluid and inconsistent) signification itself that makes political rhetoric powerful. A Lacanian account of the affective investments in discourses offers an understanding of the relationship between affects – which are outside of discourses – and discourse itself. Incorporating the affective dimensions of desire and *jouissance*, we see that politics is not only a battle over the hegemonic fixing of meanings of certain signifiers, but is also a battle for the discursive channeling of *jouissance*/affect in particular political directions. If Lacan's concepts of fantasy, desire, and the master signifier helps explain the affective attachment that American citizens and members of the political elite have with certain instances of

discourse, then Laclau can aid in understanding how they function as sites of political contestation, and how various forces struggle to ascribe particular political meanings to these instances of discourse.

Desire, in a strictly Lacanian sense of the term, helps to explain not only why subjects are guided toward the *jouissance* promised by master signifiers, but also how other words and phrases become discursively tied together into chains of signification that represent and sustain identifications. Recall that the logics of equivalence and difference, for Laclau, are discursive movements through which political boundaries and identities are produced. Logics of difference break down social linkages into particularities, while logics of equivalence work to coalesce meanings and identities into chains of similarity. Equivalence, in other words, collapses meanings insofar as what a chain of signifiers has in common is their similarity to each other against an outside element. Such relations are metonymical in that the meanings of signifiers tied together in chains of equivalence are deferred to one another. In chains that typically construct contemporary American identity, for example, the terms “America,” “the people,” “justice,” “exceptional” and so on all confer the same kind of meaning. “America” typically means “justice” and “exceptional,” since to define “America” is to refer back to these other signifiers in the chain. They are equivalent insofar as the meanings between them collapse (i.e., their meanings become nearly equivalent), and they are metonymical insofar as the “meaning” of the chain is continually deferred to other signifiers in the chain. As Lacan (2006, 419) points out, “we can say that it is in the chain of the signifier that meaning *insists*, but that none of the chain’s elements *consists* in the signification it can provide at that very moment.” Individually each signifier cannot confer the meaning that the entire chain offers, yet meaning is never complete, never finished.

Logics of equivalence bear a close similarity to the displacements of desire itself. Since desire is by definition never-ending, and since the subject never encounters the lost object of fantasy, desire is transferable from object to object. These objects, again, are typically valued signifiers that confer a sense of recognition upon the subject. Since no object or signifier satisfies the desire for a whole “self,” desire moves on to the next object that seems to better offer this promise. Desire is “based on no other derangement of instinct than the fact that it is caught in the rails of metonymy, eternally extending toward *desire for something else*” (Lacan 2006, 431, emphasis in original). Desire shifts and slides between and across signifiers that promise a more complete representation of the “self,” yet desire is continually deferred to other signifiers. Desire “*is a metonymy,*” Lacan (2006, 439) argues. In short, even at the level of signifiers strung together in chains, sentences, and so on, desire is at work. Each signification of privileged terms of the chain – “America,” “the people,” “justice,” “exceptionalism” – is deferred to others, and desire is what sticks them together. They are “our” signifiers, each offering a promise of representation, yet each deferring the realization of that promise. Conversely, “evil,” “terror,” “rogue” and so on are “their” signifiers, that is, the signifiers by which “our” difference from the Other is assessed. Consequently, our desire is blocked when it approaches a signifier that is not “ours.” Thus, while the affective dimensions of language (as *jouissance* or enjoyment) are channeled through fantasy discourses that offer the promise of a whole self, similar dimensions are at work in fusing together signifiers that compose the groups through which we try to pinpoint and discursively nail down who “we” are.

The Logic(s) of Hegemony and Object *a*

Another theoretical parallel can be found between the structure of discursive hegemony, as formulated by Laclau, and the logic of the object *a* as elaborated by Lacan. If insights about the concepts of nodal points and master signifiers offers a way to understand the discursive flows

and *politics of affect/jouissance*, then exploring affinities between discursive hegemony and object *a* can aid in uncovering the fantasy structures that necessarily underpin dominant political discourses.

While it is certainly not inaccurate to say that discursive hegemony can be thought of as the construction of a “common sense” of a society, Laclau offers a much more systematic understanding of both the process and structure of how “common sense” is constituted. He does this by way of re-working the categories of particularity and universality. With the advent of the “linguistic turn” in IR and the social sciences more generally, the notion of universals has been the target of many strands of contemporary thought.³⁴ Lyotard’s (1979) “incredulity towards metanarratives” that claim universal validity across time and context is perhaps among of the best-known versions of this.³⁵ Laclau agrees with Lyotard’s characterization, but argues that the concept of the universal should not be dismissed entirely; instead it should be re-thought in terms of its role in structuring modern discourses. He offers a new notion of the universal in conjunction with a re-working of the correlative concept of the particular.³⁶

Laclau argues that the universal should be understood not in the traditional sense of grand teleological narratives that marginalize numerous groups of people by offering a single legitimate vision of society, but can instead be understood as the “empty ground” of democratic politics. Universal concepts can still offer a way to understand contemporary politics if we accept that the time-honored political concepts that every society generates (“democracy,”

³⁴ For a brief overview, see Yanow (2006).

³⁵ Lacan’s dictum, “there is no metalanguage that can be spoken” (2006, 688) is another formulation of this.

³⁶ Laclau initially offered these arguments within the flurry of debate over identity politics and multiculturalism in the 1990s. Since contemporary thought had rendered any notion of the universal to be oppressive or totalitarian, the assertion by specific groups of their own particular identities was thought to be a more appropriate way to confront the dilemmas surrounding “metanarratives.”

“justice,” “the people,” and so on) are themselves sites of political contestation. Rather than seeing these notions as values that have an extra-discursive referent that can be readily grasped by groups in society that seek to deliver them, such notions are, Laclau proposes, ambiguous sites of inscription upon which different forces attempt to ascribe their own particular meaning – which is, paradoxically, the condition of a possible realization of a more radical version of at least one of these terms. As he (1996, 35) explains, “if democracy is possible, it is because the universal has no necessary body and no necessary content; different groups, instead, compete between themselves to temporarily give to their particularisms a function of universal representation. Society generates a whole vocabulary of empty signifiers whose temporary signifieds are the result of a political competition.”

The relationship between the universal and the particular, then, is not one of mutual exclusion. Rather, it is one of mutual entanglement. Through contestation, some political forces are able to fill in the empty content of “universal” nodal points with their own “particular” vision of what the nodal points mean. When the political right in the United States, for instance, is able to define “freedom” as anti-welfare state and anti-state intervention in the market, this means that this political movement has been able to define the “universal” idea of “freedom” in a particular way that has nothing to do with an intrinsic meaning of “freedom,” but only in terms of a chain of other signifiers that goes unspoken whenever “freedom” is uttered. Filling in “freedom’s” lack of meaning is precisely what it means to succeed in solidifying hegemony. As Laclau (1996, 44) argues, to “hegemonize something is exactly to carry out this filling function.” In this sense, the categories of the universal and the particular still retain their usefulness for political analysis, albeit in a much different (i.e., non-foundational) manner than traditional philosophy would have them.

Yet, it is the tension between the universal and the particular that allows for their contestation in the first place. Although some political movements may be able to temporarily hegemonize, or fill in, the empty content of a societal nodal point, this achievement is always precarious. No hegemonization is ever finished since there is no extra-discursive grounding which hegemonic discourses “reflect.” “Universal” nodal points are necessary for democratic political competition, but no hegemonization can ever fill their meaning completely. Thus, Laclau speaks of hegemony as a “failed totality, the place of an irretrievable fullness” (2005, 70). Particular assertions of meanings can come to embody the universal nodal points that anchor a society’s political debates, yet the inevitable incompleteness of any hegemony means that total discursive closure is impossible. In this sense, hegemony is the attempt to articulate a “part” (a particular meaning) as embodying the “whole” (the universal values of a society).

We can draw a close comparison to this process of hegemonization in the logic of the Lacanian object *a*. Recall that object *a* is the object-cause of desire, the evasive object that fantasy discourses pursue as that which will heal wounds, alleviate loss, and bring a sense of wholeness to the subject. Yet, object *a* cannot be made to exist anywhere in the Symbolic – the only order in which such an object could be expressed – since it is retroactively posited by the subject as having caused its desire, outside of the Symbolic. Rather than facing the intractable realization that one’s desire cannot be satisfied, fantasies offer the subject a way to stage the promise of wholeness as embodied in something recognizable. Once the fantasy object is reached, the subject realizes that it did not bring the promised harmony, feelings of loss return, and the subject constructs a new fantasy. This notion of a fantasy-object that seems to be the Thing that will bring satisfaction and wholeness is precisely what Žižek calls a “sublime object.” “We must remember that there is nothing intrinsically sublime in a sublime object – according to

Lacan, a sublime object is an ordinary, everyday object which, quite by chance, finds itself occupying the place of...the impossible-real object of desire...It is the structural place – the fact that it occupies the sacred/forbidden place of *jouissance* – and not its intrinsic qualities that confers on it its sublimity” (Žižek, 1989, 194). A certain fantasy-object is posited as fully occupying the space of the Thing, yet only when such an object is actually confronted does the subject discover that the *jouissance* promised by the fantasy does not amount to the disappointing partial *jouissance* actually experienced (Lacan 1998, 111). Put a bit differently, a partial object comes to fill the empty place in the fantasy structure where subject’s desire is believed to have sparked. Yet, this partial object cannot fully embody the promised fullness.

In his most recent work, Laclau finds the logics of the object *a* and hegemony to be not merely analogous, but in fact one and the same. The desire for fullness in the search for object *a* is the same structural logic at work in the universal-particular tension in discursive hegemony. Both can be viewed as investment in a partial object which is promised, or believed to be, representative of the whole. As Laclau (2005, 115-16) explains,

In political terms, that is exactly what I have called a hegemonic relation: a certain particularity which assumes the role of an impossible universality. Because the partial character of these objects does not result from a particular story but is inherent in the very structure of signification, Lacan’s *objet petit a* is the key element in a social ontology....We are not dealing with casual or external homologies but with the same discovery taking place from two different angles – psychoanalysis and politics – of something that concerns the very structure of objectivity . . .

No social fullness is achievable except through hegemony; and hegemony is nothing more than the investment, in a partial object, of a fullness which will always evade us because it is purely mythical...The logic of the *objet petit a* and the hegemonic logic are not just similar: they are simply identical.

What this discussion helps us to see is the inevitably affective component of discourses that come to define “common sense.” As Stavrakakis (1999, 62, 80-2) argues, the importance of words and phrases that function as nodal points cannot be reduced solely to their discursive

position. Although they represent the final (and ultimately tautological) ground upon which identifications hinge, they function as discursive anchors precisely because fantasies and affects may be summoned to underpin their anchoring role. Such words and phrases draw their appeal by promising or embodying a sense of wholeness for people seeking to alleviate loss and anxiety through identifying with political discourses. In many cases, nodal points are themselves positive manifestations of the object *a* of the fantasy discourse in which they appear. For example, “freedom” in the war on terror functioned as one nodal point around which a range of other words and phrases cohered. “Good,” “evil,” “terror,” “justice,” “civilization,” “barbarian” – in the circles of equivalence and difference in which these terms drew their meanings, “freedom” frequently appeared in political speeches as the final referent for explaining or understanding who “we” were in relation to an evil “them” (“they hate our freedoms”). Yet, “freedom” arguably could not have functioned in this regard without a more general fantasy construction underpinning it – a fantasy which offered people a meaningful discourse through which their lack could be (partially and temporarily) “filled,” which channeled and gave Symbolic shape to their affective experiences in their particular cultural and political context. The signifier “freedom,” when embedded in a fantasy imagining a healed “Nation” that has moved beyond the wound inflicted upon it, was affectively appealing precisely because of the promise of a sense of wholeness that it potentially offered.

Conclusion

This chapter has offered a framework for understanding the relationships between discourse, affect, and identification. In doing so, it has explored aspects of the social construction process that IR scholars have generally neglected. Drawing upon the work of Lacan and Laclau, the theoretical insights offered here contribute to an approach for understanding some theoretical questions that few IR scholars appear to have addressed. While the discipline

has addressed issues of discourse and identity for some time now, and has recently begun to investigate emotions and affects, little work has addressed how best to productively conceptualize the linkages between them. In offering an approach that does so, I argue that these factors *must* be explored if IR scholars wish to more fully understand the social construction process. Laclau's concepts of nodal points, equivalence, difference, and hegemony offer a way to think about the political implications of Lacan's arguments about the construction of subjectivity, based upon his theories of master signifiers, desire, *jouissance*, fantasy, and object *a*. Throughout this chapter, I offered brief illustrations of some of these ideas through reference to contemporary discourses of American foreign policy. The affective appeal of the war on terror, for instance, can be better understood through the constellation of desires and fantasies that it simultaneously evoked and offered receiving audiences. Indeed, a more effective way to think about the power of the war on terror, e.g. its role as a hegemonic discourse after September 11, 2001, is in terms of the affective appeal of the fantasy of identification it offered and the way in which it channeled desire and loss. This is the subject of the next chapter.

Table 1-1. Desire in the Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real

		Imaginary	Symbolic	Real
Narcissistic (Desire to be)	Passive	Desire for one's physical appearance to be identified with others; image of bodily well-being	Desire to be recognized/loved by the Other (in the form of master signifiers)	Desire to be the object of the Other's love/recognition that will fill the lack in the Other
	Active	Desire to "be like" the image of an admired other	Desire to engage in practices embodying master signifiers	Admiring object <i>a</i> in another, and attempting to identify with it
Anaclitic (Desire to have)	Passive	Desire to be the body desired by another	Desire to be desired by the Other as embodying a valued signifier	Desire to embody object <i>a</i> as desired by the Other
	Active	Desire for the bodily image of an other; sexual desire	Desire to possess the Other as a means to fullness/ <i>jouissance</i>	Desire to possess object <i>a</i> as embodied in a person, object, or activity

CHAPTER 4 IDENTIFICATION, AFFECT, AND FANTASY IN THE WAR ON TERROR

The safe Sphere in which Americans live is experienced as under threat from the Outside of terrorist attackers who are ruthlessly self-sacrificing *and* cowards, cunningly intelligent *and* primitive barbarians. Whenever we encounter such a purely evil Outside, we should gather the courage to endorse the Hegelian lesson: in this pure Outside, we should recognize the distilled version of our own essence.

Slavoj Žižek (2001)

Introduction

In an essay that appeared in the *New York Times Magazine* in October 2004, journalist Ron Suskind offered an account of the deep religious conviction that guided much of George W. Bush's approach to political decision-making. Suskind's story offered some revealing anecdotal evidence of the extent to which religious faith infused operations within the Bush executive branch. Bush's personal transition from wild fraternity boy to born-again Christian was well-known – it was in fact a key appeal of the President to many of his most loyal supporters – but the essay emphasized how this religiosity influenced his conceptualization of the war on terror, and his role in it as President and Commander in Chief. His faith was the foundation for the remarkable confidence he had in his ability to make sweeping decisions. As Suskind (2004) wrote, a “writ of infallibility – a premise beneath the powerful Bushian certainty that has, in many ways, moved mountains – is not just for public consumption: it has guided the inner life of the White House.”

This, however, this was not the most talked-about anecdotal nugget in the essay. Indeed, the journalistic morsel that received perhaps the most attention was something that caught Suskind himself off guard. As he recalls what an unnamed “senior advisor” told him:

The aide said that guys like me were ‘in what we call the reality-based community,’ which he defined as people who ‘believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernable reality.’ I nodded and murmured something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off. ‘That’s not the way the

world really works anymore,' he continued. 'We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality – judiciously, as you will – we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.'

No doubt that what surprised many readers was the frankness of this assertion. Although this admission is remarkable on a number of levels, it is relevant here because it actually parallels conclusions of many academic analyses of the politics of the American war on terror. In a way, the “unnamed advisor” articulated something that many critical, constructivist, and poststructuralist International Relations (IR) scholars have argued for some time now – that traditional notions of “objective” reality, separations between facts and values, and separations between subjects and objects are problematic. The unnamed official drew a distinction (albeit crudely) between those who, like Suskind, hold to “enlightenment principles” and strict “empiricism”, and those who recognize that the political world is not naturally given but is rather socially produced by the interactions between agents and the structures in which they are embedded. This understanding of social and political reality characterizes much of the recent academic work in IR on the war on terror.

Scholars who have employed conventional constructivist or discourse approaches to the war on terror tend to view the events of September 11, 2001, and the reactions to them, not as naturally-given or self-evident, but rather as socio-political constructions that are historically contingent and open to contestation.¹ Many recent studies utilizing these perspectives have analyzed the public rhetoric and statements of elites and leaders (see chapters in Collins and Glover 2002; Jackson 2005; Krebs and Lobasz 2008; Maggio 2007), while some scholars have

¹ By “conventional” I simply refer to what have become methodologically common ways of analyzing the construction of identities within texts. These approaches focus upon the rhetorical content of texts while largely neglecting the role of desire and affects. Prominent examples include works by Roxanne Doty (1996), Jennifer Milliken (1999) and Lene Hansen (2006).

begun to move beyond elite language to examining popular and non-elite texts (Croft 2006, Hulsse and Spencer 2008). While useful in illuminating the contestable “nature” of the war on terror, these studies typically analyze texts in terms of their rhetorical structure and/or linguistic content. Explaining how certain words, phrases, and tropes construct actors and conflicts is a central part of a constructivist or discourse approach to studying terrorism. For instance, analyzing how words like “evil” and “barbarian” construct a “terrorist” identity while analyzing how their opposites such as “good,” “courage,” or “Western civilization” construct American or Western identity has been a commonly accepted method within this literature. In this sense, much of this kind of research is close to what Jennifer Milliken (1999) has called predicate analysis – looking at how nouns, verbs, and adverbs ascribe socially-constructed actors and entities with various kinds of characteristics and agencies.

Although much has been written on the war on terror from constructivist perspectives, broadly understood (see Agathangelou and Ling 2004; Jones and Clarke 2006; Nabors 2006; Rojecki 2008; Schildkraut 2002), Richard Jackson (2005) and Stuart Croft (2006) have written arguably the most exhaustive constructivist analyses of the politics of the war on terror to date.² Like Suskind’s “unnamed advisor,” both Croft and Jackson accept that terrorism and the “war on terror” are social constructions. Rather than reflecting or describing pre-existing actors called terrorists, and their pre-existing political tactics of terrorism, they argue that terrorism and the “war on terror” are social constructs; that the language of “terrorists” and “terrorism” are sets of intersubjective understandings that socially constitute actors, events, and actions in particular ways. As Jackson (2005, 2) explains, “the language of the ‘war on terrorism’ is not simply a

² Hulsse and Spencer (2008, 577) focus on Jackson’s work because “he is a central figure in the critical terrorism studies community.” The back cover of Croft’s book, *Culture, Crisis, and America’s War on Terror*, has a blurb by Jackson himself, offering that it is “simply the most comprehensive . . . analysis of the political-cultural discourse of the war on terror to date.”

neutral or objective reflection of reality . . . Rather, it is a deliberately and meticulously composed set of words, assumptions, metaphors, grammatical forms, myths, and forms of knowledge – it is a carefully constructed discourse . . .” Croft agrees, finding that the “tragic events of 11 September 2001 did not lead inexorably to a particular response and a set of policies. Rather, the events were socially constructed to give particular meaning, and those events were spoken of in terms that created a foundational myth” (2006, 85). Hülse and Spencer (2008, 575) broadly agree with Jackson and Croft, arguing that “terrorism is a social construction, rather than a material fact.”

Even accepting that discourses of terrorism and the war on terror are sets of collectively-held beliefs and constantly re-articulated through intersubjective interpretations, these studies largely leave open *how* and *why* the war on terror was constructed such that it became, or was perceived as, a hegemonic discourse after September 11, 2001. As such, the current literature does not address a crucial question posed in this dissertation: what accounts for the power of discourse and identity beyond the mere contingency of their socio-historical construction? Croft and Jackson, to their credit, both offer arguments for how the war on terror became hegemonic, but largely do not go beyond conventional constructivist assumptions. Jackson (2005, 159), for example, addresses this question in a section of his book aptly titled “the power of the discourse.” For him, the “success of a discourse can be measured by the extent to which it allows the authorities to enact their policies with significant support, and the extent to which alternative narratives and approaches are marginalised and silenced in the public arena.” “At a deeper level,” he continues, “a discourse can be considered successful when its words, language, assumptions and viewpoints are adopted and employed uncritically in political discourse by opposition politicians, the media, social institutions (like churches, schools, universities,

associations, pressure groups), and ordinary citizens” (2005, 159). In short, a discourse is most productive when it becomes “institutionalised and normalized” across a society (2005, 159).

Jackson also nods to other factors, such as the war on terror’s appeal to deeply entrenched American national myths, and the sheer volume of instance of the discourse after September 11, 2001 in terms of speeches, policy statements, ceremonies, debates, etc. (2005, 163-4).

Croft offers similar explanations of the discursive power of the war on terror. Although acknowledging the importance of the initial rhetorical moves by Bush administration officials after September 11, 2001, Croft focuses on the wider cultural and societal production of the narrative. “Those responsible for the production of a decisive intervention, one capable of shaping a policy programme following the creation of a shared understanding of a particular crisis, have to include the creators of popular culture in a society . . .” (2006, 8-9). The social construction of crises and their aftermath are co-produced by elites and broader cultural processes. “A crisis discourse is a truly social one – one that is shared throughout the body politic, and not just its leadership” (2006, 44). Croft turns to evolutionary models to explain why the war on terror became deeply entrenched within US culture. For him, “a crisis is discursively constituted, represents a point of rupture, and is subject to a variety of narratives that constitute the decisive intervention, of which one is successful in constituting a new strategic trajectory. Crisis is thus a process. The nature of the contestation of narratives is shaped by selectivity and adaptivity. Once that strategic trajectory is established, it leads to a period of stability, during which time, contradictions emerge and develop, which will come to constitute, discursively, the next crisis” (2006, 79). In short, crises can be understood as a series of phases in which the narratives constructing them are offered to an audience, become stabilized, eventually develop “cracks,” which then leads to the articulation of new narratives.

While acknowledging the power of the war on terror, Croft and Jackson do not pose questions about how discourses evoke, satisfy, block, or channel desires and affects, or how these phenomena are related to identity. Nor do they investigate how prominent political texts can shape such non-rhetorical aspects of identity. Jackson (2005, 21) acknowledges, but does not venture beyond the assertion that language “plays an active role in creating and changing our perceptions, our cognition, and our emotions.” For him, language is “the place where our psychic and social lives intersect. Certain words or combinations of words can make us feel anxious, fearful, angry or joyful. This generates immense power for those that deploy them” (Jackson 2005, 22). Similarly, even as Croft documents the stabilization and contestations of the war on terror within American culture, he does not offer an explanation of the power of these narratives beyond the force of words themselves.³ For him, the rhetorical force alone is sufficient to explain the efficacy of the war on terror, while other constitutive factors of the discourse such as affects and desires are neglected. Both Croft and Jackson turn to the war on terror’s rhetorical reproduction through social institutions and cultural contexts (such as the media, think-tanks, and popular culture) to explain its hegemonic power (Croft 2006, 186-213; Jackson 2005, 164).

From the theoretical perspective offered in chapter three, however, these arguments appear incomplete. To argue that the success of the war on terror discourse depended upon its reproduction by elites and social institutions says little about the desire and affective factors driving this reproduction in the first place. As Mark Bracher (1993, 19) contends, “insofar as a cultural phenomenon succeeds in interpellating subjects - that is, summoning them to assume a certain subjective (dis)position – it does so by evoking some form of desire or by promising

³ Croft briefly nods to this when he specifies that his use of the term “discourse” is meant to be broad, both “in terms of shaping relationships, but also in terms of the impact upon psychology” (2006, 43-4).

satisfaction of some desire.”⁴ Not all discourses are equal, and some discourses are more appealing than others. With this in mind, this chapter offers a substantially more comprehensive analysis of the social construction process involved in the politics of the war on terror. Drawing upon insights from Lacan, I offer an understanding of the affective power of the war on terror discourse. In doing so, I offer an answer to the question of *how* the war on terror was, arguably, able to achieve hegemonic dominance after September 11, 2001. Conventional constructivist and discourse analysis are unable to account for why some discourses take hold and why some do not, since they offer no theoretical lens through which to capture the differential affective appeal of competing discourses. My approach, in contrast, drawing upon concepts such as identification, desire, affect, fantasy, and object *a*, is able to probe into deeper sources of subjectivity and identification that allow for a better understanding of why some discourses are more politically efficacious than others. The chapter, then, offers an analysis of the war on terror in terms of its affective appeal as understood through Lacanian discourse theory. The war on terror is conceptualized here primarily in terms of Lacan’s University discourse, and a particularly powerful kind of discourse that illustrates how desire, affect, signification, and a sense of loss of self combine to produce a specific type of political subject. This analysis paves the way for the accompanying investigation in the next chapter into the affective politics surrounding the discursive incorporation of Iraq into the war on terror, and of the affective underpinnings of the hegemonic politics of the war on terror.

⁴ As discussed in Chapter Two, Croft and Jackson are not the only ones that have largely neglected these factors in explaining the success of the “war on terror.” Other scholars mention how the “war on terror” “gained currency” with, “appealed to” (Flibbert 2006), and “resonated with” (Krebs and Lobasz 2007) wide segments of the American public, yet do not theorize about the affects and desires that presumably underpinned its appeal.

Fantasy, Desire, and Identification in the War on Terror

To gain a more complete understanding of the hegemonic efficacy of the war on terror discourse, it is appropriate to look at a crucial moment in the initiation of the “war” itself. Although George W. Bush first publicly uttered the phrase “war against terrorism” in his prime time statement on the evening of September 11, 2001, a much more complete vision of the conflict was offered by the president in his address to a joint session of Congress nine days later on September 20, 2001. This speech is widely viewed as one of the major founding moments of the war on terror discourse. Jackson notes that nearly 80 million American television viewers watched the speech, while Croft discusses how the speech contained many of the key themes that would come to define the war on terror (Jackson 2005, 17; Croft 2006, 69-70, 72-73).

On the surface, this speech offered several key points about what had happened nine days before, and what the nation should expect to see in the coming “war.” The major themes of the speech relate to questions surrounding the events of September 11, 2001, such as directing Americans to the signifiers that would establish who the culprits were, why they launched the attacks, and subsequently what this “new war” would look like in terms of its aim and scope, and what the government expected of Americans. Also offered in this speech was an ultimatum to the Taliban to turn over al Qaeda suspects, an appeal to Muslims that the new U.S. policy would constitute a “war” against al-Qaeda, not Islam, and the announcement of the creation of the Department of Homeland Security. In short, the speech articulated an outline for a policy program designed to respond to the events of September 11, 2001.

Constructivist and discourse analyses have considered how images of “self” and “other” were defined in a hierarchical manner that served to legitimate American unilateral action against them. Jackson and Croft, for example, have cited this particular speech as one where prominent images of “us” and “them” were first constructed, and where the “nature” of the “war”

was defined. Croft (2006, 69) discusses how the “nature” of the enemy was “clearly articulated in a fully formed fashion nine days after the attacks” in the September 20 speech. “Murderers,” “terrorists,” a “fringe” group, “radical,” “evil” (Bush, September 20, 2001); defining the “other” in absolute terms articulated a “terrorist” identity against which American identity could be defined. Signifiers like “God,” “values,” “principles,” and “courage” not only defined American identity as absolutely good and not only offered symbolic reassurance to Americans, but helped to define social and political space in the war on terror in strict binary terms, which articulated for Americans “a devaluation of one term and a favoring of the other (Llorente 2002, 39). Defining us and them in strictly opposed terms coincided with defining the “war” as one of we who are “good” versus those who “commit evil.” As Bush stated, “This is the world’s fight. This is civilization’s fight . . . The civilized world is rallying to America’s side” (Bush, September 20, 2001). As Jackson (2005, 47) notes, that this is “one of the most common appeals” in the war on terror, and “one which received a great deal of public attention” (see also Llorente 2002).⁵

Venturing beyond the social construction of hierarchical images of self and other, my Lacanian approach developed in the previous chapter offers a way to theorize the “grip” of discourses beyond their mere contingency as socio-historical constructions (Glynos, 2001). Desire, affect, and fantasy are crucial elements by which self-other relations are constituted. To analyze George W. Bush’s speech of September 20, 2001 in these terms, and to better understand its success as a political text and as a founding moment in the hegemonic project of the war on terror (in effect, its interpellative force), we can first discern what kinds of desires are evoked by

⁵ On the concept of “Western civilization” as a social construct, see Jackson (2006)

the speech in each of the three registers of human subjectivity, the Symbolic, Imaginary, and the Real.⁶

Master Signifiers

Discursive identification occurs through interpellation by the powerful words that Lacan termed master signifiers (or, in Laclau's terminology, nodal points). As I have described earlier, master signifiers are not just any signifier, but are rather those privileged words that play a major role in structuring peoples' identifications and discourses. "Student," "professor," "Democrat," "Republican," "father," "mother" are all examples of words that are sufficiently crucial to how we think about ourselves that their centrality to our identifications is often overlooked. Bush's speech nine days after September 11, 2001 is exemplary in its frequent usage of master signifiers.

As is commonplace for presidents addressing a joint session of Congress, Bush begins by addressing the Speaker of the House and Congressional members, and then "fellow Americans," immediately offering his audience a common signifier of unity, performatively constructing his audience as such. The first several minutes of the speech are in fact devoted to offering the audience multiple master signifiers that had been disrupted on September 11, 2001. Some of these are offered in several anecdotes of the heroic deeds of "fellow Americans" nine days before, and the courage of those coping since. A story of the "courage of passengers" on Flight 93 who helped bring down that flight in Pennsylvania, and a particularly "exceptional man" named Todd Beamer on board, both offer strong points of identification. The "endurance of rescuers," the "decency of a loving and giving people," the "strong" state of the Union after the events of September 11, 2001, the call to "defend freedom" and to "bring justice to our

⁶ On the three registers, see Chapter Three.

enemies,” the admirable “leadership” of Congress singing ““God Bless America”” on the steps of the Capitol, the loss of citizens of many nationalities on September 11, 2001 leading to all nations being “joined together in a great cause” – each of these formulae proposes signifiers that have proved highly effective in modern American political culture.⁷ More specifically, each of these privileged words are promoted by Bush in such a way as to be the Symbolic “American Other,” or in Lacanian terms, the Other (the “big” Other, the Symbolic order). Associating with these words confers social value upon those who are seen to embody them. Not only do such linguistic offerings help to secure shaken subjects after a national trauma, but their appeal also stems from Symbolic passive narcissistic desire – the desire to be recognized or loved by the Other. As Bracher (1993, 23) discusses, the Symbolic Other is “the ultimate authority or source of meaning constituted by the Symbolic Order and [is] epitomized in our notions of Nature, Society, God, and so on . . .” Within contemporary American political discourse, “freedom,” “justice,” “endurance,” “courage,” and so on are all especially valued by the Symbolic American Other, the (imagined) entity whose gaze confers feelings of identity and security to those who personify such values.

“Freedom” and “justice” are two prominent examples of terms that function as master signifiers in Bush’s discourse. The reason why these two signifiers arguably function as the discursive anchors around which the rest of the text coheres is because they stitch together the various meanings of the text (Torfing 1999, 98). They appear at junctions where the multiplicity of issues and meanings in the text are brought together and are offered, *simultaneously*, as self-evident assertions of what and who was attacked, why we were attacked, what we temporarily

⁷ Uluorta (2007) argues (from a Gramscian-Lacanian perspective) that American capitalist-market, religious-moral, and nationalist-patriotic discourses consistently help to solidify neoliberal economic hegemony in the United States. For a classic examination of American political culture, see Hartz (1955).

lost, and, most importantly, what underpins who we are and the values we hold that will sustain us going forward. For example: “defend freedom,” “bring our enemies to justice,” “justice will be done,” “enemies of freedom,” “freedom itself is under attack,” “they hate our freedoms,” “this is a fight for all who believe in progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom,” “the advance of human freedom...depends on us,” “struggle for freedom and security,” “freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war” – all of these statements are offered as having a readily evident and unequivocal meaning. These phrases appear as more lofty and abstract assertions distinct from the bulk of the speech, which mostly constructs an explanation the state’s response to the attacks. The numerous ways in which “freedom” and “justice” are offered highlight how they act as points of discursive condensation upon which an entire range of meanings is layered. The mere possibility that they are able to have a variety of different meanings within the same text illustrates that neither has an intrinsic meaning, but rather they only have meaning within the system of differences that the text constructs. “*Enemies of freedom,*” “*freedom and fear,*” “*justice and cruelty*” (emphases added), and so on; each becomes meaningful in its difference to the signifiers of the enemy other. Conversely, words like “terror” and “evil” do not have an essential meaning in the speech, but are only meaningful in relation to their opposition, namely, “freedom” and “justice.”

Perhaps more significantly, “freedom” and “justice” fasten key points of the chain of signification of American identity constructed in Bush’s speech. In other words, they are the points at which “our” identity cannot be articulated further. Master signifiers like these are typically “the last word, the bottom line, the term that anchors, explains, or justifies the claims or demands contained in the message” (Bracher 1993, 25). No matter what else the U.S. does in response to the attacks, it is defending “freedom.” No matter how else the goals of the war on

terror are articulated, it is a mission of bringing “justice” to the enemy. It is because these are the final words, the stopping points, in the circle of signifiers constructing American identity that they are the parts of the discourse that largely define its “readability” to its audience (Lacan 2007, 189). And, as discussed below, this “readability” and discursive condensation is itself bound to the fantasy and implicit promise of subjectivity that is found in the speech.

Other master signifiers are offered throughout the rest of the speech, each offering, or rather constructing, Symbolic reassurance to the audience of who they are, what their place in the world is, and that they are recognized and loved by the Other. “America,” “American people,” “liberty,” “God;” each section of the speech is saturated with generous offerings of such valued words and phrases. The power of each of these signifiers stems in part from their appeal to the various Others from whom American subjects conventionally seek recognition. The “Nation” and “God,” for instance, are both obvious Others from which Americans desire social approval.⁸

Imaginary Threats

While intimately bound up with Symbolic identification, Imaginary identification works through the power of images. As Lacan (1988, 319) argues, language derives power from “choice images which all have a specific relation with the living existence of the human being, with quite a narrow sector of its biological reality, with the image of the fellow being. This imaginary experience furnishes ballast for every concrete language, and by the same token for every verbal exchange.” In other words, our common ways of speaking often implicitly rely upon images of a unified or whole human form. Just as people identify with visual images of other people in photos, films, and art, verbal images in discourse can evoke strong identifications

⁸ On the pervasiveness of religious imagery in the Bush administration’s public statements, see Domke (2004). For an examination of the rise of the influence of religion in contemporary American politics more broadly, see Domke and Coe (2007).

with the forms portrayed. Images of bodily integrity can satisfy certain kinds of desire, while images of bodily destruction or mutilation can threaten one's own self-image of bodily integrity, and can introduce unease (or lack) in identification.

Bush's speech offers several such instances of strong verbal imagery that largely threaten a sense of bodily well-being, and in doing so plays upon Imaginary identification. In constructing images of al-Qaeda and the Taliban, Bush asserts that "The terrorists' directive commands them to kill Christians and Jews, to kill all Americans, and to make no distinctions between the military and civilians, including women and children." While repetition of "kill" in the same sentence works to threaten listeners' bodily images, women and children is a common linguistic trope that evokes imagery of innocents killed without reason. "Kill" is repeated again in reference to terrorists' motives. Later, more graphic images are used in describing the September 11, 2001 attacks themselves. "Great harm has been done to us. We have suffered a great loss . . . I will not forget this wound to our country or those who inflicted it" (Bush, Sep. 20, 2001). Harm, a wound inflicted; these passages evoke threats to self integrity, the "body" of the nation. Such passages threaten an audience's passive narcissistic desire in the Imaginary register – the desire to have and retain bodily well-being. As Bracher (1993, 38) explains, "anything that affirms and reinforces our body image thus provides a narcissistic gratification, a sense of security and self-worth, which has its roots in a sense of bodily integrity and mastery. And conversely, anything (whether an external force or an impulse from within) that might damage the armor constituted by this body image represents a threat to our sense of self and is thus met with opposition and aggressivity."

In addition to discerning these engagements in this speech of Imaginary threats to bodily integrity, and copious offerings of master signifiers, the speech can be re-cast in terms of Lacan's

four discourses and fantasy in order to more fully understand its affective power. Using Lacan's theory, we can map the relationships between the desires discussed above and other crucial discursive elements, such as master signifiers S_1 , knowledge S_2 , and divided subjectivity $\$$. Doing so allows us to uncover the lack, the object-cause a driving the discourse, and offers a way to think about how this text successfully constructed and channeled certain desires and affective responses in a way that helps us to understand the (nearly) endless reproduction of its central themes after September 11, 2001. As argued below, desire in Bush's speech is largely channeled through the structure of the University discourse.

Discourse Structure

Let us recall the basic structure of Lacan's four discourses:

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \underline{\text{Agent}} & \rightarrow & \underline{\text{Other}} \\ \text{Truth} & & \text{Product} \end{array}$$

How should we understand Bush's speech of September 20, 2001 in terms of this structure? In the most obvious sense, Bush is a speaker (agent) addressing an audience (other). As President, it was expected of him to address the country after such an unprecedented event. However, according to a discursive perspective, it was not George W. Bush the individual that people were looking towards for a public address, but rather the institutional (Symbolic) position of "pPresident." Additionally, Bush was not addressing a pre-existing entity named the "American people." Rather, (as is expected of presidential speeches) his discourse constructed subject positions ("fellow Americans") which listening individuals took up and identified with. Although, in this particular setting, Bush was the speaking agent addressing a receiving other, according to Lacan individuals themselves cannot act as pure authors or Agents. Instead, it is the identity-bearing signifiers with which they are associated that lend force to their message.

As such, Bush as the “President” is not the only agency here. The structure of this text is oriented by a number of discursive moves that construct particular relationships between different elements in the place of agency, on the one hand, and offers different positions to the audience, on the other. While portions of the speech offer an interpretation of the events of September 11, 2001 as an “attack” against “freedom,” “civilization” and so on, the bulk of the speech is devoted to offering the audience information about who is responsible, their motives, their locations, and their past actions. Al -Qaeda is stated as the culprit for the attacks, and Bush offers an array of other information to support the claim that they are terrorists: their bombing of American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, their practice of a “fringe form of Islamic extremism,” their linkages to other terrorist groups, their links to the Taliban in Afghanistan, their desire to overthrow governments across the Middle East, and so on. Bush also presents the policy plan to deal with the threat: not just “instant retaliation,” but also striking the enemy’s financial resources, creating the Department of Homeland Security, and asking of the audience a series of requests to aid in the fight (support American values, support the victims, continued participation in the economy, etc.) (Bush 2001a).

Just as Bush presents a series of specific policies as the most sensible reaction to the threat, so are the most sweeping claims in the speech offered as self-evident observations devoid of political (i.e. biased) perspective. Nine days after the attacks, it is presented as “obvious” (without question or qualification) that “they hate our freedoms,” and that “what is at stake is not just America’s freedom. This is the world’s fight. This is civilization’s fight” (Bush 2001a). The U.S., according to this perspective, is uniquely capable of countering this threat to civilization, and fighting on civilization’s behalf. The path to this is the spread of “liberty, here and across the world” (Bush 2001a). The active spreading of American values worldwide will

counter the deviant values of held by the enemy. The hopes of free people around the world rest upon the U.S., and the U.S. itself is a model of “courage” behind which the world will rally, all while bolstered by the certainty that God is on America’s side, and who is watching over it (Bush 2001a).

What are the discursive dynamics driving the delivery of so much “factual” information comprising the bulk of the speech? There is, of course, nothing unusual about this particular text when compared to other presidential texts in terms of its representation of America as a shining city on a hill. Nor, in this context, is there anything unusual in the president offering his audience what amounts to explanatory information on an unprecedented attack. Yet, the presentation of so much “factual” information is far from the simple relay of objective knowledge from one to another. The mode of discourse that comprises the bulk of the speech constructs a particular dynamic of subjectivity. Bush positions himself as the leader *who knows precisely* what has happened and what needs to be done, a mode of discourse that fits well with the University discourse.

$$\text{University Discourse: } \frac{S_2}{S_1} \rightarrow \frac{a}{\$}$$

$$\frac{S_2=\text{War on Terror}}{S_1=\text{American Power}} \rightarrow \frac{a}{\$=\text{Insecure Subject}}$$

According to Slavoj Žižek (2004, 398), “the agent of the University discourse is . . . fundamentally disengaged: he posits himself as the self-erasing observer (and executor) of ‘objective laws’ accessible to neutral knowledge.” In the bulk of the speech, then, it is not Bush himself who has the force of agency, but rather the “neutral” system of knowledge S_2 he deploys so as to justify a bold new initiative in world politics. The new social reality S_2 constructing the events of September 11, 2001 and their aftermath works as Agent precisely because it is

presented not as Bush's personal observations or bias, but is offered as objective knowledge apart from his own subjectivity. The new system of knowledge S_2 qua agent hails the object-cause a in the audience, which sparks the desire to embody the knowledge the agent offers. This produces an audience of subjects $\$$ defined by the new battery of signifiers S_2 constructing knowledge of the new Symbolic reality.

What is the relationship between knowledge S_2 and master signifiers S_1 in light of the bar — separating them (see the diagram)? Again, the information in the speech is presented as obvious and readily available to the audience. Yet, a particular interpretation of the events of September 11, 2001 is offered to justify an aggressive response, and to close the possibility of any attempt to understand otherwise enemies who irrationally and madly “hate our freedoms.” Thus, although the “factual” information S_2 offered in the speech seems, on the surface, to operate apart from political perspective, it is latently (beneath the bar —) supported by a particular understanding of American self-image and perceived world role S_1 . As Žižek (2004, 394) bluntly says, “the constitutive lie of the university discourse is that it disavows its performative dimension, presenting what effectively amounts to a political decision based on power as a simple insight into the factual state of things.” Knowledge is always supported by its reliance on the force of master signifiers. These master signifiers, in turn, are those discursive anchors in which subjects are most affectively invested. This investment is not the result of a rational engagement with the supposed “truth” of which the signifiers are believed to represent, but is instead is a kind of tautological “irrationality and senselessness” (Žižek 1989, 43) which is bound up in the fantasy promise of subjectivity that the discourse is seen to offer subjects.

What is the master signifier S_1 at work here? The master signifiers S_1 that underpins the “self-evident” universal appeal of American values in the speech are those signifiers which

embody American power and global hegemonic aspirations. Although knowledge S_2 in the place of agency does not directly acknowledge the master signifier S_1 which is its truth, that knowledge S_2 implicitly draws upon the “common sense” of S_1 to support itself. Following Žižek, the “constitutive lie” of the University discourse in Bush’s speech is found in the chain of reasoning offered for the American military response to come. Universal American values are the basis for, and the explanation of, the aggressive foreign policy plans offered in the speech. Yet, it is not, Bush’s contention notwithstanding, that American values offer the basis for an aggressive and unilateral foreign policy. A different logic is at work in the speech from the one that is presently as most manifest in the overt discourse itself; since American military might is the instrument through which a distinctively (and “universal”) American message of liberty and freedom are to be spread, the privileging of American power *itself* is the truth of the discourse, which implicitly underpins signifiers such as “freedom” and “justice.” As Edward Kolodziej (2008, 8) writes, “critics who characterize the Bush administration’s justification for the use of force in terms of sheer power, much like the Athenian generals in Thucydides’ account of the Melian Dialogue, miss the depth of the administration’s commitment to the moral – arguably religious – conception of its global mission.” In fact, *conversely*, it is “the logic of global power, dominated by the United States, [that] compels states and people to join what is projected as an irreversible global movement favoring American leadership and ideals” (Kolodziej 2008, 5).⁹ “Freedom” and “justice” and others are the instruments utilized by the implicit master signifier

⁹ In this regard, Lacanian theory suggests a conceptualization of power that challenges Foucauldian views. Elsewhere Žižek (2002, ci) argues that power “is simultaneously the agency which looks at us, its subjects (the panoptic gaze), and the agency which allows itself to be seen, to fascinate our gaze (the aim of the display of insignia and rituals of power) – in order to function, power has to be seen as such.” What is interesting here is the dual function of power in the constitution of subjectivity that is often left out of Foucauldian understandings. While the notion that power produces the subject frees analysis from more essentialist formulations (e.g., the notion that power only constrains pre-constituted subjects), Foucauldian analyses often leave out the intersubjective-affective dimensions that helps to explain why subjects submit to their subjection. On engagements between Foucauldian and Lacanian approaches on the question of power, see Butler (1997), Newman (2004), and Vighi and Feldner (2007).

S₁, and which offer a thin veneer of “a-political” knowledge to justify the master’s S₁ implicit order.

How should we understand object *a* and the split subject \$ in Bush’s speech? Within the structure of the University discourse, instead of a direct relationship between the subject and its object of fantasy, there exists a non-relation; the bar □ separates the subject \$ and object *a*. In the position of agent, knowledge S₂ hails object *a* in the other, which in turn produces the divided subject \$ (in the product position). Yet, recall that object *a* does not exist in Symbolic reality, but instead represents a lack or loss of oneself. It is not an “object” in the conventional sense of that term, but instead in the manner Lacan attaches to the indefinable sense of frustration and incompleteness that accompanies identification. As the object-cause of the subject’s desire, object *a* is *retroactively* posited by the subject as having existed, as *having caused* its desire. A fantasy scenario is then constructed around this “object.” Rather than coming to terms with the intolerable reality that one’s desire constantly shifts and is ultimately never-ending, fantasy offers the subject the prospect of reaching the inarticulable Thing that promises wholeness (Žižek 1997, 12-13). Within the University discourse, then, knowledge S₂ as the Agent does not interpellate object *a* per se, since this object is extra-discursive and does not exist in Symbolic reality. Rather, knowledge S₂ interpellates the *lack* in the discourse where object *a* is *supposed to have been*. What does this mean?

What is object *a* in Bush’s discourse? In the September 20, 2001 speech, the collective subject of the “nation” (and its equivalential signifiers such as “our country,” “America,” and so on) suffered a “wound.” The loss of nearly 3,000 lives is recognized as the horrific tragedy that it was, yet throughout the speech there seems to be a certain something *else* that was lost on September 11, 2001. Bush alludes to *it* several times, something beyond the loss of lives: “Great

harm has been done to us. We have suffered a great loss;” “night fell on a different world, a world where freedom itself is under attack;” “a threat to our way of life.” “These terrorists kill not merely to end lives, but to disrupt and end a way of life.” “Terrorists attacked a symbol of American prosperity. They did not touch its source. America is successful because of the hard work, and creativity, and enterprise of our people.” And, “This is a fight for all who believe in progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom.” Of course, many have commented that what was lost was Americans’ robust sense of exceptionalism and security that had remained intact throughout much of the country’s history. From a Lacanian view, however, these attempts to pinpoint, locate, and articulate *what* was lost fit well with what Žižek calls the “Nation-Thing.”

All we can ultimately say about the Thing is ‘itself,’ ‘the real Thing,’ ‘what it really is about,’ etc. If we are asked how we can recognize the presence of this Thing, the only consistent answer is that the Thing is present in that elusive entity called ‘our way of life.’ All we can do is enumerate disconnected fragments of the way our community organizes its feasts, its rituals of mating, its initiation ceremonies, in short, all the details by which is made visible the unique way a community *organizes its enjoyment* (Žižek 1993, 201).

The various attempts to describe the loss experienced do not locate a precise “thing out there” that objectively corresponds to the essence of the “Nation.” Rather, these descriptions are better viewed as attempts to articulate, or symbolize, that which is not able to be fully articulated. As Žižek (1993, 202) further elaborates, “the tautological character of the Thing – its semantic void which limits what we can say about the Thing to ‘It is the real Thing,’ etc. – is founded precisely” on its relation to the Real of *jouissance*. “A nation *exists* only as long as its specific *enjoyment* continues to be materialized in a set of social practices and transmitted through national myths that structure these practices” (Žižek 1993, 202, emphasis in original).¹⁰ Bush’s

¹⁰ To be clear, this is not merely a repetition of the more conventional argument that the nation-state is a social construct rather than an objectively existing entity. Instead, I argue that nation-state can never be fully constructed, or imagined, since it is a fantasy organized around an elusive object that always remains indefinable (and hence, un-constructable) – the inarticulable sense of what makes “us” who we are. For the classic statement on the nation as

numerous attempts to pin down what *exactly* “we” *are* points to the very indefinability of that which must be defended from the terrorist enemy. “A great loss,” “freedom itself is under attack,” a “threat to our way of life,” “disrupt and end a way of life,” the “source” of American prosperity, “hard work, and creativity, and enterprise,” “progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom” – these multiple attempts to name that which was lost, the American “Nation-Thing” constructed *retroactively* immediately after September 11, 2001. The discursive attempts to name and attach a signifier to that which has been lost points to both the presumed-to-be-missing object *a* and the split subject $\$$ produced by the discourse.

Recall that the subject is never a fully-unified entity who is fully represented by the signifiers that describe it in relation to other signifiers. Rather, the subject is always split or divided $\$$. It is partially represented in discourse by its signifiers, yet it is this partial representation that evokes the desire for what it believes can be full representation. The subject always feels as if its current symbolic representatives do not fully express all that it is, and this lack of representation exudes a kind of frustration on the part of the subject. This frustration stems from the subject’s incompleteness within the Symbolic order. It pursues a signifier that it believes will fully express what it feels is its “essence,” yet this desire is never satisfied, and is continually frustrated. No signifier is able to provide the full representation that the subject desires, no symbolic object is able to heal the subject’s split or to bring back the part of its “self” that it believes has been “lost.” This supposed full representation that the subject desires offers the promise of *jouissance*, the affective experience of a subject with no division, lacking nothing. Yet this supposed-to-have-been-lost part is nothing other than the subject’s fantasy to help explain away its constitutive incompleteness.

an “imagined community,” see Anderson (1983). On state sovereignty as a social construct, see Ashley (1988), Barkin and Cronin (1994), Bartelson (1995), Biersteker and Weber (1996), Walker (1993), and Weber (1995)

Bush's speech after September 11, 2001 (re)constructs the nation as that entity which is partially represented in signifiers deployed in the speech, yet is also "missing" something that is central to its "self." This "missing" part of the American national subject is that which Bush attempts to name throughout the speech. This element (partially represented in terms such as "our way of life" and so on) is presented as a central aspect of the national subject, but is absent. Yet, the national subject is also presented through a set of signifiers that are said to represent what it currently is. While the subject is articulated as having "lost" something, other signifiers throughout the speech are said to express the subject as it is now – crucially, in the wake of a trauma that has given form to its present search for meaning. For example, as discussed above, the master signifiers in the speech function in this manner. "Enemies of freedom," "freedom and fear," "justice and cruelty," for example, function not only to produce a set of binary opposition against which American "identity" can be defined, but more importantly function as the symbolic representatives of a national subject that are viewed as fully present, as fully and accurately describing who "we" are, which cover over the lack of the national subject's full "self."¹¹ "Freedom," "justice," "progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom," "security," "values," "principles," and so on all function as privileged discursive points around which American identification is anchored. They help to define who "we" are in contrast to "them" by articulating boundaries around the collective "us" and excluding a variety of "others."

Yet, this is not *all* that America is after September 11, 2001. These well-worn signifiers are deployed to express something fundamental about the national subject, but the "missing" part of the nation is also just as central to its construction within the speech. The "Nation-Thing" is

¹¹ I place the terms "identity" and "self" in quotations simply to remind the reader that, based on the theoretical discussion in the previous chapter, there is no stable "identity" or fully present "self." "Identity" is an ultimately impossible project that is continually pursued through identification processes. Similarly, the "self" is always a divided self, split between its representation in a signifier and that which is missing from representation (embodied in the term object *a*).

offered as the “object” that has been wounded – has been made to be missing – but the discursive attempts to symbolize it inevitably circle around the Thing, rather than capturing its “essence” directly. This is not a result of Bush’s well-known limited oratory skills. Rather, it has much more to do with the ontological. The Nation-Thing cannot, by definition, be made to exist within our discursive, Symbolic reality. The multitude of master signifiers presented in the speech attempt to cover over the constitutive lack of the American subject. “Freedom,” “justice,” “progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom,” “security,” “values,” “principles” and so on attempt to construct a national subject over the wounds that September 11, 2001 wrought. In Bush’s discourse, the subject’s lack and its partial representation in master signifiers are *both* constitutive of what the subject is now taken to be and that which it may become. The national subject \$ is split between its representation in discourse (in terms of “freedom,” “justice,” “values,” and so on) and that which escapes discursive representation (the inexpressible sense that “we” have “lost” something as a nation).

Understanding Bush’s speech as a University discourse helps us not only to identify relations between elements such as master signifiers S_1 , the knowledge S_2 deployed in the speech, the “missing” object a , and the kind of subjectivity \$ constructed. This framework further helps to identify the fantasy underpinning the logic of the speech. The fantasy deployed is not explicitly stated anywhere in the speech, yet it is simultaneously the most elusive and most affectively appealing aspect of the speech. The fantasy deployed offered the promise of alleviating the loss of security and the national “self” experienced on September 11, 2001.

Fantasy and Identification

Although Bush’s speech outlining the founding of the war on terror was richly tailored with master signifiers and images of bodily threats, it is only by complementing these with an understanding of fantasy that we can account for opportunities for identification, its channeling

of desire (towards an illusory *jouissance*) and its affective “grip” (Glynos 1999) Recall that for Lacan, in pursuing *jouissance* (understood as a conjectural affective experience of the whole and fully stable sense of self), the subject always encounters frustration and satisfaction – satisfaction in associating itself with those valued signifiers that confer a sense of being and security, and frustration in never being able to *fully* overcome the sense of loss that drives the identification process. Since most subjects are unable to deal with the contingency of their identifications and the resultant deadlocks of desire (since a truly whole “self” is impossible), fantasy offers a way for the subject to deal with these impossibilities. By constructing a narrative that explains why one is never able to fully become oneself, the subject is able to believe that (illusory) wholeness is nevertheless achievable. The manner in which fantasy accomplishes this is that the contingencies and ambiguities of identification are projected onto an other (Stavrakakis 2007, 198). The figure of the other is able to sew together the incompleteness of the subject’s existence by functioning as a kind of “scapegoat” upon which the subject’s division can be projected. Instead of accepting the incompleteness of all social identity, most subjects find it more appealing to believe that wholeness or enjoyment is possible if not for the Other who blocks or steals it from them (Žižek 1993, 203). If appears that others enjoy the kind fullness that the subject seeks, then this further pushes the subject to attain that which it appears others have attained. Lacan’s formula for fantasy is $\$ \diamond a$, which we can read as “the barred subject in relation to object *a*,” with the lozenge \diamond representing the different forms this relationship can take (Fink 1995, 174).

Within Bush’s speech after September 11, 2001, the ideal of a complete and unified Nation free of threats, antagonisms, and division is an image which covers over the constitutive divisions of such an entity. A unified, unthreatened “America” is posited as lost in Bush’s

discourse, yet, such an “America” did not, in fact, exist before September 11, 2001 – as, for example, the contestations associated with Bush’s problematic election to the Presidency in 2000 show.¹² The un-wounded, unsullied, pure Nation without division *is* the fantasy “object” of Bush’s discourse. This projected ideal of the Nation is posited as having been lost at the moment of trauma, yet, such an ideal had never been fully constructed before then. It *must* be assumed to have existed, though, in order for the war on terror narrative to be coherent. Again, this fits well with the logic of a fantasy object, or object *a*:

The paradox of desire is that it posits retroactively its own cause, i.e., the object *a* is an object that can only be perceived by a gaze ‘distorted’ by desire, an object that *does not exist* for an ‘objective’ gaze. In other words, the object *a* is always, *by definition*, perceived in a distorted way, because outside this distortion, ‘in itself,’ *it does not exist*, since it is *nothing but* the embodiment, the materialization of this very distortion, of this surplus of confusion and perturbation introduced by desire into so-called ‘objective reality’ (Žižek 1992, 12).

There is, of course, no “objective” definition of what the Nation “is.” As social constructs, states’ meanings are subject to the contingent twists and turns of history. They are constructed in different ways in different contexts. In one sense, they do not exist outside of the linguistic/discursive performances and practices that constitute them, as many in IR have argued (see Campbell, 1998). However, what is often left out of such accounts is precisely what is at stake in this. The appearance of the Nation in Bush’s speech is indeed one more performance (in a long line of performances in countless contexts) that socially constructs “the Nation,” but here we see the impossibility of *fully* constructing the Nation. Its construction is always “‘distorted’ by desire” channeled through the various discourses in which it appears. The Nation as the

¹² In this sense, I build upon the work of Campbell (1998b), who argues that “states are never finished as entities; the tension between the demands of identity and the practices that constitute it can never be fully resolved, because the performative nature of identities can never be revealed.” I argue that desire, affect, and fantasy help to better account for states as performative entities. Since states are “never finished as entities,” something must explain the push to keep pursuing a project that is ultimately impossible. The imaginary staging of, or promise of, an encounter with *jouissance* within fantasy propels the desire to keep searching for it.

fantasy object of the war on terror discourse exists not only Symbolically, but, eccentric to the Symbolic, as an aspect of the Real. In this sense, it lives “in the interstices of the socio-symbolic order” (Glynos 2001, 207). It is partially present in the discourse through the various discursive representations that attempt to capture what it “is.” Yet, it is also partially missing in the sense that some “essential” part of the national subject is presumed to be lost. The war on terror in this text is founded upon the promise that it is possible to reclaim the quality or Thing that was lost on September 11, 2001 through the defense of privileged signifiers like “freedom,” “justice,” and others. However, it is the war discourse itself that retroactively constructs what it says was lost, a mythical unity that never was. In this sense, it is *that which is missing* from the discourse that is the driving force behind its very construction.¹³

The solution offered by the fantasy is, of course, the pursuit of “terrorists and every government that supports them.” This closely corresponds to the logic of fantasy. As Glynos and Stavrakakis (2008, 258) explain, fantasy structures typically feature a scenario promising the subject satisfaction and completion (the beatific side of fantasy), and implies a disaster scenario (the horrific side of fantasy). The war on terror, as articulated in this speech, contains both aspects of fantasy. On the one hand, the imagined wholeness of the “Nation” is represented as possible if the administration’s policies are acted upon. “In the months and years ahead,” Bush hopes, “life will return almost to normal,” and that although “the course of the conflict is not known...its outcome is certain.” The promise of the fantasy is offered by no less a figure than God himself, who inspires confidence in “our” “victories to come.” On the other hand, the “horrific” side of the fantasy will come to pass if “America grows fearful,” or if we “[retreat]

¹³ Recall from the previous chapter that this notion (that something outside of social construction must nevertheless spark the construction process itself) helps to resolve the problem that both “thin” and “thick” constructivists encounter regarding essentialism. That is, in order for a constructivist position to avoid the claim that the “essence” of the world is “social construction,” something external to the construction process itself must be part of its dynamic. See Stavrakakis (1999, 65-70).

from the world and [forsake] our friends.” “Terror unanswered,” the president warns, “can not only bring down buildings, it can threaten the stability of legitimate governments.” The figure of the “terrorist” is presented as the sole obstacle to the realization of the fantasized national unity and harmony. Here, the “terrorist” is more than a “noun, message, and catch-all political signifier,” as James Der Derian (2005, 24) has pointed out. It is the sole symbol of blockage, the only obstacle to the fulfilling of the “Nation.” It is that which impedes the subject’s fantasy of becoming fully itself, but also simultaneously provides the site upon which the impossibility of the fantasy is projected. Not domestic or international political constraints, not the likely strains of long-term military actions, not the likelihood of casualties, or disagreements among potential allies are mentioned as possible obstacles to this endeavor, only the “terrorist” and his rogue state allies. Not only does this fantasy (like other fantasies) offer an idealized goal and simultaneously tacit obstacles to its actualization, but also, and perhaps the more important point from the audience’s perspective, is that “fantasy purports to offer a foundational guarantee of sorts, in the sense that it offers the subject a degree of protection from the anxiety associated with a direct confrontation with the radical contingency of social relations” (Glynos 2008, 287). The only thing that stands between “us” and our *jouissance* or sense of self, so says the fantasy, is the elimination of the only obstacle blocking it, the figure of the “terrorist.”

The power of fantasy operates through what Žižek calls the image and the gaze. Recall that identification with images is “identification with the image in which we appear likable to ourselves” (as in identifying with a celebrity, etc.), whereas identification with the gaze is “identification with the very place *from where* we are being observed, *from where* we look at ourselves so that we appear to ourselves as likeable, worthy of love” (Žižek 1989, 105). It is a way of “*seeing oneself seeing oneself*,” as Lacan (1981, 74, emphasis in original) observes.

Similarly, Jodi Dean (2005, 502) describes the gaze, “a way of looking at oneself from the perspective of another, through the imagined gaze of another . . .” Both of these perspectives function within the discursive dynamics of the speech. As discussed above, the discourse of the speech is rich in images that evoke desires for bodily integrity and security. On the level of the image, one would identify with the images of the “wound inflicted” upon the country, and the threats that the terrorists wish to “kill” “soldiers and civilians, women and children.” Indeed, identification in terms of literal resemblance is often how we conventionally think of “identifying with” someone or something.

The gaze, on the other hand, works when an audience identifies not with the literal images conjured upon by Bush’s words, but instead identify with the *unspoken position* from which the national “wounds” are viewed. From this position, the “Nation” is seen as lacking that which was lost on September 11, 2001, yet, this “missing Thing” itself did not exist until it was posited as lost by the discursive attempts to fill the social void shaken open by the events of September 11, 2001. Even when *it* makes its appearance within Bush’s speeches, *it* can only be obliquely referred to, circled around, since *it* cannot be made to exist in Symbolic reality, but is instead part of the Real, which is extra-discursive. This just-out-of-reach quality is itself what sustains desire for it, driving its pursuit. From an unspoken position of *power*, supported by an assumption that it is wrong for America to lack what was taken away (beyond the loss of 3,000 lives), or indeed lack anything constructed as “good,” the fantasy of a whole “America” is an implicit invitation for the audience to accept. In this sense, the gaze subtly constructed by the speech offers a way to fill out the fantasy structure of the speech (see Dean 2005, 502). Here, the fantasy object of the “Nation” appears to confer recognition to the subject who pursues it and in the imagined encounter when the subject finally joins with the object. “What determines me, at

the most profound level . . . is the gaze that is outside,” Lacan (1981, 106) argues, and it is this imagined position of the fantasy object of the full “Nation” that helps to draw subjects into the fantasy promise of its attainment. The subject desires to occupy the place from which the object gazes back at it, but this place is nothing other than the subject’s fantasy, which stages an encounter between the subject and the “missing” object. The fantasy allows the subject to believe that it can occupy this place, the imagined place of the “Nation” without division, but this is merely the subject’s retroactive presupposition of the possibility of fulfilling its desire and reaching *jouissance*. Truly reaching this position is impossible simply because it is nothing other than the avoidance of a lack; there is nothing “at” the place of the object. The imaginary fullness of the “Nation” without division does not exist in Symbolic reality. Its image is the fantasy that Bush’s speech offers, a fantasy that allows his audience to avoid the realization of the ultimate vagueness and ambiguity of the national subject that is “America.”

Bush’s discourse, then, hails subjects not only in terms of the literal images it offers, but also through the gaze with which it subtly invites the audience *to look at itself*. It is from the imagined perspective of a pure, undivided, untarnished, and ultimately fantasmatic “Nation” that the “wounded” incompleteness is viewed. The imagined gaze from the position of which the speech is articulated functions much more powerfully in interpellation than literal images precisely through the concealment of this gaze. It is the gaze of the fantasy object itself, the imagined perspective of the Nation-Thing, which is projected to the audience and offers an almost irresistible position for the audience to inhabit, the position from where an audience of “Americans” looks at itself from outside of itself. This is what Žižek (1989, 106) means when he argues that this kind of “identification is always identification *on behalf of a certain gaze in the Other*.” The harmonious, unified, and cohesive “America” is the imagined Other from which the

gaze is project, and is promised endpoint of the fantasy. In creating a place of power from which to view the national “wounds” – a place nowhere mentioned in the text - Bush’s discourse creates a space within which individuals implicitly (perhaps even unconsciously, or non-consciously) recognize themselves as *subjects* of the new the war on terror. Wendy Brown (2005, 33) aptly captures the political ramifications of this when she notes that this type of identification generates “a patriotic ideal that disavows its imbrication with state violence, imperial arrogance, [and] aggression toward outsiders.”

It is through these spaces that the speech constructs where individuals, in becoming subjects, are affectively tied to the discourse. The fantasy within the speech, like other fantasies, “entails the staging of a relation between the subject (as lack) and the object (as that which always escapes socio-symbolic capture), thereby organizing the affective dimension of the subject, the way it desires and enjoys” (Glynos and Stavrakakis 2008, 263). It is fantasy that provides the social contours for our desires, which is how we can understand one of Lacan’s (1978, 115) most repeated ideas, that “desire is the desire of the Other.” Desire, rather than individual or “subjective” in the conventional sense, is an inherently social phenomenon. Fantasy, including social and political fantasy, “provides a ‘schema’ according to which certain positive objects in reality can function as objects of desire, filing in the empty places opened up by the formal symbolic structure” (Žižek 1997, 7). The myriad of desires evoked by various emotion-laden passages and signifiers in the speech are, consequently, not free-floating experiences that are purely individualistic, but instead are channeled through the discourse of the speech. The University structure of the discourse implicitly constructs a “lost object” in relation to the frustrated subjectivity that is produced as a result, which sparks the desire to reclaim the “lost” *jouissance*, or sense of wholeness. Processes of affective identification in the speech,

then, stem not only (or even primarily) from a “hatred” of “them.” The drawing of boundaries between “us” and “them” is one of the most discussed aspects in the literature of the war on terror, and rightly so. We are “good” and they are “evil.” We defend “freedom” while they propagate “terror.” And so on. Yet, the construction of hierarchies of mutually constituted identities is only one part of the constellation of desires and affective identification that the war on terror evokes and invites. Identification does not only occur in the sense that the audience would identify with Bush because “he is like us” in that, together, we “hate them.” Identification centers around the affective appeal of the *something more* offered in the speech. This *something more* that is alluded to throughout the speech is indefinable, yet this indefinability is precisely what evokes the desire for it, and its affective grip.

Remember that fantasies consist of both frustrating and satisfying experiences for the subject. Recall that *jouissance* connotes both of pleasure and pain, satisfaction and dissatisfaction, presence and absence. The subject’s identification processes constantly balance between these two limits. The split subject continually pulsates between fullness and lack. Satisfaction and dissatisfaction/frustration are both aspects of the partial *jouissance* that subjects can experience in fantasy and the “full” *jouissance* that the subject always anticipates yet never attains. Partial *jouissance* or enjoyment in Bush’s discourse is found through identification with the object of the Nation-Thing. In this sense, the University structure channels the affective force with which it calls subjects into its Symbolic order or body of knowledge S_2 . The Nation-Thing pertains to the Real in the Lacanian sense – the discourse of the Nation is “strongest” or most affectively appealing at the point where it is most difficult for subjects to articulate what it represents, what demands their loyalty and attachment to it. The partial *jouissance*, or wholeness, experienced by subjects in relation to the Nation is, strictly speaking, inarticulable.

The subject constructed within this discourse is split between the signifiers that partially represent it and that part of it that appears to be missing. The fantasy of the speech, the fantasy of a “war” in which the only obstacles to our desired fullness and the healing of “our” antagonisms and divisions are “terrorists,” offers an appealing site of identification precisely because it suggests that “our” *jouissance* is attainable if only the sole obstacle is appropriately dealt with.

This affective appeal, then, is constructed upon the boundaries of the Symbolic order and the Real, between that which can be spoken and that which escapes discourse. The deployment of a fantasy that tells an audience, albeit not directly, that identification with the fantasy of a “war on terror” will offer a screen against the ambiguities of these very identifications, and will solidify the national subject with which they identify, is an affective dynamic that moves between both the Symbolic and the Real, and as a consequence delineate an Imaginary, ideal national subject. Many of the speech’s master signifiers not only construct an “us versus them” world, but these signifiers are privileged precisely because they offer the promise of full representation, of *jouissance*, without ever fully doing so. The national subject, “America,” the “United States” and so on, are equated with “justice,” “freedom” and such, but these signifiers are appealing because they embody both what the national subject is and what it can be if the fantasy is pursued. “Justice” and “freedom,” “our” signifiers, are present in the sense that despite the attacks of September 11, 2001, “we” still best represent them. After all, “they hate our freedoms – our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other” (Bush 2001a). Yet, only when the fantasy is pursued will freedom’s promise be fulfilled. Only when the enemies are defeated will the subject once

again regain that which was lost, partially symbolized in master signifiers like “freedom,” “justice,” “values,” etc.

The *jouissance* that the fantasy promises, a Nation-Thing whose wounds are fully healed and whose division is repaired, indeed an entire civilization whose savior is an assertive America, are implied as possible in this situation. However, this is only a promise implied in the fantasy, and cannot be directly or fully delivered or experienced in the fantasy. Fantasy can only stage an encounter between the subject and its *jouissance*, but can never directly deliver it since it is merely the retroactive presupposition of what the subject supposes caused its desire. The cause of this desire, though, is simply lack. The lack of a full “self” sparks desire for identification, and the subject constructs a fantasy to believe that it can be a whole “self.” The fantasy is an attempt to explain the subject’s (ultimately never-ending) desire with a narrative that tells the subject that a supposed missing part of itself caused its desire. Yet this is merely the narrative attempt to cover a void, the lack of the subject. People thus gain “little bits of *jouissance*” (Miller 2000, 37) in identifying with the subjects constructed in fantasy discourses without ever experiencing the wholeness of its promise. This pulsation between fullness and lack, presence and absence, frustration and satisfaction are precisely the dynamics that drive the affective appeal of identification within Bush’s speech. Frustration in identifying with a national subject that has experienced a vicious “wound,” partial satisfaction in identifying with an “America” that still stands for “freedom” and “justice,” frustration in identifying with a nation whose fantasy of fullness is blocked by a terrorist other, partial satisfaction in pursuing the full promise of “our” signifiers through a “war” – these movements illustrate exactly what Lacan (2006, 78) meant when he proposes, somewhat dramatically, that the subject’s identification

process is “drama whose internal pressure pushes precipitously from insufficiency to anticipation.”

These “inexpressible” qualities of affective attachments are elements that IR emotions scholars have only begun to touch upon. In a sense, we can view the mutually constitutive dynamics of object *a*, fantasy, and identification in terms of what Andrew Ross (2006, 212) calls the “mystical and ineffable” dimensions of language that channel emotions. He perceptively argues that one way to think about the emotions aroused by the events of September 11, 2001 “is to view these affective responses not as coherent ‘feelings,’ such as vengeance or anger, but as affective energies whose precise form is subject to the vicissitudes of public discourse” (2006, 212). Indeed, the ability of the Bush administration “to capture popular energies without directly appealing to people’s capacities for political judgment” should factor into any account of the political success of the war on terror. Ross comes close to describing the affective “energy” of *jouissance*, or enjoyment. As discussed by Fink (2004, 51) and Glynos and Stavrakakis (2008, 267), there is an important conceptual distinction between what are conventionally thought of as readily identifiable emotions (such as shame, fear, hate, revenge, etc.) and the more amorphous pre-discursive affective potential/*jouissance* that a Lacanian approach emphasizes. As Glynos and Stavrakakis (2008, 51) explain, “emotions such as depression or anger can deceive: their meaning and significance is a function not of their intrinsic properties, but rather of the subject’s universe of meaning and the way that fantasy structures this.” Emotions only have meaning once they come to have Symbolic existence, once they are articulated and named within discourse. “Shame,” “fear,” “hate,” and “anger” are signifiers that are attached to affective potential which in turn confers upon them social meaning. Without acknowledging these elements, elements which are not strictly coextensive with discourse as is typically theorized, but nevertheless

“infuse” and “fortify” discourse (Stavrakakis 2007, 96), we are left without an account of an ontological aspect of discourse that can gain some theoretical purchase on the differential affective appeal of different discourses. Consequently, explanations of the power of post-9/11 American foreign policy have been unable to fully explain the hegemonic appeal of the war on terror.

Several recent studies of emotions and emotional responses surrounding September 11, 2001 and the war on terror unwittingly illustrate this conceptual distinction between emotions and affects. Work on revenge (Harkavy, 2000), humiliation (Saurette, 2006), and shame (Danchev, 2006) explores the multiplicity of specific emotional responses to the events of September 11, 2001. Taken together, these and other studies rightly illustrate that this very multiplicity should be recognized and explored even further.¹⁴ However, there has been much less work on the more ambiguous affective potentials (we may even say pre-emotional) from which these specific emotional responses were shaped. As demonstrated here, Lacanian theory offers a way to take a theoretical step back from examining representations of specific emotional responses, and instead theorizes about these “indefinable” and “indeterminate” (Fink 2004, 51) affects and how they are channeled by fantasy discourses, which then opens the door to the definition and naming of specific kinds of emotional responses.

Other recent work that examines the “void of meaning” surrounding September 11, 2001 does, without necessarily realizing it, take a step back from looking at specific emotions to exploring the more indefinable affective potentials that are prior to emotional responses. Jack Holland (2009) and Dirk Nabers (2009) conceptualize the events of September 11, 2001 as a rupture of social meaning that was later filled in by discourses constructing American national

¹⁴ For other work on emotions in the war on terror, see Bleiker and Hutchison (2008) and Tuathail (2003). Criticisms of these works are offered in Chapters Two and Three.

identity in particular ways. For Nabers (2009, 193), “international crises are crucial in processes of change, as they are characterized by a void of meaning – that might be deliberately constructed – a structural gap that has to be filled, a situation of fragmentation and indeterminacy of articulations.” Nabers argues that the conceptual link between the “voids of meaning” that are opened by crises and the identities that are subsequently constructed lies in the social acts of agents that attempt to fix and stabilize meanings. Since meaning structures are both ruptured and changed by crises, the creation and transmission of meaning through discourse is the driving factor behind political change (Nabers 2009, 193). Regarding the events of September 11, 2001, he argues that “the articulation of foreign policy by the American government served the task of constructing American identity after September 11, 2001 [and] was able to fill the ‘void of meaning’ that was consciously constructed by the Bush administration, and provided the primary point of orientation for the American public in the ensuing discourse” (Nabers 2009, 201-2).

Holland (2009) takes a similar approach. The “void” for Holland (2009, 275-6) “represents the immediate post 9-11 confusion experienced by the vast majority of ‘viewers’ as language failed to adequately or consistently regulate the meaning of the unfolding events.” The events of September 11, 2001 were not “naturally” a crisis, but were instead politically and culturally (re)produced as a “crisis.” The very act of discursively constructing the events as a “crisis” necessitated the forgetting of other discursive alternatives: “in articulating 9-11 as a crisis, the act of its construction was erased from memory and the void it filled was partially forgotten as it was retrospectively re-imagined” (Holland 2009, 276; see also Widmaier 2007).

Together Nabers and Holland offer a partial link between, on the one hand, what extant constructivist and discourse analyses tell us about the social construction of the war on terror and, on the other hand, what a Lacanian approach uncovers. Their discussions and analyses of

the “void” of September 11, 2001 is useful for more fully understanding the constructions and responses to the crisis, yet they neglect to conceptualize how the “void” impacted affects in relation to disrupted social meanings. In other words, they do not theorize the social effects of the “void” as comprehensively as their analyses seem to suggest in their focus on social meanings as such. However, some of their analyses do indirectly illustrate the kind of progressive symbolization that took place after September 11, 2001 on which basis nebulous affects were articulated into more defined emotions, and attached to master signifiers that justified their meaning. In particular, Holland’s (2009) analysis of individual interviews conducted after September 11, 2001 captures one aspect on this process.

Holland draws upon individual interviews conducted in the days and weeks after September 11, 2001. While many commentators and scholars have discussed how the shock of that day shattered “commonsense” expectations about security and violence in the United States (see Campbell, 2002; Edkins, 2002), Holland offers samples of how this shock was received by many:

It was unspeakable (Hiller 2001, quoted in Holland 2009, 279).

[It] made it difficult to talk . . . speaking clearly wasn’t really happening at that point, it was very difficult. (Bisson 2001, quoted in Holland 2009, 279).

[It was] so unbelievable that it didn’t want to sink in (Day 2001, quoted in Holland 2009, 279).

At first I wasn’t angry, because I couldn’t believe it was happening (Dominguez 2001, quoted in Holland 2009, 279).

I felt nothing because I couldn’t understand (Sato 2001, quoted in Holland 2009, 279).

The events were sufficiently shocking that the discursive resources available to most Americans were initially useless in “making sense” of what had happened. As Holland (2009, 281) notes, the “void that 9-11 created resulted from two primary factors: the shattering of the foundational

myths of U.S. security culture and the resulting silence of both the media and political elites.” This silence, however, did not last long. Various discourses began competing to define the “meaning” of the events in the days afterwards. This can be seen in the public’s processing of the events. Public understandings began to be (re)produced and articulated through official interpretations as time went on. Themes of nationalism and defining the new enemy were frequently expressed.

[It was a] crime against humanity (Gospodarek 2001, quoted in Holland 2009, 285).

[It] was an attack on our society, on our way of life. . .an attack on free life in general (Kyriagis 2001, quoted in Holland 2009, 285).

How can they live among us and not see kindness? (Chapman 2001, quoted in Holland 2009, 285).

[We should] take care of the situation no matter what the costs may be. . .World War, whatever . . . I’m all for war . . . we need to strike back ten times harder than they struck us. . .by any means necessary (Hill 2001, quoted in Holland 2009, 288).

While Nabers (2009) and Holland (2009) frame their analyses in terms of the discursive construction of meaning of September 11, 2001, read through a Lacanian lens, these analyses are most useful in demonstrating the articulation and “naming” of affects surrounding the events. The hegemonic battles for the creation of “commonsense” is played out through struggles to define social meanings, and after September 11, 2001 the disintegration of meaning opened the space for various narratives to restore meaning. Yet, what Holland’s analysis in particular implicitly shows is that the stakes in the discursive politics following September 11, 2001 was not only the competition for the hegemony of social meanings, but that the channeling of affects was occurring simultaneously. As the first set of quotes from Holland (2009, 279) imply, it was not just social meanings that were unsettled, but the affective responses to the events were similarly jarred. “Unspeakable” and “unbelievable” seemed the only words available to try to

symbolize what had happened. Familiar discursive tropes no longer seemed adequate to express that shock experienced. Yet, with no such resources available to make sense of what had happened, no definable emotional response was yet possible. As one person indicated, “At first I wasn’t angry, because I couldn’t believe it was happening.” Conventional emotional signifiers were not up to the task of giving contour to the experience. Only *after* the spread of official discourses did emotional responses begin to take shape. Official discourses were reproduced through people’s own understandings of what the events were in terms of their meaning, but these discourses (and discourses of popular culture, in Holland’s account) also constructed social conduits through which affects could be articulated and brought forth into Symbolic reality.

The progressive symbolization that constructed recognizable emotional responses such as revenge (“I’m all for war . . . we need to strike back ten times harder than they struck us”), anger (“[It was a] crime against humanity”), and narcissism (“How can they live among us and not see kindness?”) was made possible by the discourses that moved to fill the “void.” As Fink (2004, 51) explains, “affect is essentially amorphous,” yet, “affect in isolation gives us access to nothing whatsoever, since we cannot work on affect directly.” Affective attachments and identifications overlap between all three registers of human social reality – the Symbolic, Imaginary, and the Real. Yet, our strongest attachments form as Real attachments. The affects experienced after September 11, 2001 were not necessarily, as Holland’s (2009) work implies, definable, but are perhaps better understood as initially unstructured potential. They were Real in the Lacanian sense of remaining outside the discursive frameworks of the Symbolic order, affective potentials that escaped efforts to articulate them into everyday categories of emotional recognition. It was only after prominent fantasy discourses began to re-orient national desire and *jouissance* around

the idea of an “wounded” nation that could be made whole if only the fantasy (a “war on terror”) was acted out that it became possible to articulate more definable emotions.

A helpful way to understand this shift from affects to nameable emotions – affect bound to signifiers – is through the metaphors discussed in the previous chapter about the relationship between the Symbolic and the Real. Lacan’s metaphor of a hydroelectric dam, for example, can help in understanding how affects remain outside the discursive bounds of the Symbolic order, yet nevertheless have an impact on that order. Just as we cannot know the forceful potential of a river before it flows through the passages and mechanics of a dam, we similarly cannot have direct access to affects except through the discourses which we use to talk about them. It is only through the passages of the dam that the force of the river can be determined and utilized. However, once it passes through the dam, the river is not the same as it was before. The dam both impedes and shapes the force of the river. Likewise, it is only through the discourses and representations of the Symbolic order that the force of affects can be understood, even if discourse in some sense impedes those affects, and even if discourses shape affects into more specific emotional directions that distorts their initial potential. The progressive symbolization illustrated in Holland’s (2009) analysis demonstrates this shift from affects to emotions, even if Holland’s analysis focuses on the social meanings of these shifts. An event which was initially “unspeakable” was later named as a “crime.” An event that “made it difficult to talk” was later constructed as “an attack on our society, on our way of life.” An event that was at first “so unbelievable that it didn’t want to sink in” soon morphed into the much more specific desire “to strike back ten times harder than they struck us.” These shifts illustrate not just a move to articulate social meanings, but more importantly signal a bringing into Symbolic existence of affects that were inexpressible, which later came to be named with more conventional emotional

signifiers. Just as the dam shapes the force of the river, so did discourses of the war on terror construct a national/collective subject which offered people a way to channel the affective ambiguity of their identifications into a shared fantasy of the national “self” that promised the “return” of the *jouissance* that they presumed had been lost at the moment of trauma. Yet, this *jouissance* that was presumed to be lost was the retroactive presupposition by subjects that *something* must account for their desire. The ambiguity of the national subject and of peoples’ identifications with that national subject, and the affective pulsations constitutive of them, were, for a time, vividly open on September 11, 2001, as some of the above statements suggest.

Read through a Lacanian framework, both Nabers’s (2009) and Holland’s (2009) analyses go some way in illustrating the affective-discursive dynamics of September 11, 2001 and its aftermath. Yet their arguments about the power of the war on terror explicitly neglect to incorporate affective or emotional power. Their focus on social meanings, rather than the infusion of affect and discourse, limits their ability to fully explain the resonance of the war on terror discourse. Nabers (2009, 197), for example, draws upon Laclau’s notion of credibility to explain why certain discourses resonate while others do not. As he (2009, 197) explains, “if [a] new political project clashes with the ‘ensemble of sedimented practices constituting the normative framework of a certain society’, it will likely be rejected.” In Laclau’s (1990, 66) own words: “the acceptance of a discourse depends on its credibility, and this will not be granted if its proposals clash with basic principles informing the organization of a group.” Holland (2009, 285) offers a similar explanation. Regarding September 11, 2001 specifically, he argues:

Bush achieved considerable resonance in narrating a crisis discourse; he did ‘a remarkable job of defining the attacks of September 11 to his advantage,’ framing a crisis discourse that was ‘a key factor in his success,’ elevating him from a perceived poor leader to an increasingly popular wartime president... This resonance was aided by the scale and shock of 9-11 combined with the relative

paucity of alternative crisis narratives; the void strategically selected in favor of the construction of crisis mobilized by the Bush government (Holland 2009, 285).

Nabers and Holland are certainly correct in pointing out that discourses must be credible in the sense of not radically diverging from the established “commonsense” of a society if they are to become part of that “commonsense.” Additionally, a focus on the power of certain elite actors to perform a “decisive intervention” and restore or impose social meanings is without a doubt part of the bigger picture. Yet, in this sense, Nabers’s and Holland’s arguments exhibit the same shortcomings as do Richard Jackson’s (2005) and Stuart Croft’s (2006) analyses of the war on terror – by only examining the rhetorical content and social meanings of post-9/11 discourses, they neglect how affects and emotions help to strengthen the “sedimentation” processes that began shortly afterwards. On some level, the resonance of the construction of September 11, 2001 as a crisis was surely aided by the “relative paucity of alternative crisis narratives,” thereby allowing the “void” to “strategically [select] in favor of the construction of the crisis” favored by the Bush administration, as Holland (2009, 285) asserts. Yet, it was not *merely* the lack of discursive alternatives that explains the traction that the official discourse gained.¹⁵ Certain possibilities were efficacious not only because there may have been a lack of discursive competition, but also because people became more affectively and emotionally invested in some discourses and not others.

To his credit, Holland briefly touches upon this dimension in his discussion of “9-11” as a somatic marker (2009, 287-89), drawing upon Gearóid Ó Tuathail (2003), who in turn draws upon William Connolly’s (2002) work on neuroscience. A somatic marker, Connolly (2002, 35)

¹⁵ The notion that there *was* a “paucity of alternatives” is debatable. As Croft (2006, 113-15) points out, there were a number of other discourses that were articulated at the time, but did not become “commonsense.” For example, various commentators at the time argued that September 11, 2001 should be conceived as an attack by Saudi Arabian radicals, as a result of a threat posed by internal American Muslims who could not be assimilated into American culture, as a criminal act, or as a crime against humanity.

explains, is “a culturally mobilized, corporeal disposition through which affect-imbued, preliminary orientations to perceptions and judgment scale down the material factored into cost-benefit analyses, principled judgments, and reflective experiments.” “9/11”, Holland argues, serves as a linguistic and affective symbol that condensed an entire set of collective meanings and feelings once its content had been fixed by the hegemonic project of the war on terror. That is, the “set of dispositions to perception, feeling and action generated by the somatic marker of ‘9/11’ serve to promote particular policies while marginalizing others” (Holland 2009, 287).

The concept of the somatic marker is, in a way, close to Lacan’s concept of the master signifier. While Holland and Toal are justified in emphasizing the affective dimensions of linguistic symbols that function as somatic markers, a Lacanian approach subsumes these markers under a broader systematic framework that also includes their unavoidably interlacing relationships with other dimensions of social construction, such as fantasy, desire, and discourse. In other words, the somatic marker concept is only one aspect of the social construction process, and lacks integration with other elements of discourse and identification that are necessary for understanding the power that particular signifiers and narratives have in interpellating individuals as subjects of/to specific fantasies. The reason why master signifiers have such powerful emotional appeal is because of their embedding within a particular fantasy narrative that structures the subject’s affective experience. This experience is oriented around the promise and appeal of reaching object *a*, the promise of becoming whole, complete and harmonious with oneself. The subject identifies with fantasy discourses (structured around master signifiers) because they allow the subject to locate Symbolic being rather than facing the void, or the Real, around which its desire circulates. Rather than facing the paralyzing realization that one’s desire can never be fully satisfied (as long as one remains a Symbolic subject), that one can never fully

become whole, that one will always experience frustration, fantasies allow the subject to follow the (illusory) promise of *jouissance* found in fantasy objects, whatever partial Symbolic manifestation those objects may take. The war on terror was able to gain “credibility” and crowd out other “crisis narratives” not only because “9/11” became a somatic marker that “[served] to promote particular policies while marginalizing others,” or because of the “affective tsunami” (Toal 2003, 859) it released.

Conclusion

The discourse of the war on terror was able to achieve its “grip” precisely because of the way in which the underlying fantasy structured peoples’ affects and desires. The sheer frequency and manner in which signifiers that had heavy historical and emotional histories were deployed in the “war on terror” no doubt helps to explain part of its appeal. “Freedom,” “God,” “America,” “values,” “way of life,” and others, all evoke a myriad of desires within the American political context. For example, passive narcissistic desire in the Symbolic – the desire to be recognized or loved by the Other – was frequently evoked after September 11, 2001, as was the Imaginary desire for bodily integrity or unity (passive narcissistic desire in the Imaginary).¹⁶ More importantly, however, was the fate of “our” signifiers in the war on terror, and how their dynamics within the fantasy offered certain kinds of political identification, which in turn produced a specific type of political subject and its response to the war on terror discourse. The discourse after September 11, 2001 took the form of the University discourse and in it, a powerfully appealing fantasy was offered to those who identified with it. After the trauma of a national tragedy, a fantasy was constructed that offered the promise of recovering a fully whole, harmonious, and healed Nation, i.e. a complete subject. The underlying University structure of

¹⁶ For a typology of desires in the Symbolic, Imaginary, and Real registers, see Chapter Three.

the war on terror offered a Symbolic contour through which national affects could be articulated and channeled in a direction that seemed to offer the promise of a full national “self.” This fantasy offered the promise of *jouissance* (in this case, the repair of national trauma), yet the promised object was illusory. National wholeness was retroactively posited by the fantasy and in turn produced a subject whose (illusory) lost object is perceived to be recovered through the enactment of the fantasy, which in turn entails a re-orientation of the subject’s affective experience through the Symbolic contours offered by the fantasy.

Of course, the war on terror discourse did not begin and end with its construction of a Symbolic system wherein “terrorists” posed the only blockage to the fantasy of a fully healed and whole “Nation.” From the very beginning of the war on terror, the Symbolic impasse of the national fantasy was “a radical network of terrorists” and “every government that supports them” (Bush 2001a). Administration officials pronounced that no distinction would be made between terrorists and those states that aided in their operations. As this continued, the fantasy of the war on terror channeled the interweaving dynamics of loss, desire, identification, and *jouissance* long after September 11, 2001. Identifying the dynamics of the fantasy not only offer a deeper understanding of the “grip” of the war on terror, but also offer a more complete picture of the discursive-affective dynamics at work in the later incorporation of the signifiers “Iraq” and “Saddam” into the national fantasy.

The following chapter continues this investigation and analyzes the politics of desire of Iraq’s incorporation as a part of the war on terror, and the hegemonic politics of contestation surrounding the discourse. Drawing upon Laclau’s insights on the construction of social identities through equivalence and difference, and the construction of discursive hegemony, and Lacan’s concepts of desire, fantasy, object *a*, I show that the desires and affects that have

previously been neglected by scholarly of the politics of the Iraq war are, in fact, necessary to understanding the political dynamics that helped to make the idea of war possible in the first place.

CHAPTER 5 THE IRAQ FANTASY AND THE AFFECTIVE POLITICS OF HEGEMONY

Introduction

In this chapter I continue my analysis of the affective power of the war on terror discourse. More specifically, analyze the affective politics of fantasy surrounding the incorporation of Iraq into this discourse, and demonstrate that these affective dimensions are necessary to account for the hegemonic contestations constituting American foreign policy discourses on Iraq. Where the previous chapter examined the affective hold of the war on terror, this chapter analyzes desire and affect necessarily underpinned the politics of Iraq's discursive grafting into the war on terror discourse. The chapter proceeds as follows. I first briefly discuss existing scholarly accounts of how Iraq was articulated as a focus in the war on terror. Specifically, I show that these accounts neglect how the dynamics of desire and fantasy made possible the incorporation of Iraq into the war on terror, thus making the American invasion seem like a "natural" step in the conflict. Second, I draw upon both Lacan's theories of desire and Laclau's concept of equivalence to demonstrate the constitutive affective dimensions that account for how Iraq was discursively grafted into the discourse. Third, I analyze the construction of subjectivity and fantasy in the major text that grafted Iraq as part of the war on terror, the 2002 State of the Union address. Last, I examine the fantasy and affective underpinnings of the hegemonic politics of the war on terror. Comparing the discourses of George W. Bush and John Kerry from 2004, I demonstrate how certain powerful nodal points, such as "freedom," were not only assertions of competing values, but how they functioned as sites of hegemonic competition for the channeling affective potentials towards certain fantasies. In other words, the politics of discursive hegemony cannot be reduced solely to rhetorical competitions over social meanings. Rather, the affective politics of the construction of

subjectivity are crucial in differentiating the varying appeal of discourses. Only by incorporating these hitherto-neglected aspects of social construction can we more fully understand the affective power that have produced the power of the discourses of the war on terror and the Iraq war

Many accounts now exist of the politics that cast Saddam Hussein and Iraq as part of the war on terror (see, for example, Isikoff and Corn 2006; Packer 2005; Ricks 2006; Woodward 2004). The rhetorical fuzziness that Bush administration officials deployed in making pronouncements about al-Qaeda and Iraq's involvement in international terrorism and widely reproduced in the media has been debated and criticized by many. Some argue that the administration intentionally selected intelligence data that bolstered the case for war while ignoring the ambiguity that many in the intelligence community expressed regarding the interpretation of the status of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. Others point out that American intelligence was simply incomplete or even wrong regarding Iraq's status as a threat, and that the intelligence of American allies (most notably Great Britain) was also mistaken.

These particular debates aside, IR scholars who have examined the politics of the Iraq War from critical and constructivist perspectives have made a number of observations and arguments about the rhetorical politics surrounding it. Richard Jackson (2005, 103), for instance, examines the rhetorical confluence of "super-terrorism, rogue states, and WMD." He points out that administration officials drew upon existing discourses of "super-terrorism," such as the possibility of terrorist attacks from the use of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, and conflated them with states that may supply such weapons to non-state terrorists. The administration made this link between terrorists and states appear to be natural and beyond question. "The rhetorical strategy of making terrorists and 'rogue states' synonymous is an ingenious discursive sleight of hand that provides the authorities with valuable resources,"

Jackson (2005, 107-08) argues, such as allowing the U.S. to target much more broadly definable state actors rather than a small group of individuals.

The notion of a “discursive sleight of hand” certainly makes sense, and others have elaborated upon the degree and frequency with which the conflation of these elements was performed. Stuart Croft (2006) also offers a picture of how the “decisive intervention” after September 11, 2001 constructed a link between terrorism and rogue states.¹ Croft, much like Jackson, rightly points out that the connection between states and terrorism is not limited to the immediate period before the 2003 invasion of Iraq, but was made right away after September 11, 2001. He observes that the “move from searching for a transnational organization (al-Qaeda) to pursuing ‘rogue states’ was an *immediate* one: it was inherent in the decisive intervention” (2006, 107). The effect was, again, to define the enemy broadly as to exploit geopolitical opportunities presented by the crisis (2006, 108). The connection between non-state terrorists and enemy states was made through the “weapons of mass destruction” trope. Members of the “axis of evil” (Iraq, Iran, and North Korea) could not be trusted with W.M.D., it was asserted, because they could deliver such weapons to terrorist groups. This claim took on a rhetorical life of its own through its repetition and reproduction in the media. Yet, as Croft points out, it “could only be made because it was consistent with the policy programme; consistent with the discourse that had been introduced through the decisive intervention” (2006, 142). The repetition of the discourse only intensified throughout 2002 and early 2003 (Croft 2006 143-44; see also Gershkoff and Kushner 2005; Oren and Solomon 2008).

Ronald Krebs and Jennifer Lobasz (2007, 440) also argue that, after the State of the Union address in early 2002, “the president’s depiction of Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi regime

¹ For an analysis of the political usage of the “rogue state” concept by foreign policy elites, see O’Reilly (2007).

remained consistent.” Saddam, it was repeated, massacred his own people, used weapons of mass destruction, supported terrorism, and “could not be trusted” (2007, 440). They argue that the fixing of Iraq to the “war on terror” narrative was a major factor in the administration’s successful mobilization campaign. Likewise, Andrew Flibbert (2006) argues that “a black-and-white understanding of international politics blurred the distinction between U.S. adversaries such as Iraq and al-Qaeda.” This image of Saddam, of course, did not immediately arise only in the wake of September 11, 2001, but was built upon the image that had been repeated in the American public imagination stretching back to the 1991 Gulf War. As Russell Burgos (2008) details, post-9/11 representations of Iraq closely coincided with and reproduced many of the images of Saddam that had become deeply embedded within American foreign policy discourse since the early 1990s. Therefore, while September 11, 2001 opened a window for the construction of a “war on terror” with which Saddam and Iraq became associated, the basic idea that Iraq was a “problem” for the U.S., and that Saddam’s overthrow was the “solution,” had become entrenched during the Clinton years (Burgos 2008).

Nevertheless, as Krebs and Lobasz (2007, 441) summarize, the “link between the Iraqi regime and Al-Qaeda was established not just through the blunt tactics of continual misrepresentation and exaggeration that have been widely noted, but perhaps more through these subtle rhetorical deployments that capitalized on the relatively settled meaning of September 11, reflected in the dominant discourse of the War on Terror.” These “subtle rhetorical deployments” largely paid off for the administration. Amy Gershkoff and Shana Kushner (2005) attribute the high levels of public support for the war to the administration’s frequent linking of Iraq to September 11, 2001 and the war on terror. As they document (Gershkoff and Kushner 2005, 529), in fall 2002 up through the time of the invasion in March 2003, public support for

the invasion never dropped below 55 percent, and often hovered at a level between 60 and 80 percent (see also Kull, Ramsay, and Lewis 2003/4).

All of these arguments and observations about rhetorical “sleights of hand” certainly offer important insights into the politics that allowed the idea of striking Iraq to gain significant public support.² Yet, a combination of insights from both Lacan and Laclau sheds light on an entire range of crucial factors that most IR scholars examining this issue have thus far neglected – the discursive structures, desires, and affects that underpinned the rhetorical “sleight of hand” in the first place. Just as prominent constructivist studies utilize a limited conception of the social construction of the war on terror after September 11, 2001, studies of the politics of the 2003 Iraq war have a relatively limited understanding of the social construction process. While conventional understandings of social construction are incomplete for a number of reasons (as discussed in the previous chapters), they are also problematic in that they fail to include elements of affects, desires, and fantasies that can offer a much more thorough understanding of the affective politics of the Iraq war. A more theoretically inclusive understanding of the social construction process can help us identify elements of these political discourses which allowed them to gain as much social traction as they did, that is, through the kinds of political subjects that these fantasies produced.

The following section first draws upon Laclau’s ideas about logics of equivalence and difference and offers an analysis of how the discursive elements that constituted points of identification in the war on terror were (re)produced through these social logics that worked to

² Other arguments on the politics of the Iraq war discuss the so-called failure of the “marketplace of ideas” (Cramer 2007; Kaufmann 2004; Krebs and Kaufmann 2005; Thrall 2007), and the role of nationalism in the United States in the months after September 11, 2001 (McCartney 2004; Rojecki 2008). Since the “sleights of hand” arguments are closest to my concerns here, I address these more directly. But my overall criticism, that most studies of the Iraq war ignore the factors of desire and affect that I emphasize here, is generally applicable to the “marketplace of ideas” and nationalism literatures.

make the war on terror-Iraq linkage seem natural. In doing so, I offer a discourse-theoretical understanding of the rhetorical “sleights of hand” that have remained under-theorized. I then show that the collapse of social meanings that Laclau’s concept of equivalence account for is itself made possible by the desires for subjectivity implicit in the bringing together of certain privileged signifiers. The “Iraq-war on terror” discourse largely maintained the structure of the University discourse, with largely the same dynamics tying together loss, knowledge, and incomplete subjectivity, the “wounded” Nation. The fantasy ultimately underpinning the “Iraq-war on terror” discourse was, however, much more politically sweeping than the immediate post-9/11 fantasies of the Nation.

Equivalence, Metonymy, Desire³

As Croft (2006) rightly points out, the linkage between a “radical network of terrorists” and “every government that supports them” (Bush 2001a) was a decisive move by administration officials. Its repetition by other major elites, institutions, and media also constituted a coalescence whose effect was to condense many of the discordant elements of what “terrorists” and “regime” meant within the context of American security discourses. While it was asserted early on that no distinction would be made between “terrorist” and their “rogue state” allies, a much more refined tone was taken months later when such governments were portrayed as more active and dangerous to U.S. security than previously. The terms “terrorist,” “terrorist groups,” “outlaw regimes” and “terror states” were often uttered in the same sentences in late 2002 and early 2003. As the president stated in March 2003, “we will not wait to see what terrorists or terror states could do with weapons of mass destruction” (Bush 2003b).

³ Parts of this section draw upon the analysis in Solomon (2009).

Much more than a rhetorical “sleight of hand,” however, the very *meanings* between these signifiers were, to an extent, *collapsed* during late 2002 and early 2003. As discussed in chapter three, Laclau argues that every “identity” needs a constitutive outside, a point of opposition against which it can draw meaning. This construction of an outside cannot occur through reference to “natural” differences located outside of discourse. It can only be represented through chains of signifiers that suppress differences among “internal” elements of an identity in relation “external” elements of an other. Laclau calls this process a logic of equivalence; the meaning of the signifiers in each chain become “equivalent” to each other insofar as their differences are subverted in their shared opposition to an outside group of signifiers. What they have in common is not something positive, but is instead a shared difference with their common outside. American security discourses during this time coalesced around a series of signifiers whose ultimate groundlessness allowed them to be temporarily fastened into chains in which they became meaningful within the war on terror. For example, from the beginning of the war on terror, both the U.S. and the enemy were represented discursively in chains of signifiers that drew their meaning from their differences with each other. The enemy was frequently described in terms of “evil,” “barbarian,” “savage,” “murderous,” and others (Jackson 2005). Each of these meanings was deferred to other signifiers in the chain, and differed from those chains that constituted U.S. identity. “Terrorists” were “evil” “savages” and “barbarians” and so on - just as “we” were represented by signifiers like “good,” “civilized,” “innocent,” “values,” and “justice.” Who we were, what we *meant* in relation to the other, was a circuit of meaning composed of a chain of signifiers articulated⁴

⁴ Laclau and Mouffe (1985, 105) define articulation as “any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice.”

together that continually referred back to each other, rather than an “essence” that existed outside of the discourses constituting them.

Just as these processes worked to organize signifiers into coherent discourses in the early months of the war on terror, so were the same processes at work in the discursive incorporation of the signifier “Iraq” into the narrative. To the extent that “terror” and “terrorism” were successfully articulated to “state,” “state sponsor,” and “regime” in the countless speeches, press briefings, official institutional documents, and media coverage throughout 2002 and early 2003, logics of equivalence worked to subvert whatever meaningful differences existed between them over their shared opposition to the signifiers to which they were opposed, namely “America,” “us,” and so on. From the very beginning of the war on terror American identification had consistently centered around signifiers such as “good,” “justice,” “values,” “civilization,” and particularly “freedom,” and these signifiers drew their meaning from their differences to the chains of signifiers that constituted their outside, such as “evil,” “devious,” “murderous,” and “barbarous.” Through the broadening of these chains to include terms like “terrorists and regimes,” “evil regimes,” and “outlaw regimes,” the meanings of these terms were emptied to the extent that the boundaries between them collapsed and that although they were not viewed as synonymous entities, in a sense, they *did* mean the same thing in relation to the threat they posed to the U.S. To the extent that “terrorists” and “terrorism” were successfully linked to “states” and “regimes,” a discursive relation was established among them such that their meanings were temporarily fixed in a way that changed whatever previous temporary meaningful fixation they may have been conjectured to have possessed (see Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 105).

As the national and international focus on Iraq increased over the course of 2002 and early 2003, the signifier “Iraq” came to occupy the same position within the discourse as did

“terrorists” immediately after September 11, 2001. Just as terrorists were “devious and ruthless” (Bush 2001c), so was Iraq “very good at denial and deception” based on years of frustrating United Nations weapons inspections efforts (Cheney 2002). Just as al-Qaeda followed “in the path of fascism, Nazism, and totalitarianism” (Bush 2001a), so Saddam Hussein was the contemporary incarnation of “Hitlerism, militarism, and communism” (Bush 2003a). Just as terrorists wanted to “overthrow existing governments in many Muslim countries” (Bush 2001a), so Saddam could not be allowed to resume his ambitions of conquest in the Middle East” (Bush 2002). Just as the conflict after September 11, 2001 was one in which “all civilized nations have a responsibility to join in fighting it” (Bush 2001b), in 2003 it was the job of the U.S. to end “terrible threats to the civilized world” and “defend the hopes of all mankind” (Bush 2002). The discourse that had existed since September 2001 thus provided a background against which a variety of threats could be understood and normalized, whether those threats came from terrorists or Iraq.

It was through a privileging of logics of equivalence, over logics of difference, in which signifiers like “Saddam” and “Iraq” were normalized into discourse. The construction of social space in the war on terror around two antagonistic poles (exemplified by “either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists” [Bush 2001a]), had emphasized equivalence over difference from the beginning, and was a strictly “us versus them” understanding of the world. The identity and position of the U.S. and terrorists within the war on terror remained largely the same as the identity and position of the U.S. as (re)produced in reference to Iraq. The same discursive structure that had successfully rendered insecure American subjects in late 2001 had also, by March 2003, successfully interpolated a majority of Americans as insecure against the spectre of “Iraq.” The representation, and endless (re)production within American society, of the war on

terror as a conflict against terrorists and evil regimes/Iraq collapsed their meanings in a way that discursively (re)constructed them as the same kind of threat. Both promoted the same ideology of “power and domination.” Both posed a threat to “our values” and “our way of life.” Both posed an existential danger to the “civilized” world. The danger of terrorism from non-state actors and the threat posed by US-designated state sponsors of terrorism was never differentiated in a way that made them threats that warranted being dealt with in different ways. If military action against one was justified, so was it justified against the other. The discursive differences between “terrorists” and “Iraq/Saddam” were dissolved to the extent that they came to effectively pose the same kind of threat to the U.S., through the dominance of the logic of equivalence that was at work in collapsing the nature of the threats.

Yet, a focus *only* on these discursive dynamics themselves can tell us little about the desires and fantasies that underpinned these associations in the first place. Supplementing this Laclauian reading with an application of Lacanian insights on desire is necessary in understanding the appeal of this discourse beyond its overt discursive dynamics as such. Laclau’s theory of equivalence bear a close resemblance to Lacan’s ideas about the metonymic nature of desire, and synthesizing these insights offers a deeper grasp of how national desire was channeled along chains of equivalence bearing the names of “threats” to the fantasy of the Nation (as elaborated in the previous chapter).

Recall that for Lacan, desire is bound to the split subject’s constitution within the Symbolic order. Since the subject is always divided from itself, the desire for an undivided and complete self guides it towards objects it believes will alleviate the persistent sense of anxiety and lack, thus healing its division. Master signifiers are often discursive objects that subjects desire, since their significance within the Symbolic order instills them with a sense of value

which makes them appealing. However, desire does not engage solely with master signifiers, but also other “lesser” or secondary ones that master signifiers help tie together. For example, while American national/collective subject in the war on terror was frequently constructed around the master signifiers of “America” and “freedom,” other signifiers also represented American identification, albeit sometimes less directly, and often in conjunction with master signifiers. “Us,” “good,” “people,” “courage,” “values,” and others formed chains of equivalence, tied together by others like “freedom,” along which the meaning of American identity was constituted. Lacan (2006, 421) calls this feature of language metonymy, the way in which signifiers form links to each other.

Metonymy allows for not only the construction of linguistic chains, but also the Symbolic channels along which desire for subjectivity is guided. As Mark Bracher (2003, 50) explains, “metonymy, in Lacan’s usage, refers to the way in which signifiers are linked to other signifiers in a chain and ultimately an entire network that provides the pathways along which identification and desire operate” (see also Lacan 2006, 421-39). Desire is what allows for equivalent and metonymic associations in the first place. Desire is what allows for the sticking together of “our” signifiers, “our” Symbolic representatives, into linking chains which appear to promise full representation. Desire, however, is continually frustrated in its shifts along these discursive pathways. Each signifier in a chain of “our” signifiers seems to promise the full representation and whole sense of self that the subject seeks, but each signifier on its own fails to provide the satisfaction it appears to offer. Thus, desire shifts from signifier to signifier continually without ever touching the “essence” that each signifier appears to express. Within discourses of American identification in the war on terror, subjects’ desire for full “identity” is circuited along chains of signifiers such as “us,” “good,” “people,” “values,” and so on, while simultaneously

opposed to “evil,” “terror,” “barbarian,” and others. Symbolic paths for desire are found in the chains constituting “our” identification, yet desire runs into barriers when it encounters signifiers that are not “ours.” Since the groups of signifiers that constitute both “American” and “terrorist” identities are mutually constitutive, insofar as they necessarily draw their meaning from their opposition to each other, American desires are both satisfied and frustrated within the war on terror discourse. Insofar as desire is able to openly circulate among “our” signifiers, subjects are able to achieve some level of (provisional) Symbolic stability. There is a kind of partial satisfaction in the limited representation that these signifiers do provide. Yet, when desire inevitably encounters signifiers that are not “ours,” such as “evil,” “terror,” and “barbarian,” desire is frustrated or blocked since these form the necessary “outsides” against which “our” signifiers draw their meaning in the first place.

This understanding of the infusion of discourse and desire can shed significantly more light on discursive aspects of Iraq’s inclusion in the “war on terror.” In one sense, the rhetorical politics surrounding Iraq in 2002 and early 2003 were certainly political calculations by foreign policy elites. In another sense, however, the *effects* of this discourse on audiences cannot be reduced to its impact at the rhetorical level itself. The incorporation of the signifiers “Iraq” and “Saddam” brought them into a chain of signification along which national desire for a coherent self, especially in the wake of September 11, was oriented. The construction of a national “self” is a never-ending project, because so long as the subject exists in Symbolic reality, it will always be split between its representation by signifiers and an ineffable sense of frustration that it always feels is not captured by its Symbolic representatives. On the never-ending nature of desire, Lacan (2006, 431) argues that “the enigmas that desire...are based on no other derangement of instinct than the fact that it is caught in the rails of metonymy, eternally

extending toward the *desire for something else*” (emphasis in original). In the same essay, Lacan even argues that “desire *is* a metonymy, even if man scoffs at the idea” (2006, 439, emphasis in original).

Desire, then, is effected through a series of substitutions. Signifiers in a common chain are substitutable for each other insofar as their meanings are deferred to each other (logic of equivalence), and are opposed to signifiers in excluded chains (operating through a logic of difference). The desire for a coherent “self” underpins their discursive ties, desires which both flow and are frustrated through these Symbolic channels. In this sense, then, the inclusion of signifiers such as “Iraq” and “Saddam Hussein” into the war on terror discourse were much more than a case of creating a “a black-and-white understanding of international politics blurred the distinction between U.S. adversaries such as Iraq and al Qaeda” (Flibbert, 2006), or even the operation of a rhetorical “sleight of hand” (Jackson, 2005). These terms became part of a signifying complex in which American national security discourses attempted to cover over loss with the construction of a coherent national self. The same structures of desire that had operated in the chains of equivalence constructing American and terrorist identities after September 11, 2001 operated in the same manner in relation to “Iraq” and “Saddam Hussein” as they were progressively grafted into the discourse.⁵ The frustration of desire over the lack of a coherent national self was represented in the blockage posed by these signifiers. “Iraq” and “Saddam” came to substitute for “terror” and “evil” in the months leading up to the Iraq war, thus orienting national desire in reference to them, and channeling desire towards the narrative that offered a “solution” to the blockage posed.

⁵ For a similar argument in IR, see Michael J. Shapiro’s (1993) usage of Lacan’s notion of desire regarding the symbolic role of Saddam Hussein in security discourses following the 1991 Gulf War.

Indeed, blockages or obstacles to the construction of the subject are always part of a fantasy allowing the subject to deal with the contingency and ambiguity of its identifications. Desire is always embedded within a particular fantasy structure that offers the subject a promise of fully becoming itself. Thus, desire cannot be understood apart from fantasy, *jouissance*, and object *a*. Nor can the effects of these factors be grasped without understanding their mutual relations with regard to each other, as structured by a particular form of discourse (the Master's, University, Hysteric's, or Analyst's). The following section explores the discursive structures and fantasies underpinning the war on terror-Iraq discourse. Doing so allows a deeper understanding of both the promise of subjectivity offered to audiences and its affective appeal, thus providing a more comprehensive accounting of the possibility of Iraq's grafting into the war on terror discourse.

Grafting Iraq and Terror: State of the Union, 2002

While there were many thousands of texts that helped to solidify the synthesis of Iraq and the war on terror (such as speeches, daily press briefings, policy documents, news media coverage, think-tank reports, the pronouncements of pundits, etc.), the February 2002 State of the Union address in particular stands out as a key moment in this synthesis. Thomas Ricks (2006, 38-9) points out the centrality of this speech (along with the president's speech at West Point in June of 2002) in the administration's agenda. "Between the State of the Union address and the West Point speech," Ricks writes, "Bush had shown the political route toward attacking Iraq. The first speech had done the targeting – that is, stated the goal. The West Point speech provided the doctrinal, or intellectual, rationale for doing it" – namely, the strategy of preemption. According to Bob Woodward (2004, 925, 130-3), this State of the Union garnered the most viewers of any since President Clinton's in 1998.

Although major portions of the annual State of the Union address are typically devoted to the president's domestic agenda, the February 2002 address, a few months after September 11, 2001, was largely devoted to outlining the Bush administration's foreign policy agenda. In it, Bush offered a narrative that (re)constructed events since September 11, 2001, focusing on the rebuilding efforts in New York and Washington, D.C., and the military campaign in Afghanistan, along with some briefer mentions of some domestic agenda items such as taxes and education. Of course, the most memorable passage in the speech regarded foreign policy, when the president named Iraq, Iran, and North Korea as the "axis of evil" because of their proposed links to terrorism and their drive to obtain weapons of mass destruction.

Discourse Structure

As with the speech of September 20, 2001, there are a number of moves in the February State of the Union whose significance for the construction of subjectivity can be understood through Lacan's discourse structures. For example, shortly after opening the speech with a reiteration of American successes in Afghanistan, Bush puts the national subject's loss front-and-center, reminding the audience that "these four months have brought sorrow and pain that will never completely go away" (Bush 2002). He then moves to offer reassurance in the form of valued master signifiers (evoking Symbolic passive narcissistic desire), stating that the American cause is "just" and that we cannot forget lives lost for the sake of "freedom." This double-movement appears several times, in which the lack of security is brought to the forefront which sparks the desire for a body of knowledge that will offer a sense of stability. Then, almost immediately, a body of knowledge S_2 is offered in the form of a coherent and meaningful narrative (a "war on terror" where an "axis of evil" threatens us), which in turn produces subjects $\$$ constitutively split between their representation by the battery of signifiers offered in the new body of knowledge S_2 , and that which is missing from the narrative.

$$\text{University Discourse: } \frac{S_2}{S_1} \rightarrow \frac{a}{\$}$$

In this manner, the identification dynamics and discourse structures of this speech largely reproduce the structure found in the first major articulation of the war on terror on September 20, 2001. The bulk of the State of the Union is driven by the dynamics of the University discourse. The body of knowledge constructing the social reality S_2 where “we” are threatened by Iraq occupies the Agent position. The new social reality S_2 is offered as commonsense apart from the political perspective of Bush the individual, yet is implicitly driven by a fascination of the possibilities of American power itself, the master signifier S_1 , and embodied in words like “justice” and “freedom.” These prominent signifiers function as sites upon which a range of meanings are written, which implicitly carry the main messages of the speech. For instance, “justice” represents, simultaneously, the violence to be applied in fighting the war (terrorists “will not escape the justice of this nation”), and the value that defines who we are in relation to the enemy (“America will lead by defending liberty and justice because they are right and true and unchanging for all people everywhere”) (Bush 2002). Similarly, while “freedom” is offered as that which defines “us” in relation to “them,” it more often implicitly represents the projection of American power: “it is both our responsibility and our privilege to fight freedom's fight;” “We have known freedom's price. We have shown freedom's power. And in this great conflict, my fellow Americans, we will see freedom's victory” (Bush 2002). Such claims and their implications are, again, offered as self-evident and beyond politics: “rarely has the world faced a choice more clear or consequential” (Bush 2002).

Remarks by other administration officials at the time also illustrate the “taken-for-grantedness” with which the new social reality S_2 incorporating Iraq was constructed, thus conferring upon it a power of agency that transcended the particular individuals offering it. For

instance, in May 2002, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, asserted that “*in just facing the facts*, we have to recognize that terrorist networks have relationships with terrorist states that have weapons of mass destruction, and that they inevitably are going to get their hands on them, and they would not hesitate one minute in using them. *That’s the world we live in*” (Cited in Croft 2006, 139, emphasis added). Similarly, in March 2002 CIA Director George Tenet testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee that Iraq had close ties to terrorism, that they had contacts with al Qaeda, and that their mutual hatred of the US suggested an alliance. As Croft (2006, 169) points out, “Tenet was called on as the authoritative expert, to reveal ‘facts’ about Iraqi behavior that could not be contested. The ‘expert’ was a special position in the debate, having a particular knowledge denied to others. The President built upon these ‘objective’ truths, and laid out the case for bringing about change in Iraq with increasing frequency throughout 2002.” These passages nicely illustrate the power of the war on terror-Iraq discourse as a University discourse, where “objective” and “rational” knowledge has the force of agency because it is viewed as operating apart from political perspective.

The position that this discourse structure offers an audience both provides a fantasy space for the audiences’ identifications to inhabit, and produces a split subject \$ who is perpetually insecure, so long as it remains within the University structure. The fantasy underlying the University the State of the Union is close to that of the September 20, 2001 speech. Recall at that time, shortly after the attacks, the obscure fantasy object was the Nation-Thing, the object that was promised by the fantasy that would make the subject whole and fully secure if only the obstacles presented (“terror” and “terrorists”) were dealt with through enactment of a “war on terror” that promised their eradication.

With Iraq's incorporation into the discourse, a similar structure is at work, only here the fantasy object is constituted on a much grander scale, which inversely corresponds to a more insecure subject. In the State of the Union, the figure of the "terrorist" is still presented as blocking the construction of a fully whole and secure American subject, but other signifiers such as "Iraq" and "outlaw regimes" now occupy the same position. The fantasy that these "obstacles" block, though, is not *only* a whole "America" or Nation-Thing. A much grander fantasy is offered that broadens the kind of subject the discourse attempts to construct. Throughout the speech, it is presupposed that not only would "America" itself be free from antagonisms, division, and harm if only "terrorists" were eradicated, but that the *entire world* would be free of such divisions if only a select few "outlaw regimes" were confronted. "Terrorists" and the "axis of evil," it is asserted, "threatens the peace of the world" (Bush 2002). America has "a great opportunity during this time of war to lead the world toward the values that will bring lasting peace" (Bush 2002). America "will lead by defending liberty and justice because they are right and true and unchanging for all people everywhere," and Americans "seek a just and peaceful world beyond the war on terror" (Bush 2002).

Fantasy and Identification

This expanded vision of the war on terror functions as a fantasy in the way it attempts to cover over loss of "security" and the *inability* to fully construct the Nation and the subject of the "peace of the world." The fantasy is predicated upon the assumption of a fully secure "America" and a peaceful planet not as elusive goals possible one day in the distant future, but as possible in the short-term, if only the few obstacles are confronted. The audience is offered a fantasy that not only promises a sense of wholeness and security, but offers a Symbolic promise that rises above any conflict or antagonisms that could otherwise be conceivable with the endeavors toward such a promise. The "America" and the absolutely peaceful world that the speech

constructs are retroactively presupposed as existing were it not for the few obstacles to these fantasized endpoints.

However, this fantasy, like every fantasy, necessarily fails due to the gap between the Symbolic reassurance that it offers and the Real that always escapes Symbolic representation. The role of fantasy is to offer a narrative which allows the subject to avoid the anxiety, paralysis, and division inherent in being a subject. Fantasy discourses posit a promised endpoint, or goal, which offers the potential for the alleviation of fear and anxiety. Yet, as long as the subject remains a subject within the Symbolic order, divided between its representation in signifiers and the missing Thing or sense of a complete “self” (object *a*) that escapes representation, the subject will always be divided. Indeed, this division is necessary to exist as a subject. Without division there is no desire, and without desire there is no subject. The fantasy offered in the Iraq-war on terror discourse functions in this manner. Sweeping claims about world peace that only the United States is positioned to deliver represents the promised end of the fantasy. Rather than acknowledging the impossibility of fulfilling desire and the ultimate impossibility of reaching either a fully secure and whole “America” or a condition of world peace free from antagonisms, the fantasy takes this deadlock into account by condensing its failure in the figures of the “terrorist” and the “rogue state.” The implication is that, were it were not for “terrorists” or “rogue states” like Iraq, we may very well secure world peace and a secure National “identity.” In other words, the *only* blockages to the fulfillment of the fantasy are “terrorists” and “Iraq,” *not* the countless other constraints that would presumably accompany such an endeavor, and certainly not the recognition of the inherent ontological impossibility of constructing a full and complete “identity.” This is precisely what Žižek (1989, 126) means when he argues that “the stake of social-ideological fantasy is to construct a vision of society which *does* exist, a society

which is not split by an antagonistic division...fantasy is precisely the way an antagonistic fissure is masked. In other words, *fantasy is a means for an ideology to take its own failure into account in advance*” (emphases in original). Since the fantasy cannot provide a fully secure sense of self it must present some impediment, some scapegoat, upon which the frustration of the self can be projected, so that the realization of its impossibility can be avoided.

In Lacan’s formula for fantasy, $\$ \diamond a$ (the subject’s relation to object a), the University discourse positions object a (in the position of a receiving Other) between the subject $\$$ (in the position of product) and the body of knowledge S_2 offered (in the position of agent). As discussed above, what this means is not that object a itself is hailed by knowledge S_2 as agent, since a is not an object that cannot be made to exist in Symbolic reality. As the object-cause of desire, object a is absent, and represents the place of loss. What S_2 hails, then, is the absence or point of failure in the discourse where the a is presupposed by the subject to have been. “Iraq” and “outlaw regimes” are the signifiers that represent the failure of the fantasy of the American Nation and of the “peace of the world.” “We” were *supposed to have had* a secure Nation and world peace were it not for the sole figures of terrorists and Saddam Hussein. This fantasy produces a subject $\$$ who is divided between the signifiers that represent it (“freedom,” “justice,” “America,” etc.) and the missing Thing (in this case, a fully-sutured Nation and a terror-free world) that the fantasy posits as lost. Yet, the lost-object itself was only *retroactively* constructed as such by the fantasy. The war on terror-Iraq discourse is predicated upon the idea of a fully-secure America and a world peace that is threatened by terrorists and Iraq, but these notions themselves are the Symbolic representatives upon which the impossibility of a complete national subject is projected. The fantasy must offer some explanation for why the desire for a full “identity” will go unfulfilled. Of course, the ontological impossibility of fully constructing

an American subject remains unacknowledged, and the inherent ambiguity of identification is overcome by the fantasy's offering of an obstacle that, if eradicated, promises a sense of unity (Stavrakakis, 2007). More broadly, the "peace of the world" is hindered by the only two blockages offered – terrorists and rogue states like Iraq. Thus, both frustration and partial satisfaction are offered through the State of the Union discourse. Partial satisfaction of subjectivity is offered through the fantasy's promise of *jouissance*. The *jouissance* implied through the pursuit of the fantasy is appealing to subjects who desire to identify with a stable national subject whose fullness is plausibly promised. Hence, "little bits of *jouissance*" are attained through identification with the collective subject constructed in the speech (Miller 2000, 37). However, frustration is experienced through the ultimate, and inevitable, failure of the fantasy to fully procure the *jouissance* it implies. The collective subject is thus incomplete, and the identification it offered to audiences pulsated between both lack and fullness, satisfaction and frustration, and presence and absence.

This interpellative appeal of the fantasy resonates on an affective level through the spaces created for an audience in terms of both the image and the gaze. The speech paints a variety of vivid images that work to threaten a sense of bodily integrity, and thus jeopardizes an audience's sense of corporal security. A few of the more vivid examples illustrate such imagery: "killers...are now spread throughout the world like ticking time bombs;" "These enemies view the entire world as a battlefield;" "terrorist cells that have executed an American;" "terrorist parasites who threaten their countries and our own;" "The Iraqi regime...has already used poison gas to murder thousands of its own citizens – leaving the bodies of mothers huddled over their dead children;" "by seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger" (Bush 2002). Such images evoke passive narcissistic desire in the Imaginary

register, the desire for bodily well-being. These threats to the Imaginary body are part of a constellation of desires presumably evoked by the speech. Active narcissistic desire in the Imaginary, or the desire to “be like” the image of an admired other, is also brought to mind with the positive imagery of brave Americans and military successes, as is Symbolic passive narcissistic desire (the desire to be recognized or loved by the Other, often through the embodiment of the values represented by master signifiers, such as “freedom,” “justice,” “America,” and so on).

Identification with such images, however, only works in conjunction with identification through and with the gaze. Indeed, Žižek (1989, 105-110) argues that identification with images is always subordinate to identification with the gaze. Identification with images is appealing because of the position from which subjects *imagine themselves being seen* as identifying with the images. The fantasized position from which we see ourselves as likeable is what guides which images we identify with in the first place. “What determines me, at the most profound level...is the gaze that is outside,” Lacan (1981, 106) argues. Put differently, it is the fantasized gaze of the object at us that influences the way in which we identify with images. Premised upon the assumptions of a peaceful world and a unified American subject (the “lost” objects of the fantasy) the imagined gaze of these objects back at an audience creates a space in which the desires of the audience are tied to the promise of their “recovery,” or tied to the implication of an encounter with them. A whole American subject and international peace are fantasmatic in the sense that they are both present and absent in/from the discourse. They are presented to an audience as recognizable and worthy of pursuit, as objects that are desirable which can be spoken of (because, in fact, they *can* be spoken of). At the same time, they are absent from our current politics, and it is their absence that drives the desire for subjectivity promised by their recovery.

The fantasy objects are not purely discursive or Symbolic, but instead slip in-between the registers of the Symbolic and the Real. In a sense, the promise of subjectivity offered by the lost object(s) of the fantasy is not merely how the subject her/himself sees the object, but how the subject perceives the *gaze of the object back at her/him*. With the gaze of a whole American subject and world peace imagined as projected back toward the subject (in other words, with the potential for such promises seemingly at hand), the subject feels that s/he is expected to desire according what the fantasy offers. Or, the subject's desire to be whole is subtly steered towards these objects. Accordingly, the representations of Iraq and the "axis of evil" frustrate the subjectivities offered in the fantasy discourse of the speech, and thus channel the affective dimensions of subjectivity of a receiving audience. The most (in)famous passage from the speech concisely illustrates some of these themes:

States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger. They could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred. They could attack our allies or attempt to blackmail the United States. In any of these cases, the price of indifference would be catastrophic (Bush 2002).

Read through a Lacanian lens, then, the social construction of Iraq's grafting into the war on terror is constituted by much more than merely representations of us and them. We are "good" and they are "evil." We defend "freedom" and pursue "justice" while they commit "murder" and spread "terror." The mutual constitution of identities is set up in hierarchical terms that values one and demonizes the other. However, as demonstrated here, the complex dynamics of desires and the interweaving movements of subjectivity and affect *constitute the conditions of possibility* for the binary "identities" that conventional views on social construction focus upon. Like the September 20, 2001 speech, the identification dynamics of the State of the Union speech were largely driven by *that which is absent* from the text, "missing" national objects and

fantasies that promise to act as a screen against the impossibility of becoming the “America” that is always held as just-out-of-reach. These “missing” elements of identification, although the most inexpressible aspects of identification, constitute the strongest and most appealing points of affective attachment to the subjectivity the fantasy offers.

The Hegemonic Politics of the War on Terror Fantasy

A Lacanian reading of the grafting of Iraq into the war on terror demonstrates that the social construction processes involved in the politics of the Iraq war were much more complex than existing IR formulations acknowledge. More than merely the construction of an “other” against which “we” drew our identity, the signifier “Iraq” took a central place in the fantasy of the collective subject “America.” This continual definition was achieved through the ways in which desire and fantasy were organized through the structure of the University discourse, which in turn channeled the affective appeals of these discourses. While the president was obviously not the only speaker who helped to articulate the discourse, Jackson (2005, 154) notes how the war on terror remained consistent and coherent across a variety of speakers (not to mention media and institutional contexts [Croft 2006]) without significant deviations from the main narrative.

This is not to say, of course, that there was no political contestation in the shaping of the fantasy. As Laclau’s approach reminds us, the politics of discursive hegemony is always a struggle. The creation of “common sense” for a society is not without resistance, and although some discourses do achieve dominance to the extent that they are able to crowd out competing discourses, they must maintain this dominance through constant articulation. Discourses require continual maintenance. Hegemony, however, does not occur solely on a rhetorical level. Something beyond rhetoric itself must account for the political success of some discourses over others. Not every signifier or discourse is an equal site of affective investment, and those that

are more successful (in terms of becoming more dominant) than others evoke stronger desires and thus have a greater affective appeal. The stakes in the construction of hegemony are not just about which political forces' rhetoric will prevail, but which discourse will define the fantasies in which a majority of subjects will find a sense of wholeness, what Lacan calls *jouissance*.

The ways in which the war on terror was able to marginalize alternative discourses has not, of course, gone unnoticed. As several scholars have noted, the hegemonic power of the Iraq-war on terror discourse was demonstrated not only in its pervasiveness in American culture and society (see Croft 2006), but also in the fact that many politicians did not, or politically could not, bring substantial opposition to the Bush administration's policies. Krebs and Lobasz (2007) make this point in their argument that Congressional Democrats were "rhetorically coerced" into unsustainable arguments against the Iraq war:

Part of the reason for [Democrats'] public acquiescence to the invasion of Iraq lies in the rhetorical obstacles erected after September 11. The establishment of the War on Terror as the organizing discourse in foreign policy, in combinations with the existing portrait of Saddam Hussein as evil and as a terrorist, deprived leading Democrats of socially sustainable arguments with which to oppose the administration. In short, these Democrats were "rhetorically coerced": they had been left without access to the rhetorical materials needed to craft an acceptable rebuttal. What they could do – and what they did – was raise questions about the timing and circumstances of an invasion. The boundaries of sustainable rhetoric had been narrowed after September 11, limiting the space for vocal opposition (Krebs and Lobasz 2007, 445).

The ability of the war on terror to crowd out other narratives and opposition criticism is certainly part of the story of the Iraq war. Yet Krebs and Lobasz's (2007) focus on rhetoric alone neglects how "rhetorical coercion" itself may be part of a deeper process that has more to do with the constitution of the subject and the struggle to secure a stable "identity" than merely

rhetorically boxing-in opponents.⁶ Indeed, the main question explored by this chapter is how we can understand the appeal of the war on terror-Iraq discourse *beyond* their rhetorical construction as such. Something must explain peoples' attachment to a discourse in order for it to have the necessary fixity and appeal to crowd out other competing discourses in the first place. As humanities scholar Marshall Alcorn (2002, 97) suggests, "talk is not effective simply because it fills the air or books; it is effective when it works on the desires that trigger particular meaning effects." Krebs and Lobasz's argument is more rigorous than this, but the criticism stands that there must be something else at work that explains peoples' bonds to certain discourses. The focus of this chapter has turned toward not only how hegemonic discourses are able to displace others by leaving opponents without the linguistic resources to effectively counter them, but also how to understand the grasp of these discourses that gives them fixity and subtle, but powerful, affective appeal in the first place. I have argued that national discourses of the Iraq war were powerful precisely because of the affective attachments people had to them. These fantasies offered the promise of fully healing the subject of the Nation by eliminating the sole obstacles presented to its frustration. This national fantasy had such a successful affective appeal not merely because it offered familiar rhetorical tropes of national identity to people, but more fundamentally because it offered a construction of a subject that allowed people to avoid the instability and insecurity effects of the Real at the heart of their identification processes.

It is these processes of affective identification that are fundamentally at stake in hegemonic competition. Employing the combined insights of both Lacan and Laclau, we can see how fantasy discourses, with their powerfully appealing promise of reaching the missing and

⁶ Krebs and Lobasz's (2007) and Krebs and Jackson's (2007) notion of "rhetorical coercion" seems to bear some similarities to Janice Bially Mattern's (2005) theories on "representational force" that can compel changes in the subjectivity of targeted actors. An exploration of these similarities is worthy of a paper in itself.

indefinable quality that makes “us” who “we” are (object *a*), are fought over by political forces that seek to define the Symbolic anchors around which fantasies cohere. This kind of competition was clearly evident in the politics surrounding the war on terror and the Iraq war. A particularly illustrative example can be found in the dueling speeches by President Bush and Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry given at the Republican and Democratic Presidential nomination conventions during the 2004 election campaign. Each speech was constituted by numerous attempts to define the nodal points (or, master signifiers) of American political discourse in particular ways. As Krebs and Lobasz (2007) argue, Democrats, Kerry included, were ultimately hemmed-in by speaking from within the discursive confines of the war on terror. More specifically, though, we see in them the attempt by different political forces to fill in the ultimately empty content of American nodal points, constituting implicitly competing attempts to channel the affective investments within the war on terror-Iraq fantasy.⁷

Both party convention speeches include much of the typical material one expects from such performances, such as recounting the nominees’ American roots, reiterating stances on major domestic and foreign policy issues, and offering criticism and partisan “red meat” for the party faithful. The Bush (2004) and Kerry (2004) speeches are also notable for the ways in which nodal points/master signifiers appear in them. “Freedom,” “values,” and “terror” are examples of the nodal points around which American political discourse was anchored at the time, and played central roles in both Bush’s and Kerry’s discourse. These signifiers, and others,

⁷ By looking at these two texts from 2004, I obviously do not claim that they had an impact on the Iraq war debate prior to the start of the war in March 2003. I analyze these texts simply as an illustrative example of discursive competition to hegemonize the nodal points of American political debates at the time. Although there was always resistance to the “war on terror” and “Iraq” discourses, Krebs and Lobasz (2007, 451) argue that it was not until 2006 that criticisms of the “war on terror” itself began to creep into mainstream political debate. Croft (2006, 165-213) documents how much of the resistance to the Iraq war took shape as a “no war for oil” discourse.

were arguably ones that played a major role in constructing American identification at the time.⁸

“Freedom,” for example, appears in Kerry’s (2004) speech a number of times, and although each time it is technically left undefined, its political meaning can be implied when put into context:

I learned what it meant to be America at our best. I learned the pride of our freedom. And I am determined now to restore that pride to all who look to America (Kerry 2004).

So tonight, in the city where America’s freedom began, only a few blocks from where the sons and daughters of liberty gave birth to our nation, here tonight, on behalf of a new birth of freedom . . . I accept your nomination for president of the United States (Kerry 2004).

And tonight, we have an important message for those who question the patriotism of Americans who offer a better direction for our country. Before wrapping themselves in the flag and shutting their eyes to the truth and their ears, they should remember what America is really all about. They should remember the great idea of freedom for which so many have given their lives. Our purpose now is to reclaim our democracy itself (Kerry 2004).

Kerry often deploys the nodal point “freedom” (and others like “democracy” and “America”) as a reference point from which to differentiate himself from Bush. With “freedom” having previously been defined by the Bush administration’s articulation of the war on terror, Kerry attempts to claim it as a value whose meaning is not defined by Bush, but whose more “genuine” meaning is *opposed* to the Bush administration’s conduct of war. “A new birth of freedom,” for example, in the context of the entire speech, constructs a meaning of “freedom” opposed to that which is currently dominant. The assertion that true “freedom” is not agreement or forced acquiescence to the Bush administration’s conduct of the war under the cloak of “patriotism,” as Kerry asserts, but is rather resisting both cynical political uses of “patriotism” and Republican claims about the nature of the war. These are discursive efforts both to contest the current “common sense” of what it means and to reinscribe it with new meaning. In this

⁸ Nabors (2009, 204) analyzes Bush’s speeches from September 11, 2001 to March 2003 and finds that in addition to “freedom,” the following words, among others, are found in high frequencies: “people,” “America,” “country,” “world,” “states,” “war,” and “peace.”

sense, “freedom” in Kerry’s discourse acts as an anchor around which the other signifiers of his speech refer back. This referent, due to its intrinsic ambiguity, is a kind of discursive blank slate upon which a number of different meanings are articulated. It defines the founding essence of America (“in the city where America’s freedom began”), defines America in reference to the enemy (in Kerry’s anecdote of seeing East Berlin as a child and afterward “learned the pride of our freedom”), and is a word that can be deployed in a criticism of political opposition (“they [Republicans] should remember the great idea of freedom”) (Kerry 2004). Kerry’s (2004) pledge to “fight a smarter, more effective war on terror” and his other disagreements with the Bush administration are condensed into this signifier which, among others, functions as a nodal point which his opposition political force attempts to claim for itself.

Kerry’s deployments of these nodal points/master signifiers as differentiating himself from the Bush administration not only work to temporarily fill-in these words with particular meanings, but they in fact point to the dynamics of desire driving Kerry’s entire speech. In terms of Lacan’s four discourses, Kerry’s text seems to be driven by the structure of the Hysteric’s discourse:

$$\text{Hysteric's Discourse: } \begin{array}{ccc} \underline{\$} & \rightarrow & \underline{S_1} \\ a & & S_2 \end{array}$$

As Bracher (1993, 66) explains, this structure is at work when a speaker’s experience of *jouissance* is conflicted, since the subject \$ feels that s/he is not adequately represented by the master signifiers which are currently dominant in a society. The split subject \$ is in the position of agent here, which means that the discourse is governed by a mode of questioning, resistance, and protesting. The subject \$ is driven by dissatisfaction underpinned by the lack of that which will give her/him a sense of wholeness (object *a*, in the position of truth), and seeks a new signifier that offers such a promise (Lacan 2007, 129). As such, the subject \$ interrogates the

current master signifiers S_1 which are dominant, hoping that the Symbolic order, the Other, will offer something *else* that will alleviate its frustration, dissatisfaction, and anxiety. Yet, as long as the subject $\$$ remains in this structure, all the current master signifiers S_1 are able to do are to offer is to offer a barrage of meanings that are currently defined by the master S_1 , which produces a system of knowledge S_2 (in the product position). Yet this does not satisfy the subject $\$$, since s/he is shielded from her/his desire for the missing object a , which is what s/he $\$$ is seeking.

The main messages of Kerry's speech are characterized by criticism and questioning. Politically, this is obvious – a large part of the Kerry campaign was based upon criticism of the Bush administration. Yet, what is not obvious is that the particular kind of subject produced by Kerry's discourse, and the affective contours constructed by it, is *constituted* by its protesting, and is left without a signifier of its own that can offer it the kind of stability it implicitly seeks. Many of the major passages in the speech are, on the surface, criticisms of the current administration's policies, but are implicitly driven by dissatisfaction with the current political order S_2 . For example, Kerry (2004) asserts that "we have the power to change the world, but only if we're true to our ideals. And this starts by telling the truth to the American people." He offers direct criticism of the administration: "saying there are weapons of mass destruction in Iraq doesn't make it so. Saying we can fight a war on the cheap doesn't make it so. And proclaiming 'Mission Accomplished' certainly doesn't make it so." He offers other criticisms as challenges to the prevailing definitions political values. He asserts that we will not be militarily successful in Iraq until "we have a president who restores America's respect and leadership so we don't have to go it alone in the world." "We need to make America once again a beacon in the world. We need to be looked up to, not just feared," he argues. The "conscience of the

country” is said to reside “in the hearts of Americans who are determined to give our values and our truths back to our country” (Kerry 2004).

Each of these criticisms, and others in the speech, can be understood not only as partisan political attacks, but more generally as a discourse whose subject $\$$ is dissatisfied with the prevailing Symbolic order. “We” can regain our “lost” integrity if we are “true to our ideals,” as Kerry asserts, and by rejecting the prevailing definition of how those ideals are defined by current master signifiers S_1 . Only when we reject current definitions of “respect and leadership” will we be able to reclaim their proper understandings. Only when we reject the Bush administration’s definitions will America once again become a “beacon” for others. Only when we reject the Bush administration’s approach to foreign relations and the projection of power will we “be looked up to, not just feared.” Only when we reject Republican definitions of values will their genuine meanings shine through (Kerry 2004). Discursively, each of these disapprovals is a rejection of the signifiers offered by the current System (S_1), represented by the Bush administration policies. The subject constructed within Kerry’s discourse is driven by its division $\$$, its frustration with its interrogation of the master signifiers S_1 currently dominant in the Symbolic order, and the deployment of a body of knowledge S_2 defined by the current master (represented by the Bush administration) only further frustrates the protesting subject.

What is the “missing” object in Kerry’s discourse, and how does its absence function in the fantasy offered in the speech? In the Hysteric’s discourse, object a is in the position of latent truth supporting the divided subject $\$$. The split subject $\$$ is separated from its missing object (under the bar). At several moments in the speech Kerry refers to certain qualities of “us” that are currently lacking. We must, he proposes, be “true to our ideals,” and we must take back the “values” and “truths” that have been usurped by the current administration. We must “restore”

the “pride” that is currently lacking in our national character. We must restore the “trust and credibility” to our leadership that is currently lacking. We must rediscover the “shared values that unite us” (Kerry 2004). Our lack of features that would make us whole – partially represented by signifiers like “ideals,” “values,” “pride,” “trust,” “credibility” – point to a sense that the country is not currently what it should be. The current order S_2 does not represent the subject of Kerry’s discourse as it feels it should, hence, the subject protests and questions. The chain of words that partially represent what we are missing points to the fantasy of this discourse.

Kerry’s discourse is articulated from the position of a hysterical subject $\$$ (in the agent position). As such, it constructs a subject $\$$ that is split between its representation in a chain of signifiers (S_1) and that which it feels is missing, but would offer a sense of completeness if recovered (object a). Yet, what precisely is missing is not part of Symbolic reality, but resides outside of it. The enjoyment (*jouissance*) that the subject feels is lacking is, strictly speaking, indefinable for this reason. It remains outside of Symbolic reality because it cannot adequately be symbolized or represented in discourse. Kerry’s discourse seems to circle around just such an object. A sense that we need to recover “ideals,” “values,” “truths,” “pride,” “trust,” and “credibility” are efforts to pinpoint and name precisely *what* is lacking without ever *definitively* doing so. “Ideals,” “values,” “truth,” “pride,” “trust,” and “credibility” often each have differing meanings, but here they are articulated as all overlapping, as chain of equivalences whose meanings refer back to one another. They are deployed to express some quality that is viewed as underlying and similar to all of them. They each attempt to capture a part of what is missing, yet none by itself adequately represents what this is. Here, object a (under the bar latently supporting the divided subject $\$$) is the sense that something is wrong, amiss, and lacking

without being able to directly attach an adequate signifier that fully represents it. This sense is the fantasy object of Kerry's discourse. The missing piece of the national subject partially exists in Kerry's text, in Symbolic reality. Yet, its elusiveness is also part of the Real. It is both present and absent from the discourse. Its partially-articulated character drives the desire for its (re)capture, and this absence offers the most affectively appealing, and most inarticulable, aspect of the speech. For Kerry and his campaign, there is the sense that our "ideals" have been hijacked by the current administration, who has misused them to disastrous effects. Only by reclaiming their "true" meanings, and the more sensible and less bellicose policies that follow from them, will America once again be a "beacon in the world." The way to achieve the promise of the fantasy is, of course, to vote for Kerry.

The place of the missing object in the discourse, the place of object *a*, also points to the hegemonic logic of Kerry's speech. Recall that for Laclau (2005, 116), "the logic of the *objet petit a* and the hegemonic logic are not just similar: they are simply identical." Laclau's particular understandings of universals and particulars are useful here. Within hegemonic struggles, some political forces are successful in re-inscribing the ambiguous content of "universal" nodal points with their own "particular" vision of what they mean. When the political right, for instance, is able to define "freedom" in terms of an expansive vision of spreading the values of democracy and liberty across the globe, this does not mean that this somehow accurately "reflects" the true meaning of the word. The word itself has no intrinsic meaning, since its meaning (like any other signifier) only comes from its embedding within a context of differences. Hegemonic contestation is the attempt to articulate a "part" (a particular meaning) as embodying the "whole" (the universal values of a society). Just as the logic of object *a* functions when a particular object is seen to embody the promise of full subjectivity

(when an normal object seems endowed with some “sublime” mystique, in Žižek’s [1989] words), the logic of hegemony is at work when different political forces attempt to articulate their own preferred meaning of society’s nodal points as the “true” universal definition. As Laclau (2005, 117) states, “no social fullness is achievable except through hegemony; and hegemony is nothing more than the investment, in a partial object, of a fullness which will always evade us because it is purely mythical.”

There are a few nodal point/master signifiers around which Kerry’s discourse coheres. As discussed above, “freedom” is one such term which knots together a range of meanings in the text. It is able to do so through its constitutive ambiguity. Once again, it the signifier that simultaneously defines the founding essence of America, defines America in reference to the enemy, and is a word that can be deployed in a criticism of political opposition whose policies have taken the national subject away from “true” freedom. Kerry attempts to fill in this nodal point with his own preferred meaning. As a central signifier (among others), it helps to define the “readability” of Kerry’s discourse (Lacan 2007, 189). However, its social meaning as a nodal point is also implicitly supported by a fantasy scenario which offers the promise of *jouissance* that has, in a sense, been blocked by the Bush administration. In doing so, the discourse sparks the desire for its recovery, since it is constructed as something central to who “we” are. “Freedom,” then, not only brings together a knot of social meanings, but is infused with the affective appeal of the *jouissance* it seems to promise the audience.

“Freedom” as a nodal point/master signifier is also supported by a range of other secondary signifiers that construct the system of knowledge S_2 within which the master signifiers S_1 make sense. In Laclau’s framework, these constitute a logic of equivalences that structures identifications. Kerry deploys a number of other valued signifiers (seen as valued, that is, in the

imagined gaze of the “American” Other) that both support and are supported by discursive anchors like “freedom.” For example, “values” is offered more frequently than “freedom” throughout the speech. As Kerry (2004) narrates, his parents taught him “the values of faith, family and country.” “Values are not just words, values are what we live by,” since “values spoken without actions taken are just slogans.” There exist a few “shared values that united us: family, faith, hard work opportunity and responsibility for all.” And, of course, Kerry’s definitions of these terms “aren’t Democratic values. These aren’t Republican values. They’re American values...They’re who we are” (Kerry 2004). In these articulations and others in the speech, “values” itself is a signifier that takes on different meanings in different contexts when linked to other signifiers. “Family” is another term that is frequently tied to “values.” Other terms are also deployed often in the speech, such as “united,” “democracy,” and of course “American.”

The national subject \$ of Kerry’s discourse is divided between those signifiers that represent it and those that attempt to repair the lack of what the subject is believed to be missing. A multiplicity of signifiers is deployed to pin down what the national subject, the nation, “is” and what is its lacking. Kerry argues that signifiers such as “freedom,” “values,” “united,” “family,” “faith,” and “American” accurately represent the national subject within the Symbolic order. This chain of equivalences does not merely construct American identification within the text, but is also bound together by the desire for a full “American” national subject. Each of these signifiers constitutes a discursive attempt to name a vital part of what the nation “is,” yet none of them on their own is able to fully do so. Žižek explains how this view of national identity relates to both what can be spoken in discourse, and that which cannot be fully articulated but can only be circled around. “It would...be erroneous simply to reduce the national Thing to the features

composing a specific ‘way of life.’ The Thing is not directly a collection of these features; there is ‘something more’ in it, something that *is present* in these features, that *appears* through them” (Žižek 1993, 201, emphasis in original). Just as Kerry offers a barrage of signifying “features” that are said to represent the American “way of life,” none of them adequately does so. They can only circle around the national Thing that they all attempt to represent directly. Yet, this national Thing is not something essential or fundamental, but is simply the lack of the fully expressible national subject. The desire to cover the nation’s lack, desire for a fully identifiable national subject, courses and flows along the equivalential words that attempt to represent it. Each of them attempts to penetrate “beneath” the words themselves to something more “essential,” but there is no such “beneath,” no “essence” of the nation to be expressed.

Each of these constitutes an attempt to fill in the “universal” nodal points of American political discourse with “particular” meanings. “Freedom” is stated to mean something different from how the current administration understands it, or from how it is defined in the current political order S_2 . “Values” are those meanings that we must recover from the current administration’s befouling of them. “United” and “faith” must be reclaimed from those who would wield them as cynical political tools to support unjust wars. Kerry’s own preferred visions of what these terms mean do not, of course, correspond to what they “naturally” or “objectively” mean. Rather, his speech is an attempt to fill in these widely-supported valued terms in a way that constructs “common sense” about them that is favorable to his discourse. For Laclau, this is precisely the function of hegemony – the partial filling in of a society’s universal values with particular and contingent meanings. And, I would add, a particular and contingent fantasy that channels the desires and affects sustaining them.

Just as desire holds together this chain of equivalences representing the nation, so does a chain of equivalential signifiers attempt to express that which the national subject is believed to be missing. Kerry offers a range of terms to express the sense of frustration with the current political order S_2 . As discussed above, terms like “freedom,” “ideals,” “values,” “pride,” “trust,” “credibility,” and “democracy” are deployed to convey what exactly the nation is missing. Each is something we must fully reclaim if “we” are to be ourselves again. Yet, just as no signifier could accurately and fully represent the nation as it “is,” no signifier can adequately or fully represent what the nation is believed to be “missing.” Indeed, the sheer multiplicity of attempts to pin down and name the Thing that is lacking points precisely to its indefinability. What exactly is missing is partially represented in the array of signifiers that Kerry presents to name “it.” Thus, these “universal” nodal points, “ideals,” “values,” and so on, are filled in by the particular meanings Kerry inscribes upon them.

However, at the same time Kerry attempts to fill in a range of valued “American” nodal points with his own preferred particular meanings, his text (2004) concedes much to the existing security discourse:

We are a nation at war: a global war on terror against an enemy unlike we’ve ever known before (Kerry 2004).

And then, with confidence and determination, we will be able to tell the terrorists: You will lose, and we will win. The future doesn’t belong to fear; it belongs to freedom (Kerry 2004).

I am proud that after September 11th all our people rallied to President Bush’s call for unity to meet the danger (Kerry 2004).

He accepts that there is, and that there is a need for, a war on terror. The enemy is new, unknown, and nebulous, closely reproducing existing portraits repeated since September 11, 2001 (see Jackson, 2005). While later in the speech Kerry (2004) argues for a different approach to the conduct of the war (a “smarter, more effective war on terror”), he explicitly endorses

Bush's initial response to the attacks, which presumably includes the narrative deployed to make sense of the events. In asserting that the future belongs to "freedom," and that it will win in the fight against "fear," Kerry implicitly concedes the already-sedimented version of the Bush administration's vision in which "freedom" had played a central discursive role.

Indeed, several statements from Kerry's speech sound as if they could have been a part of Bush's convention speech a few days later. The deployment of "freedom" (16 times) in Bush's (2004) speech has meanings that differ from Kerry's usage of it. "Freedom" here is the principle underpinning the expansive vision of the war on terror as the simultaneous elimination of terrorists and the aggressive and robust promotion of democracy:

The terrorists are fighting freedom with all their cunning and cruelty because freedom is their greatest fear. And they should be afraid, because freedom is on the march (Bush 2004).

The wisest use of American strength is to advance freedom (Bush 2004).

I believe all these things because freedom is not America's gift to the world; it is the almighty God's gift to every man and woman in this world (Bush 2004).

Now we go forward, grateful for our freedom, faithful to our cause, and confident in the future of the greatest nation on Earth (Bush 2004).

"Freedom" here, in contrast to its meaning in Kerry's assertions, represents a much wider understanding of what the war on terror is, and what it should be. Not only is it a justification/rationalization for an American mission to engage in particular kinds of foreign policies, but its juxtaposition against "fear," "cruelty," "terrorists" and other obstacles centers its role in constructing American identification through the narrative. As with most of the other major texts constructing the war on terror, this one also fits well with the University discourse. While offering some typical campaign rhetoric, much of Bush's speech is devoted to (re)constructing the same narrative and the same underlying fantasy of the Nation as had been offered since September 11, 2001. Master signifiers S_1 (such as "justice," "freedom," and

“America”) underpin and discursively stitch together a “war on terror” S_2 which has the effect of producing a subject S divided between its representation in the signifiers offered by the narrative S_2 and the “missing” object a whose fullness is blocked by “terrorists.

Logics of equivalence and difference, sustained by desire and fantasy, construct both “America” and its others within Bush’s speech. “Freedom,” “liberty,” “hope,” “strength,” “great nation,” “decent and idealistic and strong,” and “greatest force for good on this Earth” (Bush 2004) are all examples of Bush’s deployment of a battery of signifiers partially constructing in different ways the national/collective subject. Desire for a whole national subject in Bush’s discourse is circuited along these chains of signification, yet none offers the full representation, the *jouissance*, that each seems to promise *to the subject they designate*. This chain of American identification draws its differences against the chain that constructs the other within the speech. Like Kerry’s discourse, Bush draws differences against “terrorists,” and although this speech was given in 2004, Saddam Hussein and the Taliban are still others that are referenced to help define the US. “The murderous regimes of Saddam Hussein and the Taliban,” “terrorists,” “evil terrorists,” and “tyranny and terror” are deployed by Bush (2004) to construct a chain composing the threatening other, simultaneously drawing a boundary around “us.” Bush’s efforts to fill in these “universal” signifiers, such as “freedom,” “strength,” “terror” and so on constitute the hegemonic logic of his text. The discursive endeavors to inscribe upon these ultimately ambiguous “universal” terms with “particular” meanings through associations with the other signifiers (composing the chains of equivalences) are the attempts to define, to hegemonize, the “common sense” of what these terms mean, and how desire for subjectivity will be channeled through them.

In one regard, these two texts can be understood within the broader American presidential election climate of 2004 as instances where two parties fought over who will successfully articulate the master signifiers of American political debate, such as “freedom.” More significantly, in terms of constructions of the national subject, this competition can be understood through the coinciding logics of discursive hegemony and object *a*. However, as the differences in these two speeches demonstrate, no hegemonic definition is ever total. The simple fact that the Kerry campaign was able to challenge the Bush administration’s deployment of “freedom” (among others) shows that the official usage of it was not settled. In this sense, Laclau (2005, 70) speaks of hegemony as a “failed totality, the place of an irretrievable fullness.” Particular meanings can come to embody the universal nodal points around which political debate coheres, yet the inevitable instability of every hegemony means that total discursive closure is impossible.

As a contest between the Bush and Kerry discourses to achieve hegemony, from the perspective offered here one major reason why Kerry’s discourse was less politically successful was because it was less appealing in an affective sense. Kerry’s discourse arguably did not resonate as successfully as Bush’s because his did not offer as strong a promise of secure subjectivity as Bush’s. Bush’s discourse largely continued and repeated the same discursive (University) structure and continued to offer the same fantasy to audiences, a fantasy that had been quite successful in shaping the social contours within which large numbers of peoples’ affective dimensions of subjectivity were constituted. Bush’s discourse in the 2004 campaign was largely devoted to offering the same kind of affectively secure subject that it had offered since September 11, 2001. In this case, the fantasy promise of the Nation, of reaching a point of fullness where “we” lacked nothing and overcoming the few obstacles that blocked our

fulfillment, was more appealing than the constitutively *insecure* subjectivity offered by the Kerry campaign's discourse. The bulk of Kerry's discourse was arguably devoted to protesting the signifiers offered by the Bush administration, protesting the subject constructed by them, *not* to offering a stable, secure subject. As Lacan (2007, 66) argues, the Hysteric's discourse is one constituted by anxiety and insecurity, *not* stability and security. We can contrast this with the University discourse where "objective" bodies of knowledge S_2 , implicitly sustained by the force of master signifiers S_1 , frequently offer audiences a more secure discourse with which to identify and invest themselves. Kerry's discourse offered a less affectively appealing or "weaker" fantasy because it did not offer a strong promise of subjectivity as it had been defined by the war on terror. Kerry's discourse did in fact offer a fantasy of reclaiming lost "values" and such, but this object was being blocked not by some foreign enemy, but by the Bush administration. When Kerry discussed terrorists and terrorism, his discourse adopted and maintained the same implicit structure and foreign policy fantasy as Bush's, and thus the fantasy offered by the war on terror as a University discourse. Additionally, it is worth noting that the discursive structures underlying both of the speeches are precise (i.e. mirror) opposites. The University discourse structuring Bush's speech, and the position of the elements constituting it (i.e., knowledge S_2 in the place of agent, master signifiers S_1 as latent truth, object a as other, and the divided subject $\$$ as the product) is the mirror opposite of the position of the same elements constituting Kerry's (Hysteric) discourse. One could perhaps argue that Bush and Kerry were, in a sense, speaking different languages. Or, at the very least, they were speaking past each other.

None of this is to say, however, that every individual hailed as a subject of Bush's discourse necessarily "bought" it. Any rational or logical case offered by the Bush administration, or offered within the war on terror more generally, was arguably less important in

understanding its success than the desires it evoked and the subtle but powerfully appealing invitations to secure subjectivity that it offered. As I have argued, most successful discourses are so for these reasons. As David Morrison (2003, 278) points out,

The crucial point is that it is not that the subject, who internalizes [the] discourse, is necessarily intellectually convinced by it, but that this subject desires to believe [the] discourse in order to achieve certainty (by suturing the social) and avoid the anxiety of the gap between the symbolic and the real. The successful avoidance, via fantasy, of anxiety resulting from the failure of the symbolic marks an eruption of enjoyment within the subject. Thus fantasy is for the subject enjoyable.

Thus, perhaps the most crucial elements in understanding how discourses, like the war on terror-Iraq discourse, attain the status of “common sense” is because of how they construct and sustain fantasies that offer a way for people to avoid the anxiety and ultimate indeterminacy of their identification practices.

Hegemony, then, must be understood to *necessarily* encompass the affective dimensions of subjectivity. Viewed through Laclau’s logic of hegemony and Lacan’s logic of the object *a*, the discursive attempt to articulate a “part” (that is, a particular definition) as embodying the “whole” (the universal aspirations embodied in the term) illustrates the component of fantasy underlying the power of nodal points in the first place, and thus their affective appeal. Nodal points/master signifiers are sites of political contestation precisely because of their prominent role in structuring subjects’ identifications. As Stavrakakis (1999, 62) argues, “the signified function of the nodal point is not . . . solely reduced to its discursive position. It is supported by a whole fantasy construction.” The “gripping” power (to return to Glynos’s [1999] phrasing) of master signifiers/nodal points in people’s identifications stems from the affective appeal these signifiers have in terms of the promise of subjectivity that they offer. Like every other discourse, nodal points/master signifiers played a powerful role in the politics of the war on terror and the Iraq war. “Freedom,” for example, may have been a contested signifier between Kerry and

Bush's discourses, but their struggle over its definition was, more deeply, a competition to channel the national fantasy supporting the desire for it and its affective appeal. The struggle was a discursive competition to construct a fantasy of a national subject which subtly invited people to become subjects within/to it. "Freedom" in both texts was typically deployed as the last word for why "we" are doing what we are doing, what defines "us" in relation to "them," and often what we are "missing" and what is being kept from us by an other. It was simultaneously "our" signifier that represents "us," yet was also the Symbolic manifestation covering over our lack, which is precisely the role of the subject's fantasy. In Žižek's words (1989, 43), it is a positive embodiment of "traumatic irrationality and senselessness," a point of affective attachment so strong that we cannot (or dare not) interrogate it further, lest insecurity and anxiety set in. It is typically the last assertion, the stopping point, in the tautological and self-referential chain of signifiers representing who "we" are. If we were to interrogate "freedom" to exhaustion, we would inevitably have to resort back to its equivalential signifiers (e.g. "liberty," "justice," "good," etc.) from which its meaning differs and is deferred to. In doing so, we would realize that far from representing our "essence" or "who we really are," that it is instead a securing fantasy which we (re)construct for ourselves to avoid the ultimate ambiguity of the Nation.

In this sense, "freedom" functioned as a nodal point in the war on terror because it was the partial embodiment of the just-out-of-reach object *a*. The fantasy object of "freedom" was a site of political inscription, and in embodying a promise of wholeness ("true freedom") and a fully stable and secure "identity" it offered a powerful affective lure for people whose lack, desires, and identifications had been structured through the fantasy of the war on terror since September 11, 2001. This element of fantasy is crucial for understanding the appeal of the

discourse in terms of what it offered for peoples' identifications. Thus, these elements are a vital component of the hegemonic power of the war on terror (Stavrakakis 1999, 82). The competition over "freedom" in the war on terror-Iraq discourse was not merely a rhetorical struggle over its social meaning, but more fundamentally was a contest over how the discourse of the national fantasy would be channeled, and thus what kinds of political subjects would be (re)produced by it.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to demonstrate the necessity of accounting for the affective underpinnings of the discursive grafting of Iraq into the war on terror, and the affective dimensions of the politics of discursive hegemony. I first offered a critical review of existing arguments and analyses that IR scholars have offered on how Iraq was incorporated through rhetorical "sleights of hand" by the Bush administration. I subsequently demonstrated that desire is necessary for more fully understanding the equivalences that account for this discursive merger through an analysis of the 2002 State of the Union address. I then analyzed the affective politics of discursive hegemony in dueling speeches by two opposing political forces. George W. Bush and John Kerry's convention speeches in 2004 not only illustrate the struggles that occur over the definitions and re-inscriptions of common American nodal points, but also must be understood to channel the desires and affects of audiences through the respective fantasies that they offered. The affective dimension of hegemony is one that has largely yet to be incorporated into IR scholars accounts for foreign policy and national security discourses.

The analyses and arguments offered in this chapter were addressed to specific gaps in both the IR theoretical literature and in recent work on the war on terror and the Iraq war. What this chapter has not offered, however, is a historical analysis of the genealogical roots of the war on terror. Several scholars have examined how the war on terror has relied upon a variety of

historical narratives that are deeply embedded both within American foreign relations and American culture more broadly. Many have noted how elements of the war on terror bear a close structural resemblance to the operating assumptions of the Cold War system of “us” and “them,” just as others have noted how the Bush administration relied heavily upon long-established notions of American exceptionalism. One strand of thought that arguably had a tremendous impact upon the Bush administration’s approach to foreign affairs was neoconservatism. Indeed, many commentators, both popular and academic, have poured over the links between neoconservatives and the Bush administration, and the disproportionate influence that they arguably had during Bush’s first term. Although several IR scholars have examined neoconservatism and its relevance to the war on terror, few have analyzed its affective power. Neoconservatism has been a vocal and influential movement in American foreign policy for at least three decades, stretching back to the 1970s. Although neoconservatism likely reached its peak during its time in the halls of power after September 11, 2001, its influence on American foreign policy over time has been a story of ups-and-downs, ebbs-and-flows. The affective dynamics of the rise and fall of neoconservatism suggest untapped theoretical and empirical questions worth asking, and are the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6
THE AFFECTIVE POWER OF NEOCONSERVATISM: PART I

The truth is that the benevolent hegemony exercised by the United States is good for a vast proportion of the world's population. It is certainly a better international arrangement than all realistic alternatives. To undermine it would cost many others around the world far more than it would cost Americans – and far sooner.

Robert Kagan (1998, 26)

I know that engagement with repressive regimes lacks *the satisfying purity of indignation*. But I also know that sanctions without outreach — and condemnation without discussion — can carry forward a crippling status quo.

Barack Obama (2009, emphasis added)

Introduction

The visceral emotions surrounding the impact of neoconservatism on world politics no doubt help to explain the recent interest International Relations (IR) scholars have shown in the topic. While there has been popular and academic commentary on neoconservatism for a long time, it seems to have been the George W. Bush administration's particular outlook on foreign policy and the resultant politics of the Iraq war that have prompted many IR scholars to focus their attention on it. Many have rightly focused on the pivotal roles of neoconservatives in key positions in the Bush administration (Halper and Clarke 2004), while others have examined its theoretical underpinnings and its status as a theory of international politics (Rapport 2008; Williams 2005). Some have examined the debate between realists and neoconservatives over justifications for the Iraq war (Schmidt and Williams 2008). Others still have criticized neoconservatism and the Bush Doctrine's understandings of power, legitimacy, and morality, arguing that they are a unilateral form of idealism (Reus-Smit 2004).¹

¹ Other recent work in IR on neoconservatives examines their links to the thought of Leo Strauss (Drolet 2009; George 2005), their political morality (Guelke 2005), and their embrace of democratic peace theory (Ish-Shalom 2007-8). Additionally, see Durham (2006), Hurst (2005), and Owens (2007).

I build upon this growing body of work on neoconservatism, albeit from a new perspective. The strong emotions evoked in many observers of global politics by neoconservatism actually points to a gap in this literature. While an examination of its logic and political and theoretical perspective is crucial, scholarly analyses have neglected understanding what we might call neoconservatism's affective or emotional appeal. Neoconservative ideas undoubtedly resonated with American audiences after the shock of September 11, 2001, and this resonance likely goes some way towards explaining the widespread public support for the Iraq war in 2002 and 2003 (see Kull, Ramsay, and Lewis 2003/4). Although much attention in IR on neoconservatism seems to have been after the beginning of the Iraq War, a look at the history of neoconservatism shows that its ideas have been present in American foreign policy debates for decades. Like any political movement, its influence on public debate has ebbed and flowed over time. Although neoconservatism perhaps reached the pinnacle of its influence on policy during the Bush administration after September 11, 2001, it has had substantial public presence decades before.

In this chapter and the following one, I explore these hitherto-neglected ebbs and flows of neoconservative influence in terms of its varying affective appeal. Neoconservatism (which I argue is, fundamentally, a *discourse*) evokes a variety of images and narratives of American national identity, and its appeal, or its resonance with audiences, is based upon how it mobilizes those elements of national identity. The discursive power and appeal of neoconservative discourses, I argue, can be understood by comparing the affective security it offers with what competing discourses offers to its audiences. Employing the theoretical framework elaborated in chapter three, systematically blending insights from Lacan and Laclau, I offer an exploration of the central question posed in these two chapters: what accounts for the rise and fall of

neoconservative influence on American foreign policy debates? I argue that the ebbs and flows of its appeal over time can largely be traced by to the particular kind of identification that it offers audiences. Conventional discourse analytic methods are unable to account for the sources of these ups-and-downs since they offer no theoretical lens through which to capture the differential affective appeal of competing discourses. My approach, in contrast, drawing upon concepts such as identification, desire, affect, and fantasy, *is* able to probe into deeper sources of identification that allow for a more comprehensive and compelling understanding of why some discourses are more politically efficacious than others. The analysis it can provide thus offers a substantial contribution to the literature on neoconservatism, showing how its ebbs-and-flows of resonance with audiences can be traced back to the fantasies and identifications it has offered at different times.

In examining the rise and fall of neoconservatism, this chapter and the next not only demonstrate the analytical strength of my theoretical approach in terms of its ability to uncover the differential affective appeal of discourses, but also demonstrates that hitherto-neglected factors of desire, affect, and fantasy are in fact central to understanding the social construction process itself. The power of words hinges not upon their mere utterance, but in the way they evoke, satisfy, or frustrate an audiences' desires for identification.

There seems to be at least two periods prior to September 11, 2001 when neoconservatism significantly shaped public debate over foreign policy. The first was during the Carter administration and early Reagan administration. Some of the most effective criticisms of Carter's approach to foreign policy, for example, came from neoconservative godfathers such as Norman Podhoretz and Irving Kristol. John Ehrman (1995, 99) notes that during this time the neoconservatives "were gaining increasing press attention," which undoubtedly "served to

increase their own sense of importance and self-confidence.” Heilbrunn (2008, 137) similarly finds that they “enjoyed in this brief period what may well be considered the peak of their significance and value as a movement.” Contemporaneous work and commentary on the neoconservatives at the time also illustrates the rapidly increasing attention they were receiving. In 1977, the *New York Times* explored the growing appeal of conservative ideas in America, and found that its “intellectual leadership” was being provided “by a group of once-liberal writers and academics, nearly all Democrats, dubbed the ‘neoconservatives’” (Smith 1977). In “such small and influential magazines such as *Commentary*, edited by Mr. Podhoretz, and *The Public Interest*, edited by Mr. Kristol and Mr. [Nathan] Glazer,” the *Times* continued, neoconservatism was gaining ground in public debate over both foreign and domestic policy. Additionally, Peter Steinfels’s book, *The Neoconservatives: The Men Who Are Changing America’s Politics*, published in 1979, testifies to their growing influence at this time.

A second period of public prominence seems to have been the later 1990s. Halper and Clarke (2004, 74-111) document how during the 1990s the neoconservatives swung widely “from near death to resurrection” in terms of their public impact. Having spent the early part of the decade both lamenting the new lack of focus of American foreign policy and attempting to re-orient it themselves, neoconservatives spent the later 1990s accentuating themes of neoconservative thought that had previously not taken center stage. “Quite unexpectedly,” Halper and Clarke (2004, 74) note, “the neo-conservatives used the last decade of the twentieth century to reinvent and redefine themselves” around three interlinking elements: “force as the preferred policy option, black-and-white moralism as the preferred form of analysis, and unilateralism as the preferred mode of execution.” Yet, these new emphases were not articulated in isolation from international context. A substantial portion of their intellectual energy during

the late 1990s was focused on Iraq as the most immediate national security threat. In addition, they paid much attention to the challenges to American power posed by China, Russia, North Korea, and their perceived decline of American military power itself (Halper and Clarke 204, 110). For reasons elaborated below, these constructions of threats offer a glimpse into why neoconservatism was able to gain increasing public traction during this period.

Neoconservatism's visible presence during the late 1970s and later 1990s contrasts with what seems to be its diminished influence during the early 1990s. Just as neoconservatism has had peaks of public presence, it has also had troughs. The end of the Cold War left many casting about to find a framework through which to make sense of this monumental change. IR scholars were, of course, no exception (see Gaddis 1992-93). The neoconservatives, in this sense, were no different than other intellectual/political movements at the time. Part of this, no doubt, stems from the fact that they split into a few different ideological camps at this time. Some argued that with the implosion of the Soviet Union, the U.S. was now free to assert its power and shape the "New World Order" as it best saw fit, since no other state even remotely had the capacities to constrain it. Syndicated columnist Charles Krauthammer (1989/90, 49) wrote that the U.S. should "stop at nothing short of universal dominion," and that American purpose was now a "democratic crusade" (47). Other neoconservatives disagreed. Some believed that American foreign policy should adhere to more realist principles guided by the prudent pursuit of a narrow national interest. Jeane Kirkpatrick (1990, 40-3), for example, responded that "it is not the American purpose to establish 'universal dominance' in the provocative formulation of Charles Krauthammer – not even the universal dominance of democracy." Irving Kristol (1991), in a similar vein, argued that "there is no balance of power for us to worry about," and cautioned that

the U.S. should not busy itself with grand visions of spreading democracy, which easily shade into imperialistic temptations.

These ebbs-and-flows of neoconservatism's resonance with audiences can arguably be traced back to the kinds of emotional and affective responses it evokes. Both before and after the U.S. invasion of Iraq in March 2003, the arguments offered by politicians and pundits cobbled together under this label have provoked, and still provoke, a multiplicity of strong reactions.² To its disciples, neoconservatism is often held up as the last best defense of civilized nations against the onslaught of dark forces from outside. It stands firm and unyielding against those who would seek to destroy our values and our way of life, and to replace it with weaker principles that are incapable of providing the same strength of moral compass that Western values offer. Indeed, this is often the deep reason underlying much neoconservative argumentation on both domestic issues and foreign affairs. Since Western values are universal they are the last bulwark opposing the social decay that will inevitably occur if non-Western values gain a foothold. Indeed, as the above quote from neoconservative writer Robert Kagan suggests, Western values are universal not only because they are in our best interests, but because they serve the interests of everyone around the world. The decay brought on by excessive liberalism in domestic politics, and the chaos, and inevitable violence, which will occur if Western values cede (or are forced out of) their dominant position of global influence is the ultimate fear of the neoconservative "persuasion." And, as Kagan states, anyone who does not reach this conclusion simply does not realize that the benevolence displayed by the United States is good for them. This perhaps partly explains their combative style and supreme self-confidence, and constant sense of looming

² As is well-known, Irving Kristol (2004) argued that neoconservatism is better thought of as a "persuasion" rather than a coherent set of axiomatic beliefs. While I do not engage here with the politics of its naming, or with the arguments advanced by those who are categorized as neoconservatives but disavow their inclusion, I recognize the relevance of these debates. For more on this, see Dorrien (2004, 7-25).

disaster. To paraphrase the title of Jacob Heilbrunn's (2008) recent history of neoconservatism, they *know* they are right.

To its critics, however, neoconservatism arouses a level of ire that is perhaps currently unmatched by any other outlook on foreign policy. Most obviously, the rationales and justifications offered for the Iraq war, the strategic blunders associated with the preparation and conduct of the war, and the lives lost as a result offer plenty of reasons to denounce neoconservative ideas and their influence on American foreign policy. These ideas, many argue, have had such a destructive impact not only on untold lives around the world, but their policy implementation has so damaged the US and its capacities to deal effectively with a range of international issues that it will take years for the US to climb out of the reputational pit that neoconservatism has dug. The state of American foreign relations at present, not to mention the state of Iraq, stands in almost ridiculous contrast to the self-assurance and certainty that neoconservatives displayed just a few years ago. It is fitting, detractors argue, that now, albeit after disaster has already occurred, that neoconservatism is getting the scrutiny and criticism it deserves. With the blunders of the Iraq war, and a new administration, these previously dominant ideas seem safely out of the halls of power. Even its former disciples believe that the "neoconservative moment seems to have passed" (Fukuyama 2006; see also Ikenberry 2004).

These two chapters proceed as follows.³ This chapter analyzes the influence of neoconservatism in the closing years of the 1970s (the first period of heightened public impact), comparing the collective fantasies in the competing discourses of Jimmy Carter and Norman Podhoretz. I argue that a major reason why neoconservatism became so successful at this time

³ I forego both an overview of what could be considered the general tenets of neoconservative thought, and a review of the history of neoconservatism both as a movement and as an ideology. On the former, see Stelzer (2004). On the latter, see Dorrien (1993), Ehrman (1995), Halper and Clarke (2004), and Heilbrunn (2008).

was because of the subtle fantasies of a national “self” in neoconservative discourse offered a greater sense of stability of the “self,” underpinned by affective investments desires, than did prominent discourses offered by the Carter administration.⁴ Carter’s discourse about the nation’s “crisis of confidence” offered a much less-defined fantasy of the national subject than did the neoconservative discourses it competed against at the time. Podhoretz’s discourse offered a relatively more-defined fantasy of the national subject and the obstacles to its enjoyment or fullness. I argue that these stronger desires it evoked are a major reason why neoconservatism began to gain influence in the closing years of the 1970s. After analyzing these two competing texts from this early period of neoconservative influence, the following chapter examines the changing fortunes of neoconservatism in the 1990s. Neoconservatism become much more prominent in American foreign policy debates as that decade progressed, and in contrasting and analyzing the fantasies found in the writings of Charles Krauthammer and William Kristol and Robert Kagan I argue that its rising influence can largely be traced back to the kinds of desires each of their discourses evoke. For each text, I combine the insights that Lacan’s theories offer on affective appeal and desire with Laclau’s framework for understanding how attempts at discursive hegemony (a society’s “common sense”) are constructed. The analysis of each text, then, proceeds in three steps: first, I detail the structure of the discourse, understood through Lacan’s four discourses; second, I analyze the fantasy and identification appeal of the text; and third, I examine of how these aspects underpin the hegemonic logic of each text.

Carter and the “Crisis of Confidence”

As their history shows, many of the themes that guided neoconservatives’ thinking through the last three decades can be traced back to their reactions to the social upheavals of the

⁴ I place the word “self” in quotations to re-emphasize that there is no such thing as a fully-defined self or subject. Subjects desire to be a full “self” through continual identification process through fantasies.

1960s and American foreign policy throughout much of the 1970s. Particularly in the realm of foreign relations, neoconservatives' stances against the Soviet Union and embrace of anti-communism often displayed a vehemence that contrasted vividly with the cautious reciprocity of détente on the part of different administrations, and what they saw as the larger foreign policy "establishment," during the decade. As Ehrman (1995, 106) recalls, "the neoconservatives saw Communist expansion in the 1970s as not just a potential problem, but as an awful reality." In their view, the U.S. foreign policy establishment had caught a nasty case of "Vietnam syndrome;" scarred by the burdens and legacy of the war, previously hawkish liberals had begun to capitulate on the necessity of American military might. The fear was that a lack of willpower on the part of the US to defend its interests (and by extension, the interests of the West) by projecting power would combine with the growing assertiveness of Soviet expansionism, thereby endangering democratic states everywhere. A forum in *Commentary* magazine in July 1975 entitled "America Now: A Failure of Nerve?" illustrated neoconservative concerns over this perceived trend.

Jimmy Carter, arriving in office on a wave of anti-Washington sentiment after years of Nixon, Vietnam, and their aftermath, appeared to the neoconservatives to embody the "failure of nerve" that they had been lamenting. Carter and his administration believed that the high point of tensions with the Soviet Union, having peaked during the 1960s, was largely ending and a new global environment was emerging where superpower rivalry was less important for American foreign policy than attention to human rights and issues of interdependence. In June 1977, for example, Carter gave a speech in which he expressed optimism that the U.S., he believed, was now largely free of its "inordinate fear of communism," which had led to

questionable alliances with unsavory and undemocratic leaders.⁵ Carter did not see the same Soviet aggressiveness that neoconservatives did. Consequently, they launched continuous attacks on him once they realized that he saw the global situation in diametrically opposed terms as they did. Carter's foreign policy focus was, for the neoconservatives, far from the strength that was required to confront Soviet expansion, and was instead the model of "crackpot moralism" that neoconservatives argued underpinned 1930s-style appeasement (Heilbrunn 2008, 145).

These foreign policy debates took place, of course, within the larger context of the late 1970s domestic economic crisis. Oil shocks, rising inflation, and stagnating economic growth throughout the decade occurred alongside massive social changes. Many of the trends rooted in the 1960s broadened in the following decade, not only civil rights issues, but related shifts in social mores that many saw as the source of complex national problems. Rising crime rates, climbing divorce rates, greater attention to abortion, and a more pronounced sense of greater social permissiveness led many to question the well-being of the country as a whole. Like economic tribulations, "social problems were also symbolic of a broader national slide. Things were simply worse wherever one looked" (Busch 2005, 14).

With these troubles besetting Carter throughout his tenure, by 1979 he was right in sensing a "crisis of confidence." As Andrew Busch (2005, 14) summarizes, the "war in Vietnam, the failures of the War on Poverty, and the Watergate scandal severely damaged Americans' confidence in their government." In July the president spent ten days at Camp David meeting with an array of leaders, intellectuals, and citizens, and returned to Washington to address the country about its problems. The speech he gave on July 15 covered not only the energy crisis, as

⁵ Full text at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=7552>.

many anticipated it would, but more substantially offered a deeper diagnosis of the country's problems.⁶ "It's clear that the true problems of our Nation are much deeper – deeper than gasoline lines or energy sources, deeper even than inflation or recession." The root of the country's sour mood was a fundamental ambiguity in national purpose.

The threat is nearly invisible in ordinary ways. It is a crisis of confidence. It is a crisis that strikes at the very heart and soul and spirit of our national will. We can see this crisis in the growing doubt about the meaning of our own lives and in the loss of a unity of purpose for our nation. The erosion of our confidence in the future is threatening to destroy the social and the political fabric of America.

The plummeting public confidence in government, defeat abroad and defeatism at home, and economic problems caused by multiple sources were all symptoms of a deep shift in attitudes and outlooks of Americans towards not just the problems themselves, but towards how they lived their lives. "In a nation that was once proud of hard work, strong families, close-knit communities," and a "faith in God," Carter argued that,

Too many of us now tend to worship self-indulgence and consumption. Human identity is no longer defined by what one does, but by what one owns. But we've discovered that owning things and consuming things does not satisfy our longing for meaning. We've learned that piling up material goods cannot fill the emptiness of lives which have no confidence or purpose.

The "crisis" had no easy answer, Carter stressed. Americans could not defeat an enemy abroad to win victory in this struggle, nor was the problem a technical or legal one that could be solved through public policy. He admitted his belief that "all the legislation in the world can't fix what's wrong with America." The choice Americans had, as Carter saw it, was between two different paths, and it was one that they had to make for themselves. One path was one the country was already showing signs of pursuing. It was the path of pure "self-interest" and materialistic consumption which accelerated social disintegration and pessimism. "Down that

⁶ Full text at http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/carter/filmmore/ps_crisis.html.

road lies a mistaken idea of freedom, the right to grasp for ourselves some advantage over others. That path would be one of constant conflict between narrow interests ending in chaos and immobility,” and was destined for failure. The other path was one of “common purpose and the restoration of American values. That path leads to true freedom for our nation and ourselves.” But, by shunning the easy path of economic selfishness and materialism, Americans could restore the values that they had temporarily strayed from. In doing so, they could overcome the crisis and regain the confidence once lost. The fundamental solution, as Carter saw it, was that Americans “must simply have faith in each other, faith in our ability to govern ourselves, and faith in the future of this nation.”

Carter’s message was quickly dubbed the “malaise” speech (although the word never appears in the address). Not long afterwards many wondered whether the President himself was a major part of the crisis, rather than merely being the messenger of bad news. Less than a month after the speech, the *New York Times* reported that “there is a belief that [Carter] has failed to handle the crisis, and that he, perhaps, has added to it” (Raines 1979). Indeed, the speech seemed to provoke a “boomerang effect.” “even among sympathetic listeners...it raised old doubts and provoked new questioning about the President’s abilities” (Raines 1979). Other commentators since have agreed, and have reflected on the notion of how much bluntness the public can handle without being unsettled. “The nation was stunned,” recalls historian Kenneth E. Morris (1996, 5). “Although Americans had long vaguely understood their nation to rest on faith – a belief in national progress, in the American dream – few were prepared to admit its collapse” (Morris 1996, 5). Even if not all perceived a message as serious as “collapse,” most still evidently were uncomfortable with the image of a president conveying such a message, one that, even in past times of crisis, presidents typically have avoided. “Frankness and honesty were

not what [people] wanted. They wanted the reassurance of someone who would not burden them with the difficulties, but would appear to be thoroughly in command” (Bourne 1997, 445). All of this undoubtedly sheds some light on the reception, and subsequent remembering, of Carter’s speech.⁷ Yet, I argue, without belittling the importance of such a reading, that the deeper reason for the negative reception that the speech garnered has more to do with the way in which (in Lacanian terms) Carter’s discourse dealt with the national loss experienced, rather than the way in which he offered a screen against the instability of the collective “self.” The effects of Carter’s discourse are better understood by examining the kind of identification it offered audiences, and the desires and frustrations it evoked through the collective fantasy it constructed. In addition, approaching the speech in this way uncovers some of the dynamics of desire that account for why other competing discourses of neoconservatism were more politically successful.

Examining this speech from the theoretical perspective elaborated in chapter three can help us uncover the roles of discursive and affective appeals that are not immediately apparent. How should we understand the appeal of the speech in terms of insights from Lacan and Laclau? First, Carter’s speech is peppered with an array of master signifiers, or nodal points, that are valued in American political culture. “Freedom,” “strong,” “America,” “American people” – such signifiers are crucial as those markers that give added weight to certain instances of discourse. These are privileged points in social and political messages because of their role not only as strong intersubjectively held values, but also because they are sites of investment for people who desire the affective security and stability that these prized signifiers offer (Bracher 1993, 24-5). Or, as Lacan (2007, 189) puts it, they define the “readability” of a discourse. These

⁷ For other contemporaneous reactions, see Goldman (1979), Walsh (1979), and Broder (1979).

signifiers, and others, function as the discursive anchors around which national “identity” coheres because of the way they stitch together the various meanings in the text of who “we” and “they” are. Often, such points tie together strings of signifiers that form chains of identification and difference, or what Laclau calls equivalence and difference. “Freedom,” “strong,” “America,” and the “American people” and others each form links in a circle of signifiers that are largely equivalent to each other in terms of their meaning. In this case the construction of the “Nation” stands in for the perceived Other that an audience imagines conferring recognition on them by adopting such values as their own.

Yet, to dig more deeply into the speech’s appeal (or lack thereof), we must look at the fate of these signifiers in the discourse of the speech, since “what happens to our sense of being or identity is determined to a large degree by what happens to those signifiers that represent us (Bracher 1993, 25). To discern the collective subject that the speech constructs, we can map the underlying fantasy that the discourse offers in relation to the elusive national “object” that is posited as lost. Quite explicitly, Carter’s discourse centers around the loss of what he terms national confidence. By confidence, Carter refers to the “unity of purpose” that is perceived to have fortified the nation in past times that has now been replaced by doubt and pessimism. In addition to “confidence” as the signifier attached to this condition throughout the speech, Carter also affixes other words to the national mood, a few examples of which are a lack of “faith,” “progress,” “spirit,” “unity,” and “purpose” – which if restored will bring us “true freedom.”

In one sense, Carter’s words did reflect the country’s mood at the time. Yet, Carter was not only presenting or representing the “reality” of politics at the time, he also was actively constructing a particular understanding of what the national mood was, and what solutions existed. Yet this does not explain why this discourse was not as politically successful as

competing discourses at the time. To more fully understand the “grip,” or lack thereof, of this speech, I propose to analyze the speech using the framework of Lacan’s four discourses. This will allow us to identify the loss driving the articulation of the discourse, and the fantasy underpinning it.

Discourse Structure

Let us again recall the basic structure of Lacan’s theory of discourse:

$$\frac{\text{Agent}}{\text{Truth}} \rightarrow \frac{\text{Other}}{\text{Product}}$$

By mapping Carter’s discourse in terms of how master signifiers S_1 , knowledge S_2 , the split subject $\$$, and loss a are positioned relative to one another via these four possible positions, we can explore which particular discourse (Master, Hysteric, University, or Analyst) best fits Carter’s. The main message in the speech centers around the national loss of “confidence,” “faith,” “progress,” “spirit,” “unity,” and “purpose.” The “American people” as a subject is constructed not only in politically familiar terms of strength and accomplishment (overcoming the crisis), but also in terms of missing something essential that determines who the “American people” are. Carter, as speaker, positions himself as one who recognizes this crisis, and who simultaneously has a solution to overcome it. The way out that he offers is, first, to convince the audience that the signifiers to which they have adhered are fundamentally flawed. The country’s problems stem not from readily identifiable enemies, but rather its embrace (in Carter’s view) of values – in fact, *signifiers* – that have led it down the wrong path. Carter, for example, states that too many Americans “now tend to worship *self-indulgence* and *consumption*.” Too many Americans have “learned that *piling up material goods* cannot fill the *emptiness* of lives which have no confidence or purpose.” Such values lead to “a *growing disrespect* for government and for churches and for schools, the news media, and other institutions.” Hence, the fork-in-the-

road that Carter saw the nation facing consisted in one path “that leads to more *fragmentation* and *self-interest*...That path would be one of constant *conflict* between *narrow interests* ending in *chaos* and *immobility*. It is a certain route to *failure*” (emphases added).

Carter is, in a sense, protesting master signifiers that he sees as dominant in American political culture. Americans’ attachment to “fragmentation,” “self-interest,” “self-indulgence,” “consumption,” and the like are projected as the crux of the problem. These are not the values that have made America the land of progress and optimism in the past; the nation’s obedience to them now is the source of the “crisis of spirit.” The values to which the audience *should* adhere are ones that Carter himself offers. A renewed devotion to “unity,” “common purpose,” and “confidence” will, in his view, bring about a national re-orientation which will lead down the path of “true freedom.” These appeals fit well with the logic of the Hysteric’s discourse:

$$\text{Hysteric's Discourse: } \frac{\$}{a} \rightarrow \frac{S_1}{S_2}$$

Recall that this type of discourse is characterized by questioning and protesting (see chapter three). Carter’s discourse positions its master signifiers S_1 , knowledge S_2 , split subject $\$$, and loss a relative to each other in such a way as to construct a national subject whose insecurity and instability are at the forefront, driving the articulation of the discourse. Mark Bracher (1993, 66) explains that the Hysteric’s discourse is in effect whenever the subject is conflicted as a failure in its efforts to “coincide with, or be satisfied with the *jouissance* underwritten by, the master signifiers offered by society and embraced as the subject’s ideals.” Carter’s discourse constructs a subject $\$$ that is indeed conflicted between the ideals that society offers and that which it feels is missing from its being. The subject – that is, as Carter would want to construct it – protests society’s dominant signifiers such as “indulgence” and “consumption.” The subject is prompted by the desire to re-capture a fundamental part of itself that has been lost (partially

symbolized by “confidence,” “spirit,” “unity,” etc.) – object *a*. Carter offers a barrage of new master signifiers S_1 which promise the security and stability that is desired, and which promise to once again make “America” whole. This will, in turn, produce a new system of knowledge S_2 , the renewed sense of purpose that will once again heal the ruptures that have plagued the national subject. I next clarify how each of these different elements $\$, S_1, S_2,$ and *a* must be elaborated in terms of how exactly they appear (or, do not appear) in Carter’s speech.

What exactly is the split subject $\$$ in the speech, how is it constructed, and what is its relation to the other elements S_1, S_2, a ? In the Hysteric’s discourse, the split subject $\$$ is dissatisfied with the current order, and protests or questions its perceived place in that order.

The bulk of Carter’s address can be viewed as an expression of the subject’s dissatisfaction with what he sees as the prevailing order and attitudes of the country. Although Carter begins by addressing the problems associated with the energy crisis, he quickly moves to address problems that are much deeper than energy shortages. The subject that Carter’s discourse constructs is lacking, that is, the nation – “America” – is lacking something of itself. Carter articulates this in multiple ways in the speech. First and foremost is the loss of “confidence,” which for him represents something fundamentally American. “The fundamental threat to American democracy” that Carter sees, and which a range of citizens with whom he met prior to the speech informed him of, was “nearly invisible in ordinary ways,” “but strikes at the very heart and soul and spirit of our national will.” He could see it “in the growing doubt about the meaning of our own lives and in the loss of a unity or purpose for our nation.” We are not ourselves, he finds, and it is insidiously eating away at the country. “The erosion of our confidence in the future is threatening to destroy the social and political fabric of America.” Confidence is, in Carter’s view, an appropriate name to attach to the problem. Or, rather, the

lack of confidence is what is leading America down the wrong path. The “crisis of confidence” is not just a crisis self-assurance, but one of deep belief in what is possible for the nation as a whole. Thus, not only is there a loss of faith in the government, but it coincides with a lack of confidence in the strength of American culture and society. “Our people are losing that faith, not only in government itself but in the ability as citizens to serve as the ultimate rulers and shapers of our democracy.”

America is not what it should be, and it is evident not only in feelings signified by “confidence,” “will,” “faith,” and so on, but is also physically manifest in measures of national status. The national subject is not what it should be, is not what it believes it should be. It feels as though it is divided from those signifiers it believes truly represent it. And, if the subject can once again find its “true” Symbolic representatives, it believes, it will no longer be a split subject. Carter continues to attempt to pin down what precisely is missing as he sees it indicated in some of the evidence he offers. Carter states, for example, that public opinion, economic production, and Americans’ financial behavior all point in a pessimistic direction. For the first time in U.S. history, Carter states, “a majority of our people believe that the next five years will be worse than the past five years. Two-thirds of our people do not even vote. The productivity of American workers is actually dropping, and the willingness of Americans to save for the future has fallen below that of all other people in the Western world.”

Yet, “confidence” is not only something that the subject “America” is currently missing, but is also something that it, in some ways, still has. Or, at least has the potential to re-energize. “Confidence” and “faith” still express something of the American character, just not as strongly as they once did. This is problematic, since, in Carter’s view, these are not simply neutral descriptors, but are fundamental characteristics of “America” itself. Consequently, the national

subject is constructed as missing or having lost its “essence,” the “fundamental” part of itself that it needs to overcome the crisis and to once again become the full subject it believes it once was. “The confidence we have always had as a people is not simply some romantic dream or a proverb in a dusty book that we read just on the Fourth of July,” Carter asserts. He maintains his “belief in the decency and the strength and the wisdom of the American people.” “Confidence in the future has always supported everything else – public institutions and private enterprise, our own families, and the very Constitution of the United States.” Carter affirms that there is a deep core essence to American society which is reflected in the American system of government, and if that essence can be re-discovered, re-ignited, and its energy re-captured, the country’s problems will begin to give way. After all, in his view, these are the very qualities that have gotten the country through difficult times in the past. “We can regain our unity. We can regain our confidence. We are the heirs of generations who survived threats much more powerful and awesome than those that challenge us now.”

What “America” *is*, in its construction as a collective subject in the text of the speech, is divided between what “we” are in the present and those distinctly “American” qualities that are currently missing. The nation lacks “confidence,” and also lacks a range of different attributes that are cobbled together under the signifier “confidence.” Public opinion, economic production, Americans’ financial behavior, energy problems, pessimism about national institutions and government are all delineated throughout the speech as different indicators of what is wrong with the national subject, but for Carter all of these factors point to something coherent believed to be underpinning all of them. Both the nation’s current status and what the nation is missing are necessary to understanding the subject of Carter’s speech. Both aspects are constructed as part of the current national experience. The nation is not *only* a nation that is experiencing a crisis of

confidence. Nor does Carter articulate “America” as *only* the epitome of strength, democracy, and possibility. The nation as it currently “is” *and* its shortcomings are necessary for understanding the collective subject “America” in the speech. One cannot have one aspect without the other and comprehend the message of the speech. The nation’s current negative course and its positive possibility, its crisis of confidence and what Carter sees as the potential seeds to overcome it, pull in different directions. Yet, an audience cannot understand one without the other within the speech. The national subject \$ constructed within Carter’s speech is split between what it is and what it is lacking, between what it is now and what it could be. The split is constitutive of the national subject as it is constructed in the speech. The fantasy deployed in the speech (elaborated below) cannot maintain its coherency, it cannot make sense, *without* this split.

If the subject \$ is split between what it is and what it is lacking, what exactly is national subject missing? In other words, what is object *a* in the speech, that lacks/should spark the desire and the identification processes of Carter’s text? In the Hysteric’s discourse, object *a* is in the position of truth underpinning the agent position, separated by the bar □. The split subject \$ both protests the master signifier S_1 and seeks a new one (since every discourse operates through master signifiers, even protesting ones [Bracher 1994, 67]). Yet, the split subject \$ is driven by its unsatisfied desire, by its frustration with the currently dominant master signifiers S_1 that attempt to represent it. The split subject \$ as agent (in the discourse) interrogates (represented by the arrow →) the master signifier S_1 , questioning its authority and position in the hopes of satisfying its desire and healing its split.

The object *a* in the speech is not something that is explicitly articulated, but is rather something that the discourse is unable to pin down. Object *a* is not an empirically existing

entity, but is the name Lacan gives to the lack sparking the articulation of a discourse. The empty place of the discourse, that inexpressible element that the discourse never directly or explicitly captures in representation, is the lack prompting the subject's identification processes. As Žižek (1996, 144, emphasis in original) reminds us, object *a* “*does not effectively pre-exist desire as that which arouses it, it merely gives body to its inherent deadlock, to the fact that desire is never satisfied by any positive object.*” The missing object remains outside of representation, outside of the Symbolic, and is part of the Real, which means that it does not exist except as a missing element. Like every discourse, Carter's contains the place of an element that is outside of the discourse yet is necessary for the construction of the discourse.

The national subject, the collective “we,” is constructed around a loss, a loss of something posited as fundamental and, in Carter's view, uniquely “American.” “We can see this crisis,” Carter argues, “in the growing doubt about the meaning of our own lives and in the loss of a unity of purpose for our nation.” “We've always believed in something called progress. We've always had a faith that the days of our children would be better than our own.” The national mood is no less than a “crisis of the American spirit,” something that penetrates the heart of who “we” are. The “growing disrespect” for time-honored American institutions such as churches, schools, and the media is symptomatic of the crisis, he explains. The “wounds” of the assassinations and social and political turmoil of the 1960s still fester, in Carter's view. A vital part of the national subject is viewed as having been taken away by the economic and social upheavals of the 1960s. Those events sapped something from the national subject that, in Carter's construction, was essential to it. What exactly this is, however, still remains vague. There is a *sense* that something is missing, yet each of Carter's attempts to articulate it fails on its own. The subject's sense that a crucial part of itself is missing, yet it is not exactly sure what

it is, is precisely the missing object *a*. This something is not an empirically determinable object; it is, rather, the very form of the subject's lack. This lack evokes a discourse from the subject who tries to Symbolically pin down what it is, but this is merely the subject's attempt to cover over its lack of a full "self" that causes it frustration.

A loss of the "faith" and "spirit" and "confidence" that has always animated the country, and a lack of the "unity" and "progress" that had worked so well at propelling the nation forward has sapped something that made us who we "are." Indeed, a deep part of the national "self" is missing, and it is this missing part that not only elicits the nation's frustration, but keeps "us" from fully becoming "ourselves" again. This multiplicity of signifiers attached to the missing part of the "self," the various attempts by Carter to pinpoint, articulate, and construct the nation through this discourse illustrate the impossibility of *fully* constructing the national subject. This multiplicity of signifiers attempting to construct exactly *what* has been lost fits well with the logic of object *a*. As Carter's discourse nicely displays, there is indeed a sense that "we" are not fully ourselves, that we are lacking *something* that would, if re-found, offer the promise of enjoyment or national wholeness – what Lacan calls *jouissance*. "Purpose," "confidence," "spirit," "unity," "faith," "progress" – each articulates a sense of what is missing, but does not capture definitively *what* is missing. Indeed, each of these words is commonly understood to have different meanings. "Progress" is not exactly "unity;" "purpose" is not quite "confidence;" "faith" is often something different from "spirit." Yet, each of these words is deployed to refer to the same "thing." Each is offered to represent what the subject is lacking, what it once had but is now lost. There is a sameness to each one, and they all attempt to pin down precisely what they all have in common. However, each fails on its own to express the lost object directly. Indeed, each individually fails to represent "it," and together as a group they fail to signify what

extends beyond them all. In a sense, this multiplicity of signifiers refers back to an “America” that once was, but now is not. This failure to fully Symbolize the lost object is what sparks the desire for its reclamation. Yet, precisely because it cannot be fully represented, the desire for it is ongoing, sliding across and through the signifiers that attempt to represent it, but never penetrating to the supposed “signified” that is presumed under them. Indeed, there is no lost object under these signifiers, only a lack that the signifiers themselves attempt to cover. It is this inexpressible Thing – object *a* – that evokes the subject’s continuous processes of identification, that is always just out of reach, and consequently keeps animating the desire for its recuperation. This empty place – the empty gaps between the attempts to pin down “our” lost object, the lost part of our national “self” – is the lack evoking the articulation of the discourse. This gap in the discourse corresponds to the empty structural location of object *a* in the position of truth supporting the split subject \$ in the Hysteric’s discourse.

What is S_1 in Carter’s text, and what is its relationship to the split subject \$ and the system of knowledge S_2 produced by the discourse? In the Hysteric’s discourse, the split subject \$ interrogates and questions (\rightarrow) the reigning master signifiers S_1 with which it is frustrated. It is dissatisfied by the representation offered by the master S_1 , and desires a new one that it believes will not only better represent it, but will offer the promise of wholeness, *jouissance*, which the subject posits to have lost. Recall that the master signifiers are those prominent words and phrases that discursively anchor the message of a text (the aggregate of S_2). Functioning in the same way as nodal points in Laclau’s framework, they are the “privileged discursive points that partially fix meaning within signifying chains” that “create and sustain the identity of a certain discourse by constructing a knot of definite meanings (Torfing 1999, 98). As Žižek (1989, 95, emphasis in original) further explains, the master signifier/nodal point “does not imply that it is

simply the 'richest' word, the word in which is condensed all the richness of meaning of the field it 'quilts': the [nodal point] is rather the word which, *as a word*, on the level of the signifier itself, unifies an given field, constitutes its identity." There is a number of words that function as master signifiers S_1 in Carter's speech, but perhaps the most obvious one is "crisis of confidence," or "confidence" itself. Included in the very title of the speech, "confidence" indeed knots together a set of meanings in Carter's address. It is used in a number of ways and expresses a number of different meanings.

The "crisis" itself is a lack of "confidence." Just "as we are losing our confidence in the future, we are also beginning to close the door on our past," Carter finds. "The erosion of our confidence" eats away at the American character. A major concern for Carter was the link between Americans' materialism and its impact on national self-assurance. "We've learned that piling up material goods cannot fill the emptiness of lives which have no confidence or purpose." In turning toward the false satisfaction of material objects, Americans were turning away from the true fulfillment that "faith" and "community" offered. "Confidence" is not only that which we lack, but is that which we must get back if we are to become ourselves again: "Restoring that faith and that confidence to America is now the most important task we face." "Confidence," then, is what has defined us as a nation in the past, what we have turned away from, what we are now missing, what we need to get back, what still remains in us, and what we need to re-discover and re-start if we are to become "confident" once again. This is precisely the role of a master signifier. In bringing together a variety of meanings within the speech, it is an anchoring signifier to which other secondary signifiers refer back, yet it is the master signifier's constitutive ambiguity that allows it to function as an anchor in the first place. As the ambiguous representative that encompasses all that the subject lacks and what it senses it must recover, the

subject questions it for the satisfaction and fullness it promises. The split subject \$ interrogates the master signifier S_1 as something that it is missing and that it desires. In protesting signifiers such as “crisis,” “problems,” and the “fundamental threat to American democracy,” the split subject \$ pursues the signifier it now desires to be its new master S_1 , “confidence.” Its ambiguity and its tying together of a knot of meanings solidifies its centrality to Carter’s text, stitching together its various portions in a way that is vital for its coherence.

What is the system of knowledge S_2 that is produced as a result of these dynamics? Recall that the system of knowledge S_2 in Lacan’s configuration of the four discourses is the network of signifiers that supports the master S_1 . The master signifier S_1 largely defines the meaning of a discourse, and thus defines its “readability” (Lacan 2007, 189). Yet, the master S_1 can only have meaning if it is, in turn, supported by a network of signifiers that gives it the appearance of definite meaning. The network of signifiers S_2 can be thought of as those secondary signifiers that are tied together through their common reference to the master signifier S_1 . Knowledge S_2 in the Hysteric’s discourse is in the position of product (see above). When the split subject \$ questions the master signifier S_1 about its inability to adequately represent it, all the master can do in return is to offer the split subject \$ a battery of other signifiers in hopes of satisfying it. The battery of secondary signifiers produced by the split subject’s \$ questioning is the new system of signifiers S_2 of the Hysteric’s discourse.

As Carter protests those signifiers that he sees as dominant, such as “crisis,” “threat,” “consumption,” and “indulgence,” he attempts to re-orient his audience away from these words and towards others, which constitute the new system of knowledge S_2 he attempts to construct. Words like “crisis,” “threat,” “consumption,” and “indulgence” do not adequately represent “America,” Carter argues. Given the country’s history, and given Americans’ traditional

attitudes towards progress, the subject “America” cannot adequately be described through these signifiers, even though he sees them as overriding the current culture. Or, put differently, he sees the national subject as too strongly attached to these particular master signifiers that are evoking its frustration. Carter, in protest, offers his audience other signifiers like “unity,” “freedom,” “purpose,” and “faith.” These signifiers, for him, much more adequately represent the subject S and thus are better master signifiers S_1 than the pessimistic ones that are currently embraced by society. In attempting to construct a new body of knowledge S_2 for his audience through these new signifiers, he hopes to re-orient their desire through a new fantasy channeled through these signifiers. For example, “confidence” is closely tied to another common political signifier, “freedom.” By engaging in the energy conservation initiatives that Carter outlines at the end of the speech, Americans will be poised to reclaim what has been lost. Doing so, Carter says, “gives us more freedom, more confidence, that much more control over our lives.” Yet dealing with the nation’s problems is a “struggle for freedom” that will not be easy, he warns. “Freedom” is both a prized signifier in itself, but here also plays a supporting role to “confidence.” As such, it also functions as a central signifier in the new knowledge S_2 Carter constructs. “Purpose” and “unity” also play similar roles and part of this new national orientation S_2 . Tackling the crisis head-on “can rekindle our sense of unity, our confidence in the future, and give our nation and all of us individually a new sense of purpose.” Americans have always been involved in the “search for freedom, and that belief has always strengthened us in our purpose.” The search for freedom and purpose must, at its core, be underpinned by “faith.” “We simply must have faith in each other, faith in our ability to govern ourselves, and faith in the nature of this nation.” These series of signifiers – “freedom,” “purpose,” “unity, and “faith” – are the product of Carter’s discourse. In attempting to turn his audience away from

“crisis of confidence,” “consumption,” “self-interest,” and “indulgence” Carter offers these new signifiers, a new body of knowledge S_2 , in return. The goal is to produce a new network of signifiers S_2 that will replace the current order. This new orientation, represented by “freedom,” “purpose,” “unity, and “faith” and so on is the system of knowledge S_2 produced by this Hysteric’s discourse.

Thus, by elaborating the constitutive elements of Carter’s speech ($S_1, S_2, \$, a$) we are better able to discern the workings of desire within his discourse. Re-reading Carter’s speech through the framework of the Hysteric’s discourse shows that although Carter attempted to placate and reassure his audience, the discourse he offered was one of *insecurity*. The subject’s split $\$,$ its anxieties and incompleteness, were front-and-center (in the agent position) in the discourse, and thus offered the attendant insecurities and anxieties that correspond to the subject’s incompleteness $\$$ as the most overt aspect. Understanding the speech as a Hysteric’s discourse helps us not only to uncover relations between elements such as master signifiers $S_1,$ the knowledge S_2 deployed in the speech, and the kind of subjectivity $\$$ constructed, but it also offers a way to understand the desires evoked and frustrated and/or satisfied within the speech.

However, there is another plausible reading of the speech through Lacan’s four discourses. While the Hysteric’s discourse fits well with much of the speech, some aspects of it could be understood through the Analyst’s discourse. Recall that the Analyst’s discourse is characterized by analyzing, transforming, or revolutionizing (Bracher 1993, 53).

$$\text{Analyst's Discourse: } \frac{a}{S_2} \rightarrow \frac{\$}{S_1}$$

Here, the missing object of fantasy, object $a,$ occupies the agent position. The split subject $\$$ occupies the position of receiving other, while the master signifier S_1 is produced by the discourse. The body of knowledge is in the position of latent truth, underpinning the place of the

object *a*. This discourse is unique among the four forms that Lacan elaborated because both object *a* and the split subject \$ occupy the most overt or manifest positions as agent and receiver, respectively. While typically either knowledge S_2 and/or master signifiers S_1 occupy one of the overt positions, here they are both in subordinate, latent positions. This means that the elements that represent the subject's division \$ and its missing object *a* are the driving factors of the discourse. However, this does not mean that object *a* is positively represented in the discourse here. Nor, does it mean that master signifiers S_1 or knowledge S_2 are less important or vital to the discourse's dynamics. The Analyst's discourse is a highly critical one in the sense that it encourages people to openly deal with their desire and allow them to re-orient their desire towards objects and signifiers that promise less anxiety and dissatisfaction. As Bracher (1993, 72) explains,

Confronted with this discourse of the Analyst, the analysand [patient], as receiver responding to his or her own *a*, is in the position to produce a new master signifier (S_1), which amounts to an alteration of the ego ideal, and this entails an altered sense of identity as well as new meanings and different values. Only by thus realizing how their present master signifiers alienate them from the *a* can analysands proceed to separation from the alienating position embodied in their master signifiers, the separation occurring as the analysands gradually become reconciled to their repressed elements and, in fact, come to accept these as more a part of themselves than the monolithic values embodied in their ego ideal.

What would be the split subject \$ in this reading? One could understand Carter's audience as occupying the receiver position. As a speaking agent, Carter attempts to provoke his audience into the position of split subjects. In doing so, he attempts to guide the receivers toward putting their division front-and-center, acknowledging it in a way that would allow them to work through it. In one sense, this seems to be one of the goals of the speech. In observing the nation's dissatisfaction, Carter acts as an analogue to an (psycho-) analyst – that is, he tries to get the audience to acknowledge their division. However, a subject does not often want to acknowledge its division – as evidenced by the widespread negative reaction to the speech. To

put its division and incompleteness at the forefront in a way that forces the subject to actively engage with and work through it would mean the subject's fantasies would have to be shattered. Yet, it is precisely the role of fantasy to veil the subject's division and incompleteness; to live in a world without fantasy would be akin to chaos. Putting the split subject \$ above the bar □ in the receiver position, would force it to face the reality that it is lacking.

Yet, the Analyst's discourse does not aim to completely disintegrate the subject's fantasy. Instead, the goal is to provoke the split subject \$ into a search for a new fantasy. As Carter deploys this discourse onto his audience, hailing them in the position of split subject \$, he offers them a range of new master signifiers that he believes will indeed shift the national fantasy to one that evokes less dissatisfaction and anxiety than the current one. In doing so, he hopes that a new batch of master signifiers S_1 will re-orient the national desire. This is shown in the master signifier's S_1 occupancy of the product position, implicitly supporting the split subject \$. In trying to turn his audience away from its current master signifiers S_1 that have led to anxiety and dissatisfaction, such as "crisis," "threat," "consumption," and "indulgence," Carter simultaneously offers and leads his audience towards others, such as "freedom," "purpose," "unity," and "faith." These new master signifiers S_1 are the intended product of the discourse, and, in Carter's view, will hopefully constitute the central master signifiers of a new national fantasy that will heal the audience's divisions, at least more so than the current national fantasy. However, as we have seen, the subject's division is constitutive of it, and no master signifier or fantasy can ultimately heal this division, or promise the subject a recovery of that which it feels it has lost.

What would be the system of knowledge S_2 in this reading? In the Analyst's discourse, the receiving subject presumes that the analyst, in the agent position, knows what s/he is talking

about, that s/he possesses the requisite knowledge to adequately help the subject deal with his/her troubles. The analyst is “supposed to know,” as Lacan (1981, 253) put it. In other words, the analytic process of helping the subject work through his/her divisions cannot properly proceed if the subject does not believe that the analyst has the knowledge to help him/her. However, while the subject assumes that the analyst truly does know what the subject means when s/he speaks, and truly does know what the proper fix will be, this is a presupposition on the part of the subject. The subject assumes that the analyst knows what needs to be done. While the subject may assume the analyst will know exactly what to do, the analyst actually lets the subject gradually generate a new master signifier that will lead to the construction of a new fantasy. This new fantasy, furthermore, is not one that is imposed by the analyst. Rather, it is developed by the subject through his/her slow and difficult interrogation of his/her own divisions, and his/her realization and engagement with his/her presumed lack. Indeed, in Lacanian analysis the analyst does not tell the subject what to think or what it should be, but instead remains as enigmatic as possible throughout the process, resisting definite answers to the questions the subject poses, which aim at reinforcing the subject’s already anxiety-inducing identification.

Carter’s speech can, in one sense, be understood through this dynamic not merely through his Symbolic/institutional position as the President, but as a President who has acquired the requisite knowledge to know what to do with the audience’s anxieties. Carter states at the beginning of the speech that he realizes that the nation’s problems are deeper than many realize, “deeper than gasoline lines or energy shortages, deeper than even inflation or recession.” In light of this crisis, he stresses that he has spent time with an array of citizens who have offered him different perspectives on the crisis, and what to do about it. “I invited to Camp David people

from almost every segment of our society – business and labor, teachers and preachers, governors, mayors, and private citizens. And then I left Camp David to listen to other Americans, men and women like you. It has been an extraordinary ten days, and I want to share with you what I've heard.” He emphasizes that he took seriously the various pieces of advice that he received. “These ten days confirmed my belief in the decency and the strength and the wisdom of the American people, but it has also bore out some of my long-standing concerns about our nation’s underlying problems.”

Carter, after having spent ten days listening to Americans from all walks of life, presents himself as the one “supposed to know,” as the one who not only has the knowledge that comes from being president, but who has spent the time to gain first-hand knowledge from the American people themselves (the audience itself). As the “analyst,” Carter tries to provoke in the audience a new position toward their desire, a new position towards their master signifiers. After having spoken to a range of different people, Carter believes that by prompting people to deal with the nation’s divisions in a meaningful way, the nation can re-orient its desire towards signifiers to which the nation’s attachment will be less harmful to national “confidence.”

In a sense, Carter’s own Analyst’s discourse can be viewed as attempting to provoke a Hysteric’s discourse from the audience. In speaking from a position that provokes his audience into facing their own divisions, he in fact prompts them to take up the position of agent in a Hysteric’s discourse. As shown above, the Hysteric’s discourse is one where the subject’s division is at the forefront, the most overt element of the discourse. The subject is then in a position to produce for itself a new system of knowledge (in the product position) channeled by a new fantasy constructed around a new master signifier. In employing an Analyst’s discourse to evoke from his audience a Hysteric’s discourse, Carter appears to want a questioning discourse

from the audience. This, Lacan (2007, 33) points out, is what is ideally supposed to occur in analysis: what “the analyst establishes as analytic experience can be put simply – it’s the hystericization of discourse.” As is evident in the speech, Carter hopes that Americans will reflect upon not just upon the immediate economic problems the country is facing, but also upon the deeper “crisis of confidence” that has beset them. He hopes that they will begin asking tough questions about their current desire. In reflecting upon the overall spiritual direction of the nation, which in Carter’s view inevitably influences peoples’ sense of community and belonging, Carter hopes that a new realization will dawn upon people that the nation has successfully dealt with more difficult problems than the current ones, and that in summoning its strength the nation can get through this tough time. In other words, Carter encourages the national subject to take a stance to deeply engage with its own divisions and antagonisms, and in doing so embrace new master signifiers (“freedom,” “purpose,” “unity,” “faith,” etc., in the position of product in the Analyst’s discourse) and produce a new system of knowledge, a new and re-energized American “confidence” (in the position of product in the Hysteric’s discourse).

Although these aspects of the Analyst’s discourse seem to offer a plausible reading of the effects of Carter’s discourse, there is one sense in which its fit is questionable. The agent in the Analyst’s discourse is object *a*. Again, this does not mean that object *a* is a positively existing entity in this discourse, something that is readily and unproblematically identifiable. Rather, it is the place of lack in the discourse. The analyst occupies the agent position as a stand-in for the subject’s lack. By not directly telling the subject “who” s/he “is,” by not forcing a new master signifier on him/her, by remaining as enigmatic as possible in the analytic process, the analyst is standing-in for the subject’s own lack. By confronting and engaging with the loss directly (i.e., by the analyst not directly telling the subject who s/he “is” and thus reinforcing their current

fantasy), the subject is able to begin the process of confronting the truth of his/her desire (that it is never-ending, and constantly shifts between objects that promise fullness). As a result the subject will be able to generate his/her own master signifiers without having them imposed on it from outside. This is not, in fact, Carter's role in the discourse. He is an agent that is actively attempting to offer a new set of master signifiers to the audience, rather than acting as the enigmatic stand-in for the national subject's lack. He is actively promoting a new batch of master signifiers ("freedom," "purpose," "unity," "faith," etc.) that he believes provide a better orientation for national desire than the current ones ("crisis," "threat," "consumption," "indulgence," etc.). In this view, Carter's role seems to be much closer to the agent in the Hysteric's discourse, as discussed above. Carter puts the divisions and dissatisfactions of the national subject at the forefront, and seems to prompt the audience to adhere to new master signifiers in order to produce a new body of knowledge (the product of the Hysteric's discourse) – a new, and more "confident" understanding of the national subject.

Thus, both the Hysteric's and the Analyst's discourses offer insights into the dynamics of desire of the speech. In exploring how each discourse framework is able to map how desire is intersubjectively channeled through the speech, we can identify the kinds of identifications it offered, and we can also make more explicit the subtle characteristics that other discourses (such as neoconservatism) were competing with. Discursive competition is not merely between words and rhetoric. It is also a struggle for the channeling of desire in particular directions, embedded within particular fantasies that promise fullness, or *jouissance*. This framework further helps to uncover the fantasy underpinning the logic of the speech. The fantasy deployed is not explicitly stated anywhere in the speech, and it is simultaneously the most elusive and most affectively appealing aspect of the speech. The lack in the discourse, and the fantasy that attempts to veil it,

are found in the gaps and silences in the speech, yet they constitute its most affectively appealing aspects.

Fantasy and Identification

Recall that for Lacan, the experience of being a subject, of seeking stable identifications, is not merely discursive, but is also an affective experience. The subject's search for wholeness entails not only what we think of as conventional emotions (such as fear, hate, love, shame, etc.) but also more nebulous affects such as frustration/insecurity and stability/security.⁸ In pursuing *jouissance*, or a whole sense of self, the subject continually experiences both frustration and satisfaction – satisfaction in associating itself with those valued signifiers that confer a sense of being and security, and frustration in never being able to *fully* overcome the sense of loss that drives the identification process, thus undermining the sense of wholeness. Since subjects are unable to deal with the contingency of their identifications (insofar as a truly unified “self” is impossible) and the realization that desire is a never-ending process of desiring, fantasy offers the subject a way to deal with these impossibilities. By adopting a fantasy that explains why one is never able to have a fully constructed “identity,” the subject is able to believe that (elusive) wholeness is nevertheless reachable. The manner in which fantasy accomplishes this is that the ambiguity, contingency, and deadlock of identification are projected onto an other (Stavrakakis 2007, 198). The figure of this other is able to stitch together the incompleteness of the subject's precarious identifications by functioning as a kind of “scapegoat” upon which this incompleteness can be blamed. Rather than accepting the inherent incompleteness of all social identity, and the impossibility of fully securing *jouissance*, most find it more appealing to believe that *jouissance* is possible if not for the Other who blocks or steals it from them (Žižek 1993,

⁸ A discussion of the distinctions between emotions, affects, and *jouissance* is offered in Chapter Three.

203). In other words, fantasy stages an encounter between the subject \$ and the missing object *a* ($\$ \diamond a$) while offering the subject a reason why it has not attained its presumed-to-be-missing part.

Although Carter's discourse puts the loss of national self front and center, the fantasy he offers for why "our" *jouissance* (understood as confidence, progress, optimism, etc.) is itself incomplete. The fantasy is incomplete in the sense that it does not offer a well-defined screen against the very sense of loss of "self" that the fantasy constructs. More revealingly, the other upon which the national loss is attributed is not a foreign enemy or external body, but the audience itself. The crisis is one of the "American spirit" and the national character. Our problems are rooted in our own materialistic behavior. "There is simply no way to avoid sacrifice" as a solution to our problems, and Carter realized that this message may not set well with some. "This is not a message of happiness or reassurance, but it is the truth and it is a warning," he cautioned. The social wounds from the 1960s still fester, and they help to feed the current national mood. "These wounds are still very deep. They have never been healed." Carter cannot assure an easy way out. "I do not promise you that this struggle for freedom will be easy. I do not promise a quick way out of our nation's problems... There is simply no way to avoid sacrifice." Only a kind of national self-introspection can restore what has been lost. "But we can succeed only if we tap our greatest resources – America's people, America's values, and America's confidence." The fantasy that his discourse deploys is not one of overcoming the blockage posed by some readily identifiable foreign body, but of constructing our lack of *jouissance* as our *own* problem. The instability and precariousness of the nation – "America" itself – is projected not onto a easy-to-see scapegoat, but is instead dealt with by Carter's call for Americans to more strongly adhere to signifiers like "confidence," "purpose," and "unity."

Here, crucially, the split of the collective subject in Carter's discourse remains largely unresolved. Lacan's concept of the gaze can be of assistance here. Recall that identification with the gaze is "identification with the very place *from where* we are being observed, *from where* we look at ourselves so that we appear to ourselves likeable, worthy of love" (Žižek 1989, 105). It is a way of "*seeing oneself seeing oneself*" that evokes identification with the other (Lacan 1981, 74, emphasis in original). The gaze itself can be understood as another aspect of the object of fantasy, object *a*. Not only does the subject imagine the missing object will satisfy his/her desire, but the missing object itself is imagined *as gazing back* at the subject. The object is felt as conferring recognition upon the subject not only in pursuit of it, but in the imagined encounter when the subject finally achieves *jouissance* by becoming one with the object. "What determines me, at the most profound level . . . is the gaze that is outside," Lacan (1981, 106) argues. The subject desires to occupy the place from which the object gazes back at it, and to achieve the *jouissance* promised, but this place is nothing other than the subject's fantasy, staging an encounter between the subject and the missing object which is itself a lack.

The gaze of Carter's speech is tied to the missing fantasy object of the speech. The elusive object of the speech is a sense that "America" is not what it should be, that it is missing a fundamental part of itself. A loss of "purpose," "confidence," "spirit," "unity," "faith," "progress" – all of the different ways that Carter tries to discursively pin down exactly what it is that is missing illustrates precisely the impossibility of its articulation. The various attempts to articulate what this loss is take center stage in the speech. In other words, the ambiguity of the collective subject, the national "self," is what sparks the articulation of the speech, as indicated by the position of the split subject \$ in the structure of the Hysteric's discourse. In putting the incompleteness of the subject front-and-center, Carter's discourse offers the attendant

ambiguities and anxieties associated with the subject's division $\$$. The fantasy offered to deal with this incompleteness, however, is itself insecure. Fantasies typically offer a way for subjects to deal with the ambiguities of their identifications, so as to avoid a direct confrontation with the lack at the center of their "identities," so to speak. Fantasy offers the subject a promise that its desire will eventually be satisfied and the *jouissance* it seeks will be attained; in other words, it offers a kind of veil against ambiguity and incompleteness with a promise of wholeness.

The gaze offered by Carter's speech, in this sense, *does not* act like a veil against contingency and ambiguity. Carter's emphasis on the nation's loss, what it is lacking, did not offer the audience a way to deal with the ambiguities of identification and desire, but instead left open this ambiguity. The missing object of fantasy is, in most political discourses, viewed as something that is attainable if only the obstacles of the fantasy are dealt with. Yet, there are few obstacles in Carter's fantasy. Carter does offer a list of ways to deal with the nation's energy problems, but the nation's "true problems...are much deeper – deeper than gasoline lines or energy shortages, deeper even than inflation or recession." However, these offer little in the way of balancing out the loss of the weighty signifiers Carter argues are at stake. The construction of the "crisis of confidence," the loss of "purpose," "spirit," "unity," "faith," "progress" and so on, does not offer a comforting gaze for the audience. While fantasies typically offer a screen through which the subject's ambiguities are (temporarily) covered, Carter's discourse offers little in the way of such a screen. Indeed, the audience here is, in a sense, put face-to-face with the uncertainty and ambiguity that is the collective subject "America." The "America" that once was has been lost, and it is unclear how to get it back. There is no obstacle to overcome beyond which the proper "America" is waiting. Nor is there a barrier we can tumble with our might to bring about the *jouissance* we are looking for. The gaze projected back at the audience, then,

was not the gaze of a fantasy object that is promised as attainable if some readily identifiable obstacles are removed. Rather, it was the gaze of object *a* itself, the void which discourses of national “identity” attempt to cover. The gaze was not one that helped to fuse together the national subject in terms of the recognition if conferred. Rather, it re-emphasized and projected back at the audience the dispersal and vagueness of the national subject.⁹ The illusory position from which subjects could imagine themselves becoming one with the missing object (thereby attaining *jouissance*) was itself vague, and without a well-defined fantasy staging the encounter. Rather than satisfying and evoking desire for security and/or stability, Carter’s fantasy *reinforces* anxiety, ambiguity, and incompleteness. In this way, this discourse placed the contingency of national identification at the forefront, contingency with which most subjects are unable to live or deal with adequately.

Rather than constructing a fantasy that satisfied desires for a reinforcement of the self, and a corresponding sense of security at a time when it was lacking, Carter offered no stable alternative for dealing with the incompleteness of national identification. Andrew Bacevich (2008, 32) writes that the speech was doomed to fail because to suggest that “the actions of everyday Americans might pose a [considerable] threat amounted to rank heresy.” Yet, more fundamentally, having no readily identifiable blockage between our loss of being and our imagined national enjoyment or wholeness, Carter’s discourse lacked the kind of “grip” that often comes with a stronger fantasy (Glynos 1999). As Glynos and Stavrakakis (2008, 262) point out, “the credibility and salience of any object of identification relies on the ability of the fantasmatic narrative to provide a convincing explanation for the lack of total enjoyment.” Generally, the greater lack that fantasies construct often evokes correspondingly stronger desires

⁹ One is reminded here of an aphorism from Nietzsche (1992, 279): “And when you look into an abyss, the abyss also looks into you.”

for identification, whereas fantasies that do not construct a substantially lacking subject often evoke weaker desires for identification. Therefore, such fantasies will often evoke less *desire* for identification and subjectivity with the discourse in question. Thus, desire will be less oriented towards the kind of identification and *jouissance* that the discourse offers.

Hegemonic Logic

Carter's "crisis of confidence" speech was of course intended to be a successful political definition of the nation's problems and the best solution to solve it. We can safely assume that it attempted to define the common sense of the time about what was wrong with the country and what should be done about it. More technically, Carter's speech was an attempted "expansion of a discourse...into a dominant horizon of social orientation and action" (Torfing 1999, 101). In other words, it constituted an attempt at the construction of what Laclau calls discursive hegemony. Employing the combined insights of both Lacan and Laclau, we can see how fantasy discourses, with their powerfully appealing promise of reaching the missing and indefinable quality that makes "us" who "we" are (object *a*), are partially "filled in" by political forces that seek to define the discursive anchors around which fantasies cohere. In other words, Laclau's approach to the construction of discursive hegemony allows us to trace the politics of identification, fantasy, and *jouissance* that Lacan's framework uncovers.

The complex dynamic between the national subject's fullness and loss in Carter's discourse also constitutes its hegemonic logic. Recall that for Laclau, common political signifiers that are viewed as timeless and which are seen as having some readily grasped extra-discursive referent are instead ambiguous sites of inscription upon which different forces attempt to ascribe their own particular meaning. As seen above, this also largely constitutes the process by which Carter attempt's to pin down the nation's missing object. As Laclau (2005, 116) argues, "the logic of the *objet petit a* and the hegemonic logic are not just similar: they are

simply identical.” Laclau’s re-working of the concepts of the universal and the particular are useful here. Through contestation, some political forces are able to fill in the empty content of “universal” societal nodal points with their own “particular” vision of what the nodal points mean. Hegemonic struggles are the attempts to articulate a “part” (a particular meaning) as embodying the “whole” (the universal values of a society). Like the logic of object *a*, the logic of hegemony is at work when political forces attempt to articulate their particular meaning of society’s nodal points as the “true” universal definition. As Laclau (2005, 117) argues, “no social fullness is achievable except through hegemony; and hegemony is nothing more than the investment, in a partial object, of a fullness which will always evade us because it is purely mythical.”

“Confidence” of course functions as a nodal point in Carter’s speech, as do other words like “America,” “freedom,” and “faith.” “Confidence,” for example, stitches together a range of meanings, and is able to do so through its constitutive ambiguity. Again, it is simultaneously what has defined us as a nation in the past, what we have turned away from, what we are now missing, what we need to get back, what still remains in us, and what we need to re-discover. It is something that has been lost but must be regained. Carter attempts to fill in this nodal point, one of the anchors constituting the “readability” of the speech, with his own preferred meaning(s). Yet its meaning as a nodal point is not merely discursive, but is underpinned by a fantasy construction offering a promise of reaching the *jouissance* that the subject desires, the lost national wholeness contributing to the nation’s current mood. By offering “confidence” as something central to the American “self,” the speech evokes desire for its recapture. “Confidence,” then, not only brings together a “knot” of discursive meanings, but is fortified by the affective appeal of the *jouissance* it embodies for the audience. In this filling of

“confidence,” Carter offers his own particular meanings of what this “universal” signifier means for Americans. As Laclau (1996, 44) states, to “hegemonize something is exactly to carry out this filling function.”

“Confidence,” however, is supported by a range of other secondary signifiers that constitute the system S_2 which it both ties together and which supports it as a system of meaning. In Laclau’s terminology, these constitute a logic of equivalences that structure identifications. “Faith” and “unity,” for example, are deployed several times to expand the chain of what the country has lost, in addition to “confidence.” The “crisis” is fed by “growing doubt about the meaning of our own lives and in the loss of a unity of purpose for our nation,” Carter contends. Like “confidence,” it is also something we must reclaim. “We can regain our unity;” we can “rebuild the unity and confidence of America;” we “can rekindle our sense of unity, our confidence in the future, and give our nation and all of us individually a new sense of purpose,” Carter believed. In one sense they are indeed different signifiers, but the way they are deployed by Carter they are used to express something similar, or equivalent, underlying each of them.

The range of other signifiers that Carter deploys in his attempts to symbolize what has been lost and what we must get back - “purpose,” “confidence,” “spirit,” “unity,” “faith,” and “progress” – constitute not only a multitude of attempts to capture the missing object *a* without however ever fully doing so. These words also compose a string of similarities, or set of equivalences, along which the desire for object *a* is circuited. Desire for the subject’s missing piece, the part of itself that it needs in order to attain the *jouissance* staged in the fantasy of the speech, flows along these signifiers. Again, they are different words which often have different meanings, but in Carter’s discourse they are used to express something similar underlying them all – ultimately, the missing object *a* which is itself nothing but the subject’s lack. The subject’s

desire for wholeness slides along the chain of equivalences of “purpose,” “confidence,” “spirit,” “unity,” “faith,” and “progress,” and it is desire itself that allows for their sticking together in the first place. Desire shifts between and across signifiers that imply full representation of the nation’s “self,” yet this desire is continually deferred to the other signifiers in the chain. In this sense desire is “eternally extending toward *desire for something else*” (Lacan 2006, 431, emphasis in original). None of the signifiers in the chain fulfill the desire for “full” representation, so desire is guided to another, and then another, none of which live up to the promise of the *jouissance* of a whole sense of self. Thus, at the level of signifiers strung together in chains and sentences, desire is at play in Carter’s speech.

Stavrakakis (1999, 62, 80-2) argues that the centrality of certain signifiers and phrases that function as nodal points cannot be reduced only to their discursive position. Although these nodal points often represent the final and ultimately tautological ground upon which audiences’ identifications hinge, they perform as discursive anchors precisely because of the implicit fantasies and affects underpinning their centrality. They draw their appeal by promising or embodying a sense of wholeness, *jouissance*, for people seeking to alleviate loss and anxiety through identifying with political discourses. In many cases, nodal points are themselves partial positive manifestations of the object *a* of the fantasy discourse in which they appear. Just as in Carter’s address certain key words function as the particular instantiations of “universal” social values of “confidence,” it is the affective dynamic of this partial “filling” that contributes to its attempt at discursive hegemony. Every effort at hegemony, the construction of “common sense,” is underpinned by affect. Even in Carter’s discourse, which problematically offered a fundamentally *insecure* fantasy of the split subject, one can see the dynamics of the hegemonic struggle at work.

Despite these affective dynamics, and attempt at discursive hegemony, Carter's discourse was unable to achieve significant social traction. This contrasts substantially with the competing neoconservative discourses offered at the time. In the hegemonic competition to channel collective identifications in a particular way, Carter's discourse largely failed to resonate widely with audiences. One reason why Carter's message of self-sacrifice did not grab the public imagination was because many of the discourses it contended with offered not only another view of the country's problems, but because they offered a more appealing fantasy of collective subjectivity than did Carter. Neoconservative discourses at this time were able to gain traction, and thus were more successful in defining society's "common sense," because of the more secure fantasies they offered to American audiences. The writings of Norman Podhoretz, who Heilbrunn (2008, 77) finds is "perhaps the quintessential neocon," were influential at this time, and constituted a hegemonic challenge to the discourses of the Carter administration.

Norman Podhoretz and "Making The World Safe For Communism"

As Ehrman (1995) documents, neoconservatives spent much of the mid-to-late 1970s warning about Soviet expansion and aggression at a time when the American foreign policy establishment was pursuing cooperation and détente. As a description of Podhoretz's writings at the time, this was an understatement. As Podhoretz saw it, the main justification for neoconservative indignation towards Carter was because of his continuation of the policies pursued by Gerald Ford, Henry Kissinger, and Richard Nixon. To Podhoretz, such outlooks were not reasonable responses to a changed international situation, but were tantamount to appeasement and retreat. Podhoretz laid out his case in a *Commentary* essay entitled "Making the World Safe for Communism." Dorrien (1993, 168) recalls that "it was a blockbuster essay . . . [which] offered a sweeping account of the current struggle for the world and a stinging indictment of America's recent 'failure of will' in advancing this struggle."

Podhoretz's narrative was as "sweeping" in breadth and diagnosis as it was apocalyptic in tone and recommendation. He began by lamenting the "isolationist mood" that had taken over the country since Vietnam. On the political left, this new mood constituted quite a shift in perspective, given that most of the strongest responses to Soviet expansion had been enacted by liberal Democrats like Truman, Kennedy, and Johnson. Interventionism as a foreign policy against Communism had been at home on the left, but after Vietnam liberals' mood changed. This was evident in liberal ideas that foreign affairs "would now be based on cooperation rather than power and conflict and competition. Our new role would be determined by an understanding, in another favorite liberal phrase of the day, of the growing 'interdependence' of the world and the declining capacity of the great powers to impose their will on other countries" (Podhoretz 1976, 33). This spreading attitude affected conservatives no less, in Podhoretz's view. Republican foreign policies, such as détente with the Soviet Union, opening up relations with China, combined with various arms control agreements, constituted a "policy of phased withdrawal from anti-Communist interventionism" (Podhoretz 1976, 35).

The consequences of these developments, Podhoretz warned, were dire. At the same time the U.S. was experiencing second thoughts about its world role, the Soviet Union was re-energized. Regarding the U.S.'s new isolationist attitude, it was clear to Podhoretz "that the major, in fact the only, beneficiary would be the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union is a great superpower, and it has moreover entered into a period of active imperialist expansionism" (Podhoretz 1976, 37). As the U.S. was slowly inching backwards, the Soviets were showing "every sign of intending to move ahead" (Podhoretz 1976, 37). If the U.S. continued on this path, if it retreated at every point of encounter with Soviet interests, eventually the U.S. would surrender every bit of global ground until it was surrounded by a sea of hostile Communist

neighbors. At that point, Podhoretz (1976, 39) asserted, the “Communist temptation to subvert and undermine the last remaining democratic society would be irresistible, and to combat such subversion would require a degree of repression which would itself endanger democratic freedoms.” The only way to avoid this catastrophe was to, first, reverse the tendency in the U.S. to see the Soviet Union as somehow less than an undeterrable and overwhelming deadly threat, a tendency embodied by the growing sense of “they have their problems, we have ours” apathy (Podhoretz 1976, 39). This was epitomized by Carter’s expressed relief in 1977 that Americans had gone a long way towards overcoming their “inordinate fear of Communism.” Second, and more significantly, the U.S. had to overcome the lack of “will” that had sent its foreign policy into retreat. The US had to step back into the role it had occupied since World War II in defending liberty against Soviet expansion. It was only the U.S. that could stand up for the rest of the world, and in doing so could turn the dangerous tide that had been rising. To fail would be to “help make the world safe for the most determined and ferocious and barbarous enemies of liberty ever to have appeared on the earth” (Podhoretz 1976, 41).

Podhoretz’s discourse, in one sense, presumably draws much of its appeal from precisely the ominous tone that many have noted is characteristic of his writings. Heilbrunn (2008, 77) notes that there “is something to be said for the almost willful, naïve ferocity of his political passions,” and that he was “longer on fulminating language than on insight.” As an evaluation of his style and accuracy of his writings, this certainly captures something of his pronouncements. Yet, placed within the broader context of late 1970s foreign policy debates, and the growing public presence he and other neoconservatives were gaining, the fantasies that his texts construct offer a view into their affective appeal.

As with all political texts, Podhoretz's discourse constructs a fantasy of national wholeness that covers over the loss of "self" around which his text coheres. Podhoretz's text is similar to Carter's in the sense that both center upon loss, or lack. Whereas Carter's discourse offered notions that America had itself been responsible for its own loss of "confidence," "unity," "progress" and so on, Podhoretz's discourse also focuses on what "we" are missing, but constructs this missing "object" in relation to an other. On the surface, Podhoretz seems to say that, in apparent agreement with Carter, that the national problem can be traced to a question of willpower. However, the fantasies each text deploys, and the consequent desires evoked, are quite different. And, these differences are crucial for their differential affective appeal.

In terms of loss, Podhoretz's articulation of the nation's problem was indeed similar to Carter's. Both saw themselves as questioning the prevailing order. Both saw themselves as protesting what they viewed as dangerous rising tides that threatened to not only overwhelm the nation's ability to effectively deal with its problems, but that would eventually swallow the nation into an abyss of dreadful ramifications. Just as Carter warned that the continued pursuit of narrow self-interest and materialistic consumption would lead the nation away from traditional values of community and hard work, Podhoretz strongly warned that if the nation relinquished its vigilance against Communism, it would be on the losing end of the titanic struggle against the Soviet Union. Podhoretz saw himself in opposition to the U.S. foreign policy "establishment," and protested against policies he viewed as "appeasement."¹⁰ An "isolationist mood *has* taken

¹⁰ The charge of "appeasement" is one that Podhoretz has frequently lobbed against those who advocate or pursue policies with which he disagrees. Another of his oft-mentioned articles was a 1977 piece in *Harper's* entitled "The Culture of Appeasement," in which he not only continued to accuse Carter of this most unforgivable of all foreign policy sins, but traced the "weakening" of American culture against the Soviets to the growing tolerance of homosexuality. Podhoretz, though, did not reserve these criticisms only for Carter. After some initial praise, Podhoretz turned against Ronald Reagan in the 1980s, particularly after Reagan dropped his "Evil Empire" rhetoric and began pursuing talks with Mikhail Gorbachev. For instance, the mere title of one article illustrates his despair - "The Neo-Conservative Anguish over Reagan's Foreign Policy" (Podhoretz 1982). In another, Podhoretz compares Reagan to Neville Chamberlain, and proclaims that "appeasement by any other name smells as rank, and the stench

hold of the country since we left Vietnam,” which he was attempting to lift (Podhoretz 1976, 31, emphasis in original). The new embrace of “isolationism” was “itself a measure of the enormous change which [had] taken place in the country,” a tide which he was rowing against (Podhoretz 1976, 32). The new broadly-accepted understanding of America’s world role was that foreign policy would “now be based on cooperation rather than power and conflict and competition,” in addition to a new emphasis on “interdependence” – all developments that Podhoretz (1976, 33) tried to resist.

Analyzing Podhoretz’s text through Lacan’s framework of the four discourses will allow us to uncover the loss sparking the articulation of the discourse, and will aid in tracing how desire channels the fantasy of *jouissance* that underpins the text. By mapping Podhoretz’s discourse in terms of how its master signifiers S_1 , system of knowledge S_2 , split subject $\$$, and object a are positioned vis-à-vis one another through these four possible positions, we can find out which particular discourse (Master, Hysteric, University, or Analyst) best fits Carter’s.

Discourse Structure

In terms of how Podhoretz constructs the nation and its problems, his text fits well with the logic of Lacan’s discourse of the Hysteric. Here, the national subject $\$$ is insecure and divided between the equivalential signifiers S_1 that represent it within the Symbolic order and that part of itself that it presupposed as lost (a). Podhoretz hopes to re-orient national desire towards that which will make the nation whole, constructing a new understanding S_2 of, in his view, the proper role of America in the world.

$$\text{Hysteric's Discourse: } \frac{\$}{a} \rightarrow \frac{S_1}{S_2}$$

of it now pervades the American political atmosphere” (cited in Bacevich 2005, 236; see also Podhoretz 1983). Bacevich (2005, 236) notes that these criticisms of Reagan were offered during one of the most massive peacetime build-ups ever of American military power.

If both Carter's and Podhoretz's texts can be understood through the structure of the Hysteric's discourse, then one may reasonably ask: how different can they be in terms of their affective appeal? As the following discussion shows, while the structure of a discourse matters for its appeal and resonance with audiences (especially in its hegemonic competition with other discourses), the fantasy texts deploy is equally as important in understanding how the text channels desire and *jouissance*.

First, what is the split subject \$ of Podhoretz's neoconservative discourse, and what is its relation to the other elements (S_1 , S_2 , a) of the discourse? Remember that in the Hysteric's discourse, the split subject \$ is characterized by dissatisfaction with the current order, and questions or protests its perceived place in that order. How does this play out in Podhoretz's text? For him, the national subject is substantially lacking in several respects. Podhoretz begins his essay by lamenting that, in his view, the United States has to a large extent succumbed to an infectious bout of isolationism. Despite the fact that "isolationism has for so long been a dirty word in the American political vocabulary," Podhoretz find that an "isolationist mood *has* taken hold of the country since we left Vietnam" (Podhoretz 1976, 31, emphasis in original). This has not come upon the country suddenly, but rather has crept into national debates over foreign policy without many realizing it. Indeed, it is an outlook that "more and more people are being persuaded to adopt, sometimes without full awareness of what it is they are committing themselves to" (31). As he views the current creeping dominance of isolationism, he understands it as concern for nothing but one's own borders and physical territory, completely without the "entangling alliances" of which George Washington so famously warned. "The general isolationist view is still, as it has always been, that the United States has no business going to war for any reason other than the defense of its own territory against attack" (31).

However, when translated into current global realities, “isolationism amounts to saying that the United States should no longer do anything to check the spread of Communist power and influence anywhere in the world” (31). “Isolationism” is the name he pins to the condition that currently plagues the country, as it covers an array of actions and non-actions that for him all share the same underlying qualities.

The “isolationism” over which Podhoretz anguishes is a substantial part of his discourse, and it is necessary to understand what he views as its origin. The division and incompleteness of the subject \$ in this text stems from both “external” and “internal” others. Specifically, the behavior and attitudes of both “liberals” and “conservatives” have led to American isolationism. Through an elaboration and discussion of where, for Podhoretz, isolationism comes from we can better understand the national subject, and later the fantasy of the full national “self,” that Podhoretz’s discourse constructs, and the desire it evokes. In terms of the collective subject his discourse constructs, the domestic sources of the subject’s isolationism are as nearly important for him as is the presence of the Soviet Union in blocking the United States from becoming what Podhoretz aspires. Podhoretz’s distinction between international and domestic politics leads him to see America’s isolationist disposition in terms of both the country’s general reaction to Soviet aggressiveness and in terms of how different political groups in the country have contributed to its isolationism.

For Podhoretz, the “new isolationism” was “most visible among liberals” (32). This was the culmination of a considerable turnaround in the politics of American foreign policy, since liberals had since World War II been “*the party of intervention*” (32). Podhoretz argues that although the demagoguery of Senator Joseph McCarthy was in some ways regrettable, it nevertheless originally had the effect of galvanizing liberal Democrats into pursuing actively

anti-Communist foreign policies. “Liberals of all shades of opinion deplored and denounced McCarthyism, but the anti-Communists among them were even less sympathetic than the McCarthyites to the kind of liberalism that was either unambiguously pro-Soviet or that was ‘soft’ on Communism” (32). The anti-Communist left not only offered criticism of those it saw as sympathetic to Communism, but more broadly pursued a number of initiatives to stem the perceived rising tide of Communist influence. “It was primarily the liberals who pressed for political and economic initiatives to encourage democratic reforms and the development of free institutions in all those countries which were part of the free world only, or anyway largely, in the sense that they were not part of the Communist world” (32). These were, obviously, not the only means the left used to meet the Soviet challenge. Liberals, “for all that they often deplored the gross conservative emphasis on military power as the main weapon in the fight against Communism and for the defense of freedom and democracy – also tended to be bolder in the use of force than conservatives” (33). It was, after all, under liberal Democratic administrations that the United States had intervened in Korea and Vietnam.

It was Vietnam that brought about end of the actively interventionist liberal foreign policies, even anti-Communist interventions. If “it was the liberals – and the ‘best and brightest’ among them – who led the United States into the Vietnam war, it was also the liberals who later turned against this war which they themselves had made, who led (or at least coopted) the opposition to it, and who developed or propagated all the arguments against it” (33). The domestic divisions created by the escalation, prolonging, and eventual loss of the war and retreat of American troops led to the weakening of the anti-Communist left’s commitment not only to anti-Communism, but to much deeper doubts about America’s world role. Many of these doubts were reflected in the 1972 presidential campaign of George McGovern. His slogan, “which

asked America to ‘come home again’,” promised a turn “from an emphasis on foreign affairs to a primary concern with domestic priorities” (33). Although there would still be foreign policies, they would now be based not upon strident anti-Communism, but upon “cooperation rather than power and conflict and competition” (33). For Podhoretz, this colossal change of liberal attitudes was profoundly dangerous. “Whatever else may have been envisaged by the liberals for the United States in this truly brave new world, it was certainly not the use of American power to check the spread of Communism and ‘to assure the survival and the success of liberty’” (34).

Liberals had made the more substantial political shift, but conservatives were no less guilty of fostering a national mood of isolationism. As such, conservatives are also part of the “internal” or domestic division of the collective subject. At the time, Podhoretz found that conservatives often gave the impression of being more hawkish on Communism than liberals. Richard Nixon “repeatedly spoke of the need to keep America strong in order to balance Soviet power;” Gerald Ford negotiated, but ultimately failed, to keep South Vietnam from being taken over by Communists, and Henry Kissinger supported several efforts of aiding anti-Communists in places like Portugal and Angola (35). Nevertheless, Podhoretz finds that “conservatives in office and in practice have been rather less bellicose than their standard rhetorical gestures would lead one to suppose” (35). Podhoretz compares the bulk of Kissinger’s foreign policies to those of Neville Chamberlain (in neoconservatives’ eyes, of course, the model of how *not* to be a statesman), and accuses him of orchestrating a “phased America withdrawal from anti-Communist interventionism” (35). He also accuses Kissinger held the view that the United States is in political and economic decline at the same time the Soviets had entered an expansionist phase (36). “The implication,” Podhoretz (36) believes is attributable to Kissinger and conservatives generally, “is that the best the United States can do is get out of the way as

gracefully as possible, and with a minimum of such disruptive (or, ‘destabilizing’) consequences as might draw us into conflicts with the Russians for which we no longer have the power or the stomach.” This, for Podhoretz, is an unacceptable and naïvely perilous conclusion.

The upshot of this discussion is in the particular ways that it constructs the subject, the “United States” or “America,” and how it is constructed as lacking. The national subject \$ constructed within Podhoretz’s text is divided between what it is and what it should be. The split is constitutive of the subject the “United States.” The United States has the potential to once again become the aggressive anti-Communist leader that it needs to be, yet is not currently. “Isolationism,” in Podhoretz’s view, plagues the country and is one of the major factors keeping it from stepping into its necessary, but neglected, global role. The country is rife with domestic political divisions that cut across it. From liberals who have turned their back upon their proper roles as anti-Communist hawks, to conservatives who are much less anti-Communist than their actions and talk suggest, the nation’s foreign policy consensus has broken up and is beginning to re-form around isolationism. The nation, the collective subject \$, is incomplete, and it is this incompleteness and division that keeps it from becoming whole. The subject’s incompleteness \$ sparks the desire for the *jouissance* it is missing, yet – and this is the crucial insight that Lacan’s formulae permit us to see – the fantasy deployed in the speech (elaborated below) cannot maintain its coherency *without* this division and incompleteness.

As elaborated throughout the essay, then, the current “isolationist mood” contrasts greatly with what Podhoretz sees as the true global role of the United States – vigilant confrontation with the Soviet Union at every possible opportunity. This incompleteness of the subject “America” is constituted through not only the disconnect between the country’s current isolationist status and what it could be if it woke up from its current isolationism. Its incompleteness also is tied to

how Podhoretz's discourse creates an opening for a missing fantasy object that is presupposed by the discourse, which in turn evokes the desire for its recapture.

If the split subject \$ of this text is a "United States" divided between isolationism and a necessary but neglected role as global anti-Communist leader, what is the missing object that the subject seeks? What is object *a* in Podhoretz's discourse, where is its position of structural emptiness in the discourse, and how is it related to the desire and *jouissance* channeled by the discourse? While the signifiers "isolationist," "isolationism," and "new isolationism" capture part of what dismays Podhoretz, and attempt to represent an aspect of the split subject's \$ incompleteness, there is something *else* that is much more substantial and consequential to not only the position of the United States \$, but to world order itself. Much like Carter's failed attempts to pin down, represent, or symbolize what *exactly* he felt the subject \$ was missing, Podhoretz's text reveals a number of places where an extra element is apparent, which Podhoretz attempts to name with different words and phrase in different ways. Yet the multiplicity of attempts at representation fails, and in fact demonstrates that it is nothing but the structural lack in the text.

There are several places where Podhoretz attempts to discursively pin down and name what exactly is lacking. Throughout the text, Podhoretz offers a number of critiques, arguments, and observations that in one sense point to different issues, but in a stronger sense all point to a certain similarity. For example, Podhoretz insists that even those "isolationists" that have supported actions such as the CIA aiding various rebel anti-Communist groups around the world do not truly share his ideas about what America's global role should be. "No doubt that many such people *think* they believe there are things the United States should do to check the spread of Communist power and influence in the world" (32). Liberals, Podhoretz believes, do not believe

in the “use of American power to check the spread of Communism” (34). He mentions approvingly conservatives’ speaking of “the need to keep America strong,” even if they were less assertive in this pursuit than previously hawkish liberals (35). He accuses Kissinger and conservatives of planning a “policy of phased withdrawal from anti-Communist interventionism” (35). He laments that is now “built upon the assumption that we no longer have the will or ability to check the spread of Soviet power,” since “many American liberals, dreaming the dream of a new international order of which no one is in charge, still seem unaware of the extent of Soviet ambitions, and the extent to which they have thus far been limited in action by American power” (37).

Podhoretz believes that while the new liberal and conservative doves are dangerously mistaken, there is another alternative – “and that is to use American power to make the world safe for democracy” (40). Although the “the idea of making the world safe for democracy was much ridiculed after World War I, and its cold-war equivalent, defending the free world, was much ridiculed in its own time as well,” this is the only way that America can effectively counter Communist aggression (40). Once, before this most recent bout of isolationism set in, the United States “*was* leading a free-world alliance in the entirely meaningful sense that every free society in the world was either a member of the alliance or under its protection” (40). The “purposes of the United States” in pursuing this was once clear, but has since become foggy to the American foreign policy establishment (40). The reason, Podhoretz believes, comes down to questions of American power and will. “The new liberal isolationists say that we lack the power and the new conservative isolationists say that we lack the will,” he asserts (41). Since by both military and economic standards the United States is the most powerful country in the world, the issue comes down to “the question of will” (41). “Have we lost the will,” Podhoretz asks, “to defend the free

world – yes, the free world – against the spread of Communism? Contemplating the strength of isolationist sentiment in the United States today, one might easily conclude that we have” (41). This lack of will translates to the denial by liberals and conservatives of the need to spread American influence around the globe. It is a denial of American power. It is a denial of America’s ability to “control its own allies or clients,” thus weakening those allies and tilling the political soil for the seeds of Communist influence (33-4).

All of these pronouncements by Podhoretz can be viewed as attempts to pin down the national subject’s missing part – object *a*. His criticism of both liberals and conservatives, and his declarations that American must reignite its willpower are all different ways of expressing the same condition that is viewed as underlying all of them. Each of these articulations points, in some ways, to different aspects of what Podhoretz views as the major problems with American foreign policy. Yet, more significantly, there is something similar underlying all of them; they all share a certain quality. “American power,” “strong,” “will,” “ability,” “purposes,” “control” – while all of these signifiers often have differing conventional meanings, their deployment in Podhoretz’s text points to a similarity underlying all of them. Each of these articulates something that the subject, the “United States,” *should* have, but does not. “America” should actively utilize its “power” to counter Soviet aggression. It should become “strong” once again. It should rediscover its “will,” combine it with its new found “ability,” and employ them to reassert global “control” and reignite American national “purposes.” Yet, the subject does not currently have any of these. It *lacks* these fundamental qualities that it in fact needs. “American power,” “strong,” “will,” “ability,” “purposes,” “control” all attempts to represent in Symbolic reality what the national subject is lacking. The gaps in the texts point to something that the subject is missing, yet this missing object itself is not a discursive or Symbolic object, but is part

of the Real. The fantasy object – object *a* – is that which is missing from the discourse, yet nevertheless sparks the desire for its articulation. Podhoretz attempts to pinpoint exactly what is missing at these several places with a multitude of signifiers, but, like all other attempts to Symbolize fantasy objects, fails since the object does not exist in Symbolic reality. Each of these efforts to articulate and symbolize what the national subject is missing touch upon a sense of some “essential” quality that must be reenergized, but each also fails on its own, since none are able to *fully* construct what *exactly* is missing.

Yet, it is at these points in the discourse, the gaps at which the string of major signifiers are unable to fully express what underpins all of them, that offer the most appealing sites of identification. It is here where the partial sense of wholeness (partial *jouissance*) experienced is, strictly speaking, inexpressible. In the Hysteric’s discourse, the split subject \$ in the agent position is supported by object *a* in the position of latent truth. The subject \$ is driven by its dissatisfaction with the current order and the signifiers that current represent it. It protests, questions, and interrogates the dominant master signifiers in the hopes of finding a new signifier that better represents it. It is the desire for “full” representation that guides the subject \$, yet it a desire for a part of its “self” that it feels is missing but cannot be represented by the signifiers it pursues. In Podhoretz’s discourse, the multitude of signifiers he attaches to what the national subject is missing - “American power,” “strong,” “will,” “ability,” “purposes,” “control” and so on – all attempt to name the quality that seems to underlie all of them. However, the similarity they share, the thing that lies beneath all of them, to act as the S_1 that would anchor the discourse so as to resolve its ambiguity and inconsistency.

All of these various signifiers and phrases attempt to name what the national split subject \$ is missing. Yet each fail to fully express what is viewed as their underlying similarity. It is

this failure itself that points to the desire bringing them together. The split subject's \$ desire is evoked by the loss of what it presupposes must have caused its desire, which in turn propels its identification processes. The collective subject \$ the "United States" is propelled by its desire to find a new set of signifiers to replace the ones that currently cause it anxiety and dissatisfaction. "Isolationism," for Podhoretz, is one major name for what the subject "is," but adherence to this signifier (since it is the master signifier S_1 guiding the liberal and conservative foreign policy establishments, in his view) is holding the subject back, and keeps "America" from becoming what it should be and what it can be in the future. Desire has no specified object, but shifts between objects which promise a representation that will alleviate incompleteness and dissatisfaction. The desire for *jouissance* slides along the signifiers that offer the possibility of wholeness, even if the experience of *jouissance* itself cannot be found in any of them. Podhoretz's (however incomplete) construction of the collective subject \$ is represented at various points by words that he deems as "truly" representing "America," unlike the signifiers to which it currently adheres. For him, "American power," "strong," "will," "ability," "purposes," and "control" all are simultaneously what the subject lacks, but if these signifiers are re-found and re-asserted they will make the subject feel whole once again. The desire for "power," the desire to be "strong," the desire for "will," "ability," and global "control" all simultaneously point to an inexpressible Thing underlying them all. Yet, the Thing is nothing but a structural lack, the gaps of the split subject \$, the places of missing *jouissance*, around which the entire text coheres. None of these signifiers on its own satisfies the desire for *jouissance*; rather, desire courses along these words, continually deferred to the next word in the chain, delayed by its inability to be satisfied or fulfilled in finding the wholeness it seeks.

If desire for *jouissance* is never satisfied, what is (are) the master signifier(s) S_1 in Podhoretz's discourse that offers the promise of it? How does S_1 relate to the other manifest elements in the discourse, the split subject $\$$ and the system of knowledge S_2 ? The split subject $\$,$ in its dissatisfaction, seeks new signifiers that offer the promise of full representation and wholeness, and Podhoretz's discourse points to several such nodal points/master signifiers. Many of these, for Podhoretz, are signifiers that have previously served the nation well, have represented us well, and are those to which we must re-attach ourselves. For example, American political culture "has always held up liberty as the highest political value, while the political culture of Communism has always scoffed at and denigrated liberty as a bourgeois delusion" (39). This is the view not only of Communists themselves, he argues, but also of internal leftists and liberals who are sympathetic to such ideas. "This particular species of anti-Americanism has (at least in America itself) subsided lately," Podhoretz finds, "but only to be replaced by its obverse: a tendency, now widespread both here and in the Western democracies generally, to dismiss liberty as unimportant in comparison with rival values like equality and community" (39). "Liberty is a blessing in itself," and need not be weighed against other values to be favored less (39). Once these basic values have been re-discovered and re-asserted as guiding principles of American foreign policy, the United States can once again step back into its proper world role, Podhoretz argues. America will use its "power to make the world safe for democracy" (40). In doing so, it will reclaim the mantle it once held, since, in the past, "the United States *was* leading a free-world alliance" (40). In countering Communism, the United States was absolutely necessary "in holding back the single greatest and most powerful threat to freedom on the face of the earth" (40). Thus, America was accurately described as "the defender, or even as the evangelist, of freedom and democracy" (40).

Each of these statements offers not only a prediction by Podhoretz of what the global results will be once the United States re-asserts itself, but more importantly offers a new set of master signifiers S_1 to which his discourse channels the desire for wholeness. “Liberty,” “democracy,” “freedom,” “defending the free world” (40) – each of these plays the role of the *preferred* master signifier S_1 in the discourse. They constitute what the subject wishes to become, but is not yet. As argued below, these nodal points are crucial both in how they channel desire and the promise of *jouissance*, as well as in their absence.

These master signifiers S_1 also point toward the system of knowledge S_2 in the discourse. Knowledge, in the Hysteric’s discourse, is in the position of product, latently underpinning the master signifier S_1 . The new system of knowledge S_2 is the product of questioning by the hysterical subject’s $\$$. Here, “democracy,” “defending the free world,” and “freedom” point toward the kind of new system that Podhoretz ultimately looks forward to. In fighting for “freedom” and “democracy” against those who would subvert them (and hence us), the split subject $\$$ will live in a world where those signifiers still prosper, and where a majority of people accept them rather than their opposites. Americans should be “extraordinarily enthusiastic...how exhilarating very large numbers of people in this country find a sheer willingness to proclaim the superiority of our political values to the political culture of Marxism and Communism, how sick they are of creeping [fragmentation] from within in the sphere of political discourse, and how happy they become when they see the United States once again speaking in clear accents as the leader of the ‘liberty party’” (41). Podhoretz hopes that this new network of signifiers S_2 , such as “democracy,” “defending the free world,” and “freedom,” will define the new order, and are encapsulated in this somewhat hopeful closing of his essay.

Thus, understanding the speech as a Hysteric's discourse helps us not only to uncover relations between elements such as master signifiers S_1 , the new network of signifiers S_2 offered, and the split subjectivity $\$$ constructed. As the next section demonstrates, this framework also helps to identify the fantasy underpinning the logic of the speech. The lack in the discourse, and the fantasy that attempts to veil it, are found in the gaps and silences in the speech, yet constitute its most affectively appealing aspects. Podhoretz's essay channels the subject's $\$$ desire and *jouissance* in particular directions through the fantasy offered to veil the subject's incompleteness and impossibility of attaining wholeness.

Fantasy and Identification

As Žižek (1989, 118) argues, fantasy “provides the co-ordinates of our desire – which constructs the frame enabling us to desire something.” If we understand the split subject $\$$, master signifiers S_1 , and system of knowledge S_2 in Podhoretz's text, what is the fantasy deployed that “provides the co-ordinates of desire” and attempts to cover over the structural lack around which it coheres – object *a*? Crucially, the nation's loss of “will,” of “purposes,” of “power,” and so on (or “unity” and “confidence,” as Carter would put it) is not strictly due to the nation's own shortcomings, in Podhoretz's view. Instead, it ultimately stems from the aggressiveness and strength of the Soviet Union. “What we see in this newly tolerant, and even benevolent, attitude towards Communism,” Podhoretz fears, “is the slow erosion of our own sense of political value in response to the Communist challenge . . .” (Podhoretz 1976, 39). The American response to Soviet assertiveness has been an erroneous reaction that can be traced back to the erroneous lessons drawn from Vietnam. The traditional world role that the US has played in countering Soviet aggression has been temporarily forgotten or ignored due to the “isolationist” reaction against Vietnam. The subject's $\$$ loss, then, is not strictly its own “fault” but is in due to the overwhelming threat that the Soviets pose. “What we see in this newly

tolerant, and even benevolent, attitude toward Communism,” Podhoretz (39) argues, “is the slow erosion of our own sense of political value in response to the Communist challenge – an accommodation in the sphere of ideas to match the accommodation we have been making in the sphere of power.” Furthermore, “our unwillingness or inability to condemn their crimes against political liberty – which they of course do not regard as crimes at all – can fairly be described as a synonym of the surrender of our political culture to theirs” (39). Thus, despite the fact that Podhoretz also asserts that the issue of American incompleteness “boils down in the end . . . to the question of will” on the part of the United States (41), the presence of the Soviet Union, of Communism, and the mistaken American reactions to it, plays at least as significant of a role in the subject’s current division.

This is a crucial feature of Podhoretz’s discourse in terms of its appeal. The fantasy that Podhoretz’s discourse deploys to avoid the anxiety of America’s national problems is blamed, or projected, onto an other. To avoid the possibility that our national problems are entirely our own fault, the fantasy offers a rationalization why America is not achieving the enjoyment that it deserves. America should once again be “defending the free world,” should be the “evangelist . . . of freedom and democracy,” should once again be “leading a free-world alliance” (40). The fantasy offers both imaginary fullness and possible disaster, as most political fantasies do (Glynos and Stavrakakis 2008). If the subject pursues the fantasy, the free-world will continue, liberty will come to those to whom it is currently denied, and the United States will again step into its rightful role as the planet’s crusader for democracy. If, however, this pursuit fails, catastrophe looms. The “most determined and ferocious and barbarous enemies of liberty ever to have appeared on the earth” will win without a fight and subdue all others (41). To avoid the loss, and to truly become ourselves again, the United States should, in a sense, mirror the

perceived Communist aggressiveness. The role of “Communism,” as a master signifier, is to stitch together an otherwise anxiety-producing discourse of the nation’s problems. Without it, Podhoretz’s discourse would evoke the same kinds of frustrations of identification as Carter’s discourse, while also leaving open the contingency and ambiguity about how to deal with the frustration.

Why is this? Many discourses about a national subject pose “blockages,” or scapegoats, that allow the collective subject to cope with complex national problems. Podhoretz’s discourse nicely illustrates this. Not only does the neoconservative fantasy of the Communist threat produce a scapegoat upon which national problems can be projected, but it evokes precisely the kinds of partial satisfactions that Carter’s discourse did not. Podhoretz evokes both threats, and solutions to national (in)security, and in doing so he offers a sense of affective security to those who see themselves as the “Americans” spoken of in his narrative. This subtle concern is evident in both how Podhoretz describes the past, and hopefully future, role of the U.S. Throughout the Cold War, the U.S. could “truly have been described as the defender, or even as the evangelist, of freedom and democracy” (Podhoretz 1976, 40). His hope expressed at the end of his essay, describing Americans who rejoice in the “sheer willingness to proclaim the superiority of our political values to the political culture of Marxism and Communism...and how happy they become when they see the United States once again speaking in clear accents as the leader of the ‘liberty party’” (41), illustrates the *jouissance* that is seen as attainable if only the fantasy were pursued. (Re)constructing national identification with common, but powerful, master signifiers such as “liberty” and “freedom” plays to desires of security on the part of American audiences, and allows opportunities for an audience to affectively reinvest in these signifiers as their own. If only America disavows its current master signifiers (“isolationism”)

and embraces new ones (“defender” of “democracy,” “freedom,” etc.) will our desire be properly routed toward once again becoming more fully ourselves. Our self-division will be healed once our signifiers coincide with who we *really* are. In this sense, Podhoretz’s definition of “America,” a crucial nodal point, differs substantially from how Carter defined it. In the hegemonic struggle with the discourses of the Carter administration, Podhoretz defined the nodal point “America” in terms of a particular underlying fantasy that helps to better understand the greater appeal, and relative political success, of neoconservatism at the time. “Freedom” and “democracy” embody the promise of *jouissance* if “America” is able to recover and promote them, in doing so allowing itself once again to be represented by them. They thus offer partial *jouissance*, or “little bits of *jouissance*” (Miller 2000, 37) in the promise of their appeal, yet are merely attempts to symbolize a lack. The fantasy underpinning their place in the discourse channels desire for them because of the *jouissance* they imply. Yet the full *jouissance* imagined is never attained since the very existence of the fantasy itself functions to veil the impossibility of the wholeness it promises.

The gaze constructed by the discourse plays a central role in the subject’s affective attachment to the partial *jouissance* offered by the fantasy. It is the gaze of the fantasy object itself, which is projected to offer an appealing position for the audience to inhabit, the position from where the imagined “complete” subject looks at itself from outside itself. The gaze stems from how the fantasy stages an encounter with the object that is presumed missing – object *a*. The signifiers that attempt, yet fail, to pin down what the subject $\$$ is missing, such as “American power,” “strong,” “will,” “ability,” “purposes,” and “control” each of which offers an impression or sense of what the subject can become, a sense of the *jouissance* that is promised if the fantasy were pursued. The only obstacle that the fantasy poses is “Communism.” Once “Communism”

is defeated, once Soviet aggressiveness is halted, once this sole threat to “freedom and democracy” is stopped, the subject $\$$ will become one with what it sees as the missing piece of its “self,” the inexpressible sense of wholeness promised by the string of crucial signifiers offered throughout the text, “American power,” “strong,” “will,” “ability,” “purposes,” and “control.” The *jouissance* and enjoyment of the “self” that partly promised in these signifiers is seen as possible, indeed inevitable, once the blockage is successfully removed. No other obstacles, no political difficulties or antagonisms, no disagreement among different political groups, no continued domestic divisions or lethargy on the part of liberals and conservatives, and no perceived problems with allies or other global actors. *Jouissance* is indeed *presupposed* in the fantasy if the blockage is overcome. It is posited as missing from the national “self,” yet such a “self” never in fact existed prior to its presupposition within the fantasy. As Žižek (1996, 144) argues, object *a* is not something that positively exists in symbolic reality, but is merely the presupposition of the subject’s never-ending and perpetually unfulfilled desire, an object that the subject presumes *must have caused* its desire. Thus, the missing object *a*, the *jouissance* of a unified and harmonious national “self,” is nothing but a fantasy covering over the lack of “self,” the lack of full illusory *jouissance* that is nevertheless promised by the fantasy. The subject’s attachment and embedding in the fantasy through the gaze is both “inside” and “outside” of the discourse of the text. It is an affective experience, simultaneously satisfying and frustrating, which lies outside the discursive bounds of the text itself (outside the Symbolic order), but is nevertheless channeled through the text’s representations. The gaze is not explicitly articulated anywhere in the text, but nevertheless shapes the subject’s identification with it. Thus, the gaze exists in the gaps and spaces of the text which are constructed within discourse and those which escapes it.

Desire for *jouissance* and the gaze are linked to the function of the Communist other within the text. Perhaps ironically, Podhoretz's representations of the Soviet Union display the sociality of desire. Lacan (1978, 235) argues that desire is never individual, but is always intersubjective – one's "desire is the desire of the Other." The role of the Soviet blockage in the fantasy illustrates this aspect of desire. While the Soviets are *the* implacable enemy, they simultaneously seem to embody all the traits that America *should* be. The rapid spread of Communist "power and influence" (31), Soviet "expansionism" (32), the "spread of Communism" (32), the Soviet's "active imperialist expansionism" (37), the Soviet Union as "a great superpower" (37) and the general image of an unyielding Communist behemoth suggests that while Podhoretz's discourse offers reinforcement of American desires to be the world's defender of freedom, as reinforcing that "we" are not "them", there is nevertheless something to admire in Communist assertiveness. Podhoretz clearly argues for an aggressive promotion of American ideals, wishes the United States would once again become a great superpower, and sees American expansionism as the best way to counter Soviet growth. The Soviets are without a doubt the implacable enemy, "we" are engaged in a monumental struggle against "them," but at the same time there is something about them that reinforces *our* notions of who we *should* be during this time of isolationist sentiment.

Building upon such ideas, Žižek makes a relevant argument about the perceived "theft of enjoyment" as a constitutive element of national identification. As discussed in previous chapters, national identification is not constructed solely around a simple catalogue of socio-cultural-political characteristics that exhaustively define who "we" are in relation to "them," whoever "they" happen to be. What sets us apart, our national Thing, is strictly speaking indefinable, yet partially manifests itself through national rituals, ceremonies, and performances.

What is at stake in nationalistic tensions is not merely a hatred of the other for hatred's sake, or even a hatred of difference for difference's sake, but a fear that the other might steal our national Thing. "We always impute to the 'other,' Žižek (1993, 203) observes, "an excessive enjoyment: he wants to steal our enjoyment (by ruining our way of life) and/or he has access to some secret, perverse enjoyment... The basic paradox is that our Thing is conceived as something inaccessible to the other and at the same time threatened by him." This tension helps to understand the dynamics at work in Podhoretz's simultaneous disgust and subtle admiration of Soviet behavior.¹¹

For Podhoretz, the Thing that America is lacking during its unfortunate isolationist mood is exactly the Thing that the Soviets are presumed to have. They have "IT," which is propelling them forward at the same time that our lack of "IT" is pulling us backward in the face of Soviet advancement. The Soviets "can be expected to go as far as their own ideological and imperial ambitions, and the absence of effective resistance, will carry them – and that could well be to the ends of the earth" (37). Yet, if America were to regain what has been lost, it would once again use its "power to make the world safe for democracy," just as it once "*was* leading the free-world" (40). In criticizing the "new isolationists," Podhoretz attributes to them the belief that "Communism has acquired so much power – power in the form of Soviet nuclear capability, power in the form of Russian imperial dynamism, power in the form of the size and potential of the population of China, power in the form of the persuasiveness of Marxist ideology to the masses of mankind – that we have no choice but to accommodate ourselves to it" (39). The mutual construction of self and other here does not occur only on a discursive, Symbolic level, but also as an absence. The representations of Soviet behavior in Podhoretz's text are in a sense

¹¹ For a similar analysis, see Jodi Dean's (2005) examination of the Cold War more broadly through Žižek's concepts of imaginary (image) and symbolic (gaze) identification.

a mirror of what American behavior should look like. The United States should go as far as its *own* ideological ambitions will carry it to “make the world safe for democracy,” just as “they” are covering the world with Communism. They are indeed “stealing our enjoyment” of global ideological dominance. Their theft of our precious Thing – the indefinable object *a* – is blocking us from fully becoming who we can be. The subject \$ exists not only in the Symbolic order, but the part of itself that is missing – missing, yet a vital part – exists as both present and absent from Symbolic reality. The Symbolic representation of the subject and its absence of representation intermingle and contaminate each other at the point at which the subjectivity offered by the text is both the most appealing and the most precarious. Thus, we remain split, divided, and insecure. Only by following through with the fantasy of overcoming our “isolationism” will we recover the lost part of our being, which will heal the gap in our collective subjectivity.

Hegemonic Logic

The affective dynamics of desire, fantasy, and *jouissance* in Podhoretz’s discourse are inseparable from, and crucial to understanding its resonance with audiences. Both neoconservative discourses and the discourses of the Carter administration attempted to define “common sense” about the “nature” of the National Problem, the above analysis central to understanding why and how neoconservatism began to resonate at this time. Lacan’s framework offers substantial insights into the affective underpinnings of the dynamics of discursive hegemony that Laclau’s theory elaborates.

The nodal points, or master signifiers, of Podhoretz’s text are those that both tie together the various meanings of the text, and those major signifiers that other signifiers ultimately refer back to. For instance, “United States,” “America,” and “American” constitute the discursive points around which the range of meanings of what the nation “is” cohere in the text. Podhoretz protests the associations between “America” and “isolationist” and “isolationism,” and attempts

to forge associations between “America,” the “United States” and other signifiers such as “democracy,” the “free world,” “leading a free-world,” “freedom,” and “defender.” As the major nodal points of the text, “America” and the “United States” are supported by these other signifiers. In a sense, the meaning of “America” and the “United States” is a “knot” of meanings that brings together the various significations of “democracy,” the “free world,” “leading a free-world,” “freedom,” “defender” and so on.

These nodal points support, and are supported by, the strings of equivalences and differences that construct the sites of identification within the text. As Laclau (2005, 78) argues, all social identification is “split between its differential nature, which links/separates it from other identities, and its equivalential bond with all the others *vis-à-vis* the excluded element.” As such, “all social (that is, discursive) identity is constituted at the meeting point of difference and equivalence” (Laclau 2005, 80). The “identity” of “Communism,” for example, is constructed through both the strings of signifiers that all express something (in Podhoretz’s view) that characterizes Communism, and through their differentiation from those strings of words and phrases that construct American “identity.” The Soviet Union “is in an aggressive imperialist phase” (36); it has “entered into a period of active imperialist expansionism,” and can be “expected to go as far as their own ideological and imperial ambitions” will take it (37); a “world dominated by Communism is likely to be a world given over to barbarism and misery” (38); Communists wish to “subvert” democratic societies (39); Communists are the “most determined and ferocious and barbarous enemies of liberty ever to have appeared on the earth” (41). Communist “identity” is constituted by a chain of equivalences that brings together various signifiers and phrases that construct Communism with certain qualities and characteristics. “Aggressive,” “imperialist,” “expansionism,” “imperial ambitions,” “barbarism and misery,”

“subvert,” and “determined and ferocious and barbarous enemies of liberty” are all deployed as attempts to construct a “Communist” “identity” in relation to an “American” one. Each of these “Communist” signifiers draws their meaning both from their equivalence with other signifiers in the chain and from their difference to their opposing signifiers in the chains constructing “American” “identity.” “Aggressive,” “imperialist,” “expansionism,” “imperial ambitions,” “barbarism and misery,” “subvert,” and “determined and ferocious and barbarous enemies of liberty” each refer to an aspect of Communism that is a threat to the United States, yet their meanings are not reducible to characteristics that exist outside of discourse. In Podhoretz’s discourse, this chain forms a system of meanings in which the meanings themselves lie at the intersection of the equivalence and difference to “American” signifiers. “Aggressive” also means “imperialist,” “imperialist” also means to “subvert,” and to “subvert” means “imperial ambitions.” The “identity” of the chain itself both differs from its opposites constructing “America,” and is deferred to the other links in the chain. The meaning of each term in the chain is continually deferred to the others in the chain, and is simultaneously differentiated from “American” signifiers.

As discussed above, the groups of signifiers constructing the “United States” and “America” are also tied together in chains of equivalence, underpinned by desire for “full” representation. For Podhoretz, although the United States is mistakenly attaching itself to signifiers like “isolationism,” the proper representation of the “United States” is to be found in a series of words and phrases. “American power,” “strong,” “will,” “ability,” “purposes,” and “control” all represent something that the U.S. still has something of, but must re-energize if it is to become what is once was, and what it must be if it is to counter Soviet “aggression.” Each seemingly refers to an extra-discursive feature of the U.S., but in fact only refers back to another

signifier in the chain. “American power” necessarily entails “will” and “ability,” as well as re-discovered national “purposes.” The United States must reclaim these signifiers if it is to reclaim its proper place on the world stage. “Democracy,” the “free world,” “leading a free-world,” “freedom,” and “defender” and “evangelist” of “freedom and democracy” – all of these also draw their meanings from their equivalence to others in the chain, and to their difference from their opposites in the chain constructing “Communism.” “Democracy” is not “Communism, the “free world” is not “imperialist,” “freedom” opposes “subversion,” and the “defender” of democracy counters the aggressiveness of “barbarism and misery.”

Thus, in terms of Laclau’s framework, the “identities” of both the “United States” and “Communism” lie at the intersections of the chains of equivalence and difference constructing them. “American” “identity” is simultaneously composed of the equivalential signifiers that continually refer back to each other and their oppositional/differential “Communist” signifiers. Similarly, “Communist” “identity” draws its meaning from both the series of equivalences between its signifiers and their differentiation from “American” signifiers.

While Laclau’s theories of equivalence and difference help to analyze the mutual constitution of political boundaries and identifications, Lacan’s insights aid in understanding how desire underpins the production of these boundaries. Desire, the desire for a whole sense of self, for *jouissance*, is never fully satisfied. It is a movement that shifts from object to object, from signifier to signifier, and is never satisfied by the representation that various signifiers offer and by the partial *jouissance* that they might offer. Desire is what ties together “our” signifiers into equivalential chains. Desire passes along the words that promise full representation, yet each of these words fails to do it on its own. Desire brings together “American power,” “strong,” “will,” “ability,” “purposes,” and “control” in the hope that each, or all, will bring the full

representation of the “self” that it seeks, the lost *jouissance*, yet the chain as a whole does not deliver on this promise. The chain itself cannot offer the representation the subject seeks because there is no whole “self” beneath the words that strives to be represented. The chain only covers over the lack of the “self,” the loss of wholeness and *jouissance*. Desire in Podhoretz’s text is both a movement of satisfaction and frustration – partial satisfaction in bringing together a group of signifiers that attempt to pin down *something* of what the subject “is,” and frustration in never finding the full representation it seeks in the chain that merely covers the lack of the subject. Desire slides along the chain without ever touching the *jouissance* that the subject presupposes and seeks.

Jouissance is not found in Podhoretz’s text, but his discourse offers a number of nodal points that are underpinned by an implicit fantasy scenario, and the dynamics of this relationship constitute another part of the hegemonic logic of the text. Specifically, the roles of the universal and the particular in Podhoretz’s text are crucial for understanding its attempt at discursive hegemony. Recall that for Laclau, hegemony is not the ascension of the discourse that most “accurately” represents reality, but is instead the attempts by political forces to fill in a society’s dominant political values, its “universals,” with “particular” understandings of what they mean. “American power,” for example, is an American “universal” that in itself has no intrinsic meaning, but whose meaning is contingently filled by Podhoretz’s narrative of what it means to have “American power.” This power confers upon its holders a global obligation and duty to counter the spread of Communist “imperialism” at every conceivable point, and to spread the values of “democracy” and “liberty” everywhere around the globe. “American power” is the tool through which American expansionism is to be conducted and American universals

appropriately spread everywhere. “American power” can, and has, had different meanings at different times in American foreign policy, but here its meaning is filled in a particular way.

The other major nodal points that Podhoretz offers are constructed through these same movements of emptiness and filling. “Democracy” and “freedom” are two universals that Podhoretz deploys. They play substantial roles in the fantasy of his discourse, and it is the tension between their lack and imagined fullness that constitutes their centrality to the text’s hegemonic logic. Both are nodal points in the sense that they draw together a “knot” of meanings in the text. “Democracy” and “freedom” characterize “us,” what we have that the Soviets do not, what Communism wishes to wipe out, and what characterizes the “free-world alliance,” e.g. the entire world that is not Communist. However, both are in a sense *not yet* qualities that the subject fully “has.” Only when the subject re-attaches itself to its true signifiers, in Podhoretz’s view, “American power,” “strong,” “will,” “ability,” “purposes,” “control” and so on, will America be fully able to rid itself of “isolationism” and restore the “freedom” and “democracy” that is still somewhat absent because of “isolationism.” “Freedom” and “democracy” are what we have, but do not fully have yet. In this sense, they are both present and absent in/from the discourse, part of the subject and not fully part of the subject. The fantasy in the discourse offers the recovery of “freedom” and “democracy” and the *jouissance* implied if the subject is able to recover them. “Freedom” and “democracy,” then, partially embody the *jouissance* the subject is missing, thus forming their centrality to Podhoretz’s discourse. Yet, they are the Symbolic representatives covering over the lack of the subject’s “freedom” and “democracy.” The fantasy of their attainment, and the consequent defeat of Communism, hides the impossibility of their full realization. Or, more specifically, the fantasy of their attainment, and the Communist obstacle posed, allows the subject to avoid the lack at its

heart, to avoid the Real that provides the condition of possibility and impossibility of its identifications. These “universals,” therefore, are supported by a “particular” fantasy construction upon which their affective appeal and centrality to the text rests.

Conclusion

A crucial contrast between Carter’s and Podhoretz’s discourses should now be evident. The respective fantasies implicitly constructed, the national subjects partially constructed, the “missing” objects and parts of the national “self,” the respective obstacles posed or not posed, and the dynamics of filling and loss that constitute the hegemonic attempts of both texts – all of these dynamics together help to explain why Podhoretz’s neoconservative discourse was able to resonate with audiences at a time when Carter’s discourse was largely a public failure. The constitutively insecure fantasy offered in the structure of the Hysteric’s discourse contrasts significantly with the fantasy of Podhoretz’s discourse, which can also be understood as a Hysteric’s. The desires evoked and channeled through the texts, the gazes projected back at audiences, the fantasies of fullness and *jouissance* promised to audiences, the identifiable obstacles posed (in the case of Podhoretz) or not posed (in Carter’s case), and the manner in which these movements attempted to construct the “common sense” of the nation’s problems in the closing years of the 1970s all help to explain why neoconservatism was able to gain a foothold and public presence at the time. Although the configuration of desires and split subjectivity that both texts offer can be understood as Hysterical discourses, the fantasies (and constructions of national loss) that they offer are the crucial factors for understanding their respective appeals and resonance. The competing hegemonic fantasies of Carter and Podhoretz in constructing the national loss of enjoyment, and the blockage to overcome so as to reclaim national wholeness, evoked differing desires in audiences, which led to their different political fates. The opportunities for affective investment in each of these discourses, through the

national/collective subjects that they partially constructed and the hegemonic contest over which would define “common sense,” helps to explain the varying power they claimed on audiences.

To conclude, there is an interesting side story that ties together national desire, identification, and Carter’s ill-fated speech. During the president’s ten-day retreat to Camp David where he prepared the speech, he solicited input from nearly 130 visitors from all walks of American life. One of them was University of Rochester historian Christopher Lasch. In January 1979 Lasch had published *The Culture of Narcissism*, and “at a time of inflation and recession, oil shortages, soaring crime rates and faltering cities, [his] book leapt onto the best-seller list, making him famous” (Siegel 2010). In it, Lasch applied a clinical understanding of narcissism to diagnose a range of social pathologies that, in his view, had spread throughout American culture. “In Lasch’s definition... the narcissist, driven by repressed rage and self-hatred, escapes into a grandiose self-conception, using other people as instruments of gratification even while craving their love and approval” (Siegel 2010).¹² After listening to arguments from several of his aides, who pushed him for a sober address about the country’s deeper spiritual problems instead of a “bold, upbeat speech” that other advisors pressed for (Bourne 1997, 442), Carter procured Lasch and others to help him prepare the speech. These advisors believed that “unless Carter addressed the crisis of confidence both his presidency and, ultimately, the nation would fail” (Morris 1996, 3). It is perhaps ironic that writers like Lasch, who believed narcissism to be the very problem plaguing the country, thought the crisis could be fixed with what they viewed as a heavy dose of blunt honesty. Perhaps if Carter and his advisors had had a deeper understanding of the dynamics of desire, affect, and fantasy in the construction of human subjectivity, they could have addressed the nation’s frustrations in a way that would

¹² To be clear, Lasch’s Freudian definition of narcissism differs significantly from the Lacan’s understanding of it. For a recent survey of Lasch’s broader philosophy, see Mattson (2004).

not have further added to them. In doing so, they could have perhaps avoided contributing to the rise of neoconservatism at the time.

CHAPTER 7
THE AFFECTIVE POWER OF NEOCONSERVATISM: PART II

Introduction

This chapter continues the analysis of the affective power of neoconservatism began in the previous chapter. That chapter analyzed the plays of desire and affect of competing discourses during an early period of neoconservative influence in the texts of Norman Podhoretz and Jimmy Carter. In this chapter I explore the descent and rise of neoconservatism in the 1990s in terms of its affective appeal. I analyze the discourse of Charles Krauthammer in the early 1990s (a time of relatively minor neoconservative public impact), and compare it to neoconservative discourse later in the decade (a period of heightened public impact), as found in the writing of William Kristol and Robert Kagan, I argue that a major reason why neoconservatism was unable to gain social traction earlier in the decade was because it offered less-defined fantasies of subjectivity and evoked less desire (and thus constituted a less appealing site of affective investment and identification) than later neoconservative discourses with more-defined fantasies posing clearer “obstacles” to national wholeness (in Lacanian terms). I briefly conclude by suggesting that the power and appeal of neoconservatism should not be underestimated in future debates over American foreign policy.

The chapter proceeds chronologically by first uncovering the fantasies in the writing of Krauthammer, and then compares it to an analysis of the writing of Kristol and Kagan. The analysis of each text, as in the previous chapter, proceeds in three steps: first, I elaborate the structure of each discourse, understood through Lacan’s four discourses; second, I analyze the fantasy and identification appeal of each text; and third, I examine of how these aspects underpin the hegemonic logic of each text.

Neoconservatism and the End of the Cold War

The early impact of the neoconservatives on American foreign policy debates during the Carter administration was quite asymmetrical to their level of influence toward the end of the Cold War and its immediate aftermath. Their early heyday during the late 1970s and early 1980s dissipated as the decade wore on. Long gone were the days, Ehrman (1994, 177) points out, “when a *Commentary* article could lead to an ambassadorship, establish policy for an administration, or become the focus of intellectuals’ discussions across the country.” By the late 1980s, once influential neoconservative forums like *Commentary* had lost much of their influence (Ehrman 1995, 171-8), and by the end of the decade, neoconservatism had “lost its compass” (Halper and Clarke 2004, 76).¹

Like most other perspectives on global politics at the time, the end of the Cold War played a big part in this, and it threw the neoconservatives somewhat into a state of confusion. Podhoretz’s writings on foreign policy are indicative of the extent to which neoconservatism relied upon communism as its focal point, and thus provided a reference against which their foreign policy ideas could be advocated. More broadly, a glance at some of the most prominent neoconservative ideas about foreign policy (as found in the writings not only of Podhoretz, but also other prominent neoconservatives like Jeane Kirkpatrick and Irving Kristol) demonstrates this reliance. Halper and Clarke (2004, 100), for example, observe that “Kristol accepted that much of neo-conservatism’s ideological campaign against the USSR was essentially defensive, inasmuch as it was responding to an existing threat and that is was required in the circumstances created by the Cold War.” Similarly, Heilbrunn (2008, 192-3) finds (with perhaps a touch of *schadenfreude*) that the neoconservatives “had invested too much emotionally in the Soviet

¹ By the mid-1990s, Podhoretz (1996) believed that neoconservatism no longer existed “as a unique school of thought,” and thus felt obliged to pen what he termed its “eulogy.”

Union to conceive that it might disappear. It was their mental balustrade, something they could lean on in their battles against effete liberals at home. Deprived of it, they lost their footing.”

Several have argued that a large part of the reason why neoconservatism’s influence diminished at this time was because of their split response to the end of the Cold War. Since its gradual birth in the 1960s and 70s, the movement had committed itself to the defeat of communism, but when this happened they were faced with questions that had largely been glossed over during those decades of relative unity. Upon what principles should the U.S. build its post-Cold War foreign policy? And, in a world with one remaining superpower, how broadly or narrowly should American national interest be defined? The movement’s members split and coalesced into two camps. Some argued that a narrower definition of the national interest best suited the new times. Others saw an opportunity, with the Soviets gone, to spread American influence across the globe in the form of crusades for democracy (Halper and Clarke 2004, 76).

Many of the older generation firmly embraced the idea that with the threat of communism now vanquished, the U.S. should have a more constricted definition of the national interest. Since the Soviets had been the reason for an expansive world-wide policy of containment, there was no reason left to maintain such far-reaching interests. Jeane Kirkpatrick, who was one of them, gained notoriety in 1979 with her influential essay “Dictatorships and Double-Standards,” published in *Commentary*. This paved the way for her appointment by Reagan as ambassador to the United Nations. Yet, with the end of the Cold War, she backed a more modest approach to American foreign policy. She believed that the US could now be a “normal country in a normal time,” and that burdens assumed strictly for Cold War purposes could, and should, now be abandoned (Kirkpatrick 1990). Irving Kristol largely agreed. He argued that the U.S. should no longer be concerned about balance-of-power politics, and pretensions of being the world’s

campaigner of democracy would easily lead to unnecessary global commitments. Doing so would force the U.S. into the role of world policeman, and he as he saw it, the U.S. would very likely pass on this position (Kristol 1991).²

Other neoconservatives disagreed. They believed that with the Soviet Union out of the way, the U.S. was free to actively spread its own democratic values around the world. Partly, this split was a generational change. Just as writers like Kristol, Kirkpatrick, and Podhoretz had helped to shape the older generation, younger writers like Robert Kagan, William Kristol, and Joshua Muravchik largely took over the reins of the movement. Muravchik, for example, contended that promoting democracy should take center-stage in American foreign policy, peacefully if possible, but through military intervention in cases of egregious brutality on the part of some states (Halper and Clarke 2004, 79-80). Kagan, similarly, argued for “building upon the successes of the cold war to create a permanent ‘benevolent domination’ – in other words, world hegemony” (Heilbrunn 2008, 217).

Perhaps the most influential of this group early on was Charles Krauthammer, who “offered the strongest case for continued activism” in the realm of foreign policy at the time (Ehrman 1995, 181). Krauthammer had spent much of the latter 1980s criticizing isolationist tendencies of both Democrats and Republicans, and when the Soviet Union collapsed he scoffed at the idea that a newly unencumbered superpower should constrain its global interests by becoming tied down in international institutions (Ehrman 1994 181-2). He proclaimed that the cornerstone of American foreign policy should be a “democratic crusade” (Krauthammer

² In neoconservative circles, this debate began back in the mid-1980s. Robert W. Tucker’s (1986) essay in *National Interest*, for example, reflected upon whether the U.S. would be a reserved “exemplar” of or an active “crusader” for democracy.

1989/90, 47) and that the Gulf War of 1991 demonstrated the structure of the new international order beyond a doubt (Krauthammer 1991).

It was a widely-shared belief that “America’s military, economic, political, and cultural dominance made the world ‘unipolar,’ and without a rival, it could seemingly do whatever it wanted. Many believed that it should” (Chollet and Goldgeier 2008, 13). Krauthammer authored what came to be one of the most influential statements of these beliefs. His essay “The Unipolar Moment” appeared in the winter 1990/91 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, which made the case for a re-orientation of American foreign policy away from the narrower and more restrained visions offered by older neoconservatives.

Krauthammer began by going against the grain of what he saw as the conventional wisdom about how the post-Cold War world would look. In doing so, he elaborated his vision of what American foreign policy should look like, and what its guiding principles should be. The three main assumptions underpinning the conventional wisdom at the time were false, in his view. First, it was mistaken to assume that the “new world order” would be multipolar with power diffusing away from the two superpowers and towards a number of other up-and-coming states and regions. While others contended that states like Japan and Germany and regions such as Europe would rise as power centers, Krauthammer argued that events like world reaction to Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait demonstrated American pre-eminence. Only the U.S. had the economic, political, diplomatic, and military clout to shape the world as it saw fit. No other state had comparable power to counter the kind of aggression that had occurred in the Persian Gulf (Krauthammer 1989/90, 23-7).

Second, it was just as mistaken to assume that with the collapse of the Soviet Union the U.S. could get over the domestic divisions over Vietnam and reclaim, without “inordinate fears

of communism,” an internationalist agenda. In fact, Krauthammer argued, a new isolationism had taken hold in the country, which posed a significant obstacle to the internationalist agenda the U.S. now needed to undertake. While isolationism was nothing new (it “is the most extreme expression of the American desire to return to tend its vineyards” [Krauthammer 1989/90, 28]), its more sophisticated variant was realism of the kind being expressed by other foreign policy intellectuals. Krauthammer criticizes Kirkpatrick specifically, arguing that rather than strive to be a “normal country in a normal time,” the U.S. instead had an obligation to impose its power and vision upon a chaotic international system. “The world does not sort itself out on its own,” and thus needed a great power to actively engage in sorting out others (Krauthammer 1989/90, 29).

Finally, conventional wisdom was mistaken in assuming that with the end of the Cold War, the potential for conflict would be greatly diminished. On the contrary, Krauthammer believed, the fall of the Soviet Union permitted the rise of “small aggressive states armed with weapons of mass destruction and possessing the means to deliver them,” which made the “coming decades a time of heightened, not diminished, threat of war” (Krauthammer 1989/90, 23). Iraq, Syria, Libya, and North Korea were the most prominent examples of small states that could amplify their power through the possession and use of WMD.³ Such states are not merely peripheral threats that the US can largely ignore, but, in Krauthammer’s (1989/90, 31-2) view, “will constitute the greatest single threat to world security for the rest of our lives.”

The impact of Krauthammer’s arguments upon broader public debate seemed to be largely inverse to the sweeping vision it offered. Ehrman (1995, 183) argues that Krauthammer’s approach did not even gain much traction among other neoconservatives, let

³ On “weapons of mass destruction” as a socially constructed category, see Oren and Solomon (2008).

alone the broader public. Instead, it was the more realist-oriented policymakers in the George H. W. Bush administration who were successful in articulating a narrative that was influential (Heilbrunn 2008, 203). Of course, the fact that, unlike in the first Reagan administration, neoconservatives had been shut out of the first Bush administration undoubtedly factored in to their lack of influence. Combined with competition from the strident “America First” isolationism of traditional conservatives like Patrick Buchanan, neoconservatism was “on the defensive in the early 1990s” (Heilbrunn 2008, 203).⁴

Yet, as elaborated below, neoconservatives were also out of power during the later 1990s, a time which many observers agree that neoconservatism arguably began to resonate much more with the public. Institutional exclusion alone cannot, then, be the sole factor in understanding neoconservatism’s lack of appeal in the early 1990s and then gaining traction later in the decade. Instead, a comparison of neoconservative discourses at this time can shed light on this unevenness. The fantasies of subjectivity offered by neoconservative discourses, and the consequent desires evoked, underpinned by the affective appeal of identification with *jouissance*, offer a distinctive view of the social ebb-and-flow of neoconservative success during the 1990s. Krauthammer’s vision of unipolarity offer a prominent example of the expansionistic visions of neoconservatism that would later come to dominant the movement, yet for particular reasons did not early on.

Discourse Structure

Understanding Krauthammer’s essay in terms of Lacan’s four discourses will help to identify the fantasy of subjectivity in the text. The effects produced by Krauthammer’s discourse can be better understood by mapping how each of four factors (master signifiers S_1 , knowledge

⁴ For explorations of the differences between traditional conservatism and neoconservatism, see Barry and Lobe (2002) and Micklethwait and Wooldridge (2005).

S_2 , subjectivity $\$$, and lack a) are positioned relative to one another. In isolating the discourse's constitutive elements, we will be able to better understanding the fantasy deployed but it.

Krauthammer begins his essay by protesting what he views as the erroneous conventional wisdom that has been put forth by policymakers and the rest of the foreign policy community (1990/91, 23). This kind of protesting and questioning of the dominant order is characteristic of Hysteric's discourses, when the subject's division (dissatisfaction, uneasiness, etc.) drives the articulation of the narrative.

However, the bulk of the essay is, instead, largely devoted to the laying out a description of what the author sees as the new structure of the international system. That is, Krauthammer paints a detailed picture of the global system as it currently exists. His argument uses assertions that are offered as obvious as to be indisputable, and pronounces international conditions as so evident that any clear-headed observer would agree. Of course, far from reflecting the new nature of international order, Krauthammer's essay actively helped (along with many other similar statements from the time, notably Francis Fukuyama's [1992] "end of history" thesis) to construct these new understanding of American power in relation to the rest of the world. In this manner, "The Unipolar Moment" fits well with the logic of the University discourse.

$$\text{University Discourse: } \frac{S_2}{S_1} \rightarrow \frac{a}{\$}$$

In contrast to the Hysteric's discourse, which is characterized by protesting and questioning, the University discourse is characterized by indoctrinating and/or educating. Note that the structures of the two discourses are mirror opposites. In the Hysteric's discourse the split subject $\$$ occupies the agent position (the most overt and manifest aspect of the discourse), object a occupies the position of latent truth underpinning the split subject $\$$, the master signifier S_1 occupies the other position, while a system of knowledge S_2 is produced. In the University

discourse, by contrast, each element (S_1 , S_2 , $\$, a$) occupies the opposite position (i.e. diagonal) that it does in the Hysteric's structure. Here, the system of knowledge S_2 now takes on the position of agent, supported by a master signifier S_1 in latent truth position. Object a occupies the position of other, interrogated (\rightarrow) by knowledge S_2 . In the agent position, knowledge S_2 hails the lack a in the other, which in turn produces the divided subject $\$$. The body of knowledge S_2 in the agent position means that the power of the agent does not rely upon the sheer force of authority (as in the Master's discourse), but instead relies on the legitimacy of the "objective" knowledge offered. The "objective" knowledge S_2 is presented to the receiving other as legitimate and authoritative because it is *not* seen as ideologically controlled by a master. Knowledge S_2 here is seen as operating apart from the bias, perspective, and prejudice of the particular agent offering it. Thus the knowledge itself has agency since it is seen as separate from the particular subject offering it. However, in Lacan's view, every system of knowledge or signification S_2 is underpinned and held together by the performative force of master signifiers S_1 . Hence the master signifier S_1 appears as the latent truth of the agency of knowledge. Object a in the position of receiving other represents the desire of the other to embody the knowledge S_2 offered by the agent. Although object a appears above the bar \square in the University discourse, this does not mean that it is somehow fully represented, or that is an overt or explicitly articulated aspect within the discourse. Object a , rather, represents the inexpressible Thing, the missing piece of the subject $\$,$ which is beyond Symbolic representation and is part of the Real. In relation to the split subject $\$$ in the position of product, the position of object a as the receiving other means that what the body of knowledge S_2 effectively hails is the *lack* in the subject. The overt object of desire within the discourse is not the *cause* of desire itself, but instead is the

Symbolic and partial stand-in for the subject's lack. The overt manifestation of the desired object is retroactively posited by the subject as having caused its desire.

How should we understand the body of knowledge S_2 deployed in Krauthammer's text, and how does it relate to the other manifest elements in the discourse, its master signifiers S_1 and the split subject $\$$? Krauthammer presents the bulk of his argument in terms of offering a picture of the international system as the Cold War is finally winding down and nearly over, and what the new future will look like. In this sense, Krauthammer places at the forefront the body of knowledge S_2 that his discourse deploys. The articulation of this new knowledge is the driving factor of the discourse. The knowledge S_2 that the discourse constructs about the new structure of the global system is offered as observation, as a "true" statement based upon indisputable facts, and one that stands apart from (biased) political perspective. Despite Krauthammer's pretensions to the contrary, this is obviously not the case. Knowledge S_2 is never neutral, but is always (explicitly or implicitly) supported by a master signifier S_1 . This is a signifier of pure power that attempts to achieve Symbolic closure through the force of authority that the agency of knowledge S_2 attempts to soften or cover. For Krauthammer, there are three indisputable facts that comprise the fundamental characteristics of the post-Cold War world. First, the structure of the new international system is unipolar. Second, world order is put at risk of there is a rise of isolationism within the United States. Third, the rise of what Krauthammer calls "Weapons States" will pose the most immediate threats in the new world order.

The "most striking feature of the post-Cold War world," Krauthammer (1990/91, 23) asserts, "is its unipolarity." That the United States is the most dominant country in the world is beyond dispute. "There is one first-rate power and no prospect in the immediate future of any power to rival it" (1990/91, 24). "The center of world power is the unchallenged superpower,

the United States, attended by its Western allies,” Krauthammer argues (1990/91, 24). With the impending fall of the Soviet Union, there is simply no other power that can pose a comparable threat to the United States, and the fact that it can now, seemingly, do what it wants without any other state to constrain it. “American preeminence is based on the fact that it is the only country with the military, diplomatic, political and economic assets to be a decisive player in any conflict in whatever part of the world it chooses to involve itself” (1990/91, 24).

Again, for Krauthammer, the knowledge S_2 that he presents is beyond argument simply because it is offered as empirically true and beyond dispute. This, for him, contributes to its legitimacy, and also its agency as the driving factor of the discourse. Those who disagree with him simply do not see the obviousness of American global supremacy. Krauthammer is thus adamant that the new structure of the international system is unipolar and not multipolar, as some commentators (who remain unnamed) have argued. While he conjectures that a multipolar world may come to pass in time, it has not yet, and will likely not for decades (1990/91, 23-4). This does not mean that there are no second-order powers that can have an impact upon the global system. Germany and Japan have sound and strong economies, Britain and France can deploy not-unsubstantial military capabilities if needed, and the Soviet Union at the time still existed with some political and military power (although these were quickly declining) (1990/91, 23-4). Still, in his view, there “is but one first-rate power and no prospect in the immediate future of any to rival it” (1990/91, 24). Nor is there any possibility in realistic multilateralism occurring through the United Nations. “There is much pious talk,” Krauthammer finds, “about a new multilateral world and the promise of the United Nations as a guarantor of a new post-Cold War order. But this is to mistake cause and effect, the United States and the United Nations. The

United Nations is a guarantor of nothing. Except in a formal sense, it can hardly be said to exist” (1990/91, 25).

In Krauthammer’s view, the obviousness of the new unipolar structure of the international system was made evident by the 1990-91 Gulf war. This also is presented as solidifying the knowledge S_2 deployed as beyond doubt or question. The “true geopolitical structure of the post-Cold War world” was “brought sharply into focus by the gulf crisis: a single pole of world power that consists of the United States at the apex of the industrial West” (1990/91, 24). Not only did the United States’ military capabilities illustrate unipolarity, but the behavior of second-rank powers reinforced its obviousness. The “recent behavior of Japan and Germany,” for example illustrates this, since “they have generally hidden under the table since the first shots rang out in Kuwait” (1990/91, 24). Europe as a regional power demonstrated the same tendency. While “a unified Europe may sometime in the next century act as a single power, its initial disarray and disjointed national responses to the crisis in the Persian Gulf again illustrate that ‘Europe’ does not even qualify as a player on the world stage” (1990/91, 24). Not only were other major states’ responses disjointed or worse, but the Gulf crisis further demonstrated that others do not, and cannot, act without America leading the way for them: “where the United States does not tread, the alliance does not follow” (1990/91, 24).

Although Krauthammer contends that the “unipolar moment” is here to stay at least in the short term, its long term endurance is by no means guaranteed. The risks of American isolationism are the second element of the post-Cold War world. “For a small but growing chorus of Americans this vision of a unipolar world led by a dynamic America is a nightmare. Hence the second element of the post-Cold War reality: the revival of American isolationism” (1990/91, 27). Isolationism is a theme of thinking about American foreign policy that goes back

to its founding, yet given the world's new unipolar structure, this is simply no longer tenable. The "more extreme isolationists define vital national interests to mean the physical security of the United States, and the more elusive isolationists take care never to define them at all" (1990/91, 28). Like the obviousness of unipolarity itself, the impracticability of isolationism was revealed by the Gulf War. An aggressive state that invades an oil-producing neighbor who is vital to American economic and national security interests "can hardly be a matter of indifference to the United States," Krauthammer (1990/91, 28) argues. Indeed, if today's isolationists find that "upon reflection...the Persian Gulf is not, after all, a vital American interest, then it is hard to see what 'vital interest' can mean. If the Persian Gulf is not a vital interest, then nothing is" (1990/91, 28).

Just as Iraq's actions in Kuwait demonstrate the naivety and danger of isolationism, so does it epitomize the third part of the system of knowledge S_2 deployed, the threats posed from the rise of what Krauthammer calls the "Weapon State." This is in fact one of the more seductive developments of the new unipolar international system. Although a unipolar system might seem at first to be less prone to conflict than a bi- or multipolar one, this is not the case. Here is "the third and most crucial element in the post-Cold War world: the emergence of a new strategic environment marked by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction" (1990/91, 30). The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction adds to the rise of "relatively small, peripheral and backward states [that] will be able to emerge rapidly as threats not only to regional, but to world, security" (1990/91, 30). Iraq, North Korea, Libya, Argentina, Pakistan, Iran, and South Africa are all mentioned as current and/or potential Weapons States that could pose a threat in the near future (1990/91, 31).

If these points constitute the body of “objective” knowledge S_2 deployed in the text, what is the master signifier S_1 underpinning this knowledge? Every system of knowledge S_2 is supported by the force of its master signifiers S_1 , argues Lacan. The knowledge S_2 offered, or produced, in this text paints a picture of a world where American international activism is the best way to avoid a breakdown of world order. The fact that the world is not multipolar or bipolar demonstrates that even if multilateral management of world affairs between a handful of large and influential states is hypothetically possible, it is certainly not the case now. American unipolarity, in fact, demonstrates the opposite. This is because the United States is the only country capable and willing to impose order on the global system. Indeed, an extensive international activism is necessary to maintaining world order. “If America wants stability, it will have to create it” (1990/91, 29). Thus, ostensibly, America does not act merely for itself, but acts on *behalf* of the entire world. The “world does not sort itself out on its own” and needs an active great power, the only remaining superpower, to provide the leadership and example that others want (1990/91, 29). Conversely, if the United States does not take on this role, the harm to world order will not be one of degree, but of kind. “The alternative to unipolarity is chaos,” Krauthammer (1990/91, 32) contends. The world therefore *needs* American power if it is to be a civilized, orderly, and secure world. No other actor or entity is capable of providing that which the United States can. There is either an American world, or there is no civilized world at all.

Yet, this unipolarity is not as benevolent as Krauthammer lets on. “Our best hope for safety in such times, as in difficult times past, is in American strength and will – the strength and will to lead a unipolar world, unashamedly laying down the rules of world order and being prepared to enforce them” (1990/91, 33). Imposing rules of its choosing, that suit its own

interests, is almost by definition in the interests of the rest of the world, since without American unipolarity there is nothing but “chaos.” Indeed, this is the only alternative to American political, military, and economic global dominance. America is obliged to, and indeed *must*, compel the world to conform to its own rules, lest bedlam swallow the globe. An American world ordered by American rules is in the service of the rest of the world, who cannot provide order themselves. American stability *is* global stability. Global stability, in turn, means America itself is stable enough to provide the “strength and will” that the world needs. Thus, American power is not merely for the world’s sake, but for its *own* sake, for America’s sake. American power is good for the world, and good for America. This understanding of American power is the master signifier S_1 that underpins, and makes possible, the vision of the unipolar world. This notion of American power for its own sake is the master signifier S_1 supporting the “objective” knowledge of unipolarity.

There is a close relationship between the master signifier S_1 and the body of knowledge S_2 deployed in Krauthammer’s text. In the structure of the University discourse, knowledge is typically seen as non-political and non-ideological. It is seen as “knowledge” apart from s/he who offers it, which confers upon it the sense of legitimacy, which in turn gives it the power of agency in the discourse (i.e. in the agent position). In Krauthammer’s discourse, S_2 and S_1 are mutually implicating insofar as he articulates them as nearly overlapping. The world is unipolar, is still a dangerous place, and it needs the unipolar power to make the world less dangerous. American power is used on behalf of the world that is perceived as wanting it, and is used on behalf of American interests. It is in American interests, and the world’s interest, to “unashamedly” construct and impose American global rules. “America” and “the world” nearly come to overlap. America’s interests and the world’s interests overlap. The “rest” of the world

is denied much of a place in Krauthammer's text, except to point out that they lack the "strength and will" of the U.S., that they "do not tread" where the U.S. does not, and that the few "weapon states" that exist pose a threat to an American-centered global order. Krauthammer's construction of a "unipolar world" in the text both produces and supports the position and ambition of the subject "America." These "observations" of the unipolar world offers a thin veneer of "knowledge" S_2 to cover the latent truth of the American power S_1 constructed and advocated by the discourse. This "objective" knowledge S_2 is presented as obvious and beyond question, thus also implying that the need for American global supremacy and American-imposed world order (constituting the master signifier S_1) is also beyond question.

What is the split subject $\$$ of Krauthammer's discourse? Krauthammer offers a new system of knowledge S_2 to the audience in a discourse, which then produces a particular kind of subject $\$$ (that is, at the position of product in the structure of the Hysteric's discourse). The subject $\$$ that Krauthammer's discourse produces is an "America" that sits astride the globe as the only superpower to survive the Cold War. The most forceful assertions of the text are constructions of "America" as obviously dominant without competition. The "center of world power is the unchallenged superpower" (1990/91, 23). There "is but one first-rate power and no prospect in the immediate future of any power to rival it" (1990/91, 24). "American preeminence" allows it to participate in any part of the world that it chooses in largely any way (political, economic, military) it chooses, and this is partly "based on the fact that" it "was the United States, acting unilaterally and with extraordinary speed, that in August 1990 prevented Iraq from effectively taking control of the entire Arabian peninsula" (1990/91, 24). The "unipolar moment," for the time being, is here to stay. America is the preeminent global power without rival. Therefore it seems upon first that the subject $\$$ "America" does not suffer from

division, antagonism, or frustration. The national subject does not seem as frustrated by the divisions that typically plague split subjects \$.

Thus, it is almost as if America has achieved the very goal that not only helped to guide its behavior throughout the Cold War, but has nearly achieved the foreign policy goals that neoconservatives had been driving at for decades. The United States has come as close to dominating the world since the end of World War II. As a subject, the “United States” has come as close to wholeness, to *jouissance*, as it perhaps ever has. “We” have virtually achieved the fantasy of unipolarity. As the center of world power, the “United States” has nearly reached wholeness. This world domination can be understood as a wholeness of the “self,” as *jouissance*, because of what Krauthammer implies throughout the text regarding the constitution of world order. Again, his contention that the “alternative to unipolarity is chaos” is crucial (1990/91, 32).

However, there are some obstacles posed to the full realization of an American-imposed world order. There are, in other words, a few blockages to the fantasy image of an American world that constrain the fullness or *jouissance* that the subject believes it could experience were it not for the blockages. World security in the current unipolar world is threatened by the risks posed by “Weapons States.”

We are in for abnormal times. Our bet hope for safety in such times, as in difficult times past, is in American strength and will – the strength and will to lead a unipolar world, unashamedly laying down the rules of world order and being prepared to enforce them. Compared to the task of defeating fascism and communism, averting chaos is a rather subtle call to greatness. It is not a task we are any more eager to undertake than the great twilight struggle just concluded. But it is just as noble and just as necessary (1990/91, 33).

Throughout the Cold War the U.S. strove for security against a mortal foe, and now must engage with the same level of zeal to ward off “chaos.” “Chaos,” while not spelled out explicitly, for Krauthammer evidently means the lack of American-imposed global rules and order. With the fall of the Soviet Union, there is no longer the possibility that another state

power will be able to impose a different set of global rules. Having defeated fascism and communism, the U.S. has come close to the possibility of a world managed by American rules. And despite the threat from “Weapons States,” they are mostly “small, peripheral and backward states” incapable of global domination. Krauthammer sees most of the industrialized world’s foreign policy and coalescing behind that of the United States. “The unipolar moment means that with the close of the century’s three great Northern civil wars (World War I, World War II and the Cold War) an ideologically pacified North seeks security and order by aligning its foreign policy behind that of the United States” (1990/91, 25). The major industrial powers, worn from conflict, voluntarily step behind the dynamic leadership of the United States since it is the only state that can provide world security. This sense of world security, understood by Krauthammer as a distinctly American and American-provided security, can be understood as the wholeness the subject seeks. Once there are no more threats to world, to the American world, it will seemingly lack nothing. The *jouissance* of world security that it sought during the Cold War was denied by communism and thus out-of-reach. The *jouissance* that seems closer now that communism is no more seems closer still; the “unipolar moment” is now, and the world is closer to American domination than ever before. But, *jouissance* is still out of reach. The fantasy constructed by the text implies what such a world may look like, but also offers a number of obstacles and losses that explain to the subject why its enjoyment is still not forthcoming.

This, in turn, points to the place of object *a* in the discourse. In the University discourse, object *a* occupies the position of receiving other. Yet, this does not mean it is a positively existing entity in the Symbolic order. Object *a* is the term Lacan uses to name the subject’s lack, the missing Thing that the subject feels will make it a whole subject once again, that is, once the missing object *a* is recovered. Although the subject believes this is something that has been lost,

it is only a retroactive construction of something lost. In order to believe that it can alleviate its loss, to feel that its anxiety and division can be healed, the subject presumes that something *must have caused* its desire. The subject then constructs a fantasy that pinpoints what it believes was lost, why it was a crucial part of itself, what now keeps the subject from reclaiming it, and implies the *jouissance* that will be experienced should the missing object be found. As a text constructing a particular kind of identification, we would expect Krauthammer's discourse to offer an underlying fantasy that posited something lost, a lost part of the subject, that if recovered would again bring security and wholeness to the subject. As with most texts, desire would be channeled through the Symbolic discourse of the text toward the object *a*, which would be constructed as missing. A fantasy would be offered to the subject that would promise the satisfaction and security of wholeness, of *jouissance*, which the subject would then follow through which to procure the enjoyment promised.

Krauthammer's text, in an unusual detour from typical neoconservative texts, constructs a subject that does not seem to lack much that is vital to its "self." The place of object *a* in Krauthammer's text is best understood through a discussion of the fantasy of American unipolarity and the blockages posed to it. What the split subject is missing in this discourse is in one sense something that has been lost, and in another sense is something that has not existed, but which the fantasy promises is on the cusp of coming into being – a truly American-centered world. The subject "America" has lost something it once had ("strength and will") and also desires something that is just-out-of-reach (an American world order).

Fantasy and Identification

The fantasy that fills out the structure of the University discourse brings us to the relationship between the subject $\$$ and the missing object *a* ($\$ \diamond a$). There is not a direct relationship between the subject and the missing object, but rather different Symbolic

manifestations (represented by the lozenge \diamond) of the mediations between the split subject $\$$ and what it believes is missing. The knowledge S_2 deployed in a University discourse produces a split subject $\$$ by interpellating the subject's fantasy, that is, by interpellating the empty place in the discourse where the subject $\$$ presumes its missing part must have been.

The fantasy of Krauthammer's discourse differs from fantasies offered by neoconservatives at other times. In one sense, this is to be expected. Different times and issues call for different arguments. Yet, many observers note that since the beginning of the movement in the 1960s and 1970s, one fairly consistent quality of neoconservatism is the ever-present sense of doom just around the corner, and national choices that are always starkly dichotomous. As Bacevich (2005, 77) wryly observes, "on the one hand – if the nation disregards the neoconservative call to action – there is the abyss. On the other hand – if the nation heeds that call – the possibility of salvation exists." Krauthammer's text displays many of the usual neoconservative precepts that characterize the movement from its beginning until after September 11, 2001 (including the primacy of military power, and the idea that American global hegemony is benevolent and beneficial for non-Americans). Yet, crucially, his notion that "chaos" lurks close-by, while at other times in his writing has taken center-stage, conflicts in significant way with the major thrust of this message of unipolarity. It is through this tension that we can understand the affective appeal (or lack thereof) of the fantasy. Rather constructing a subject of lack, Krauthammer's discourse largely constructs a subject much closer to fullness. This, in turn, does not evoke desire for identification, but instead functions to kill desire for identification.

Remember that, for Lacan, desire is coextensive with lack (Fink 1995, 54). To exist in the Symbolic order (indeed, to exist as a subject at all), one must desire. Loss evokes desire,

desire drives identification, and only through identification with the social resources of the Symbolic order can subjects gain the recognition they need to achieve a sense of stability and security. Krauthammer's discourse presumably does not spark much desire because the subject it constructs is, strictly speaking, not missing all that much. As the unipolar power, or, as the subject is constructed through the fantasy of being a unipolar power, there is not much desire in Krauthammer's text for something *else* that might make the subject feel more secure or more stable. As the unipolar power, the subject seems already quite "close" to the wholeness of *jouissance* in terms of a world shaped by American-imposed rules. Now that the Cold War is over, and now that the only other superpower that remotely had the capability to impose its own global rules is no more, the obstacles to the national subject's *jouissance* have largely been removed. Yet, once the subject approaches the "object" it believes it desires, desire for that specific object begins to fade. If one were to find the Thing that would truly make one whole, desire would die, and subjectivity would evaporate. The meaninglessness of the Real would set in, and one would cease to be a subject within the Symbolic order. As Lacan (1998, 111) argues, "That's not it' is the very cry by which the *jouissance* obtained is distinguished from the *jouissance* expected." That is, paradoxically, the closer the subject gets to *jouissance*, the more desire fades, and the more anxiety sets in, since it is only through desire that we have subjectivity, and therefore the more desiring the subject becomes – almost reaching a state of desiring for the sake of desiring.

Although Krauthammer's message of unipolarity constructs a subject not lacking all that much, thus evoking less desire for a complete "self" than it may otherwise, the fantasy of the "unipolar moment" was not completely without loss. There are several senses of a lack or of a missing object in Krauthammer's discourse.

First, one way we can understand object *a* in this fantasy is the lack of an American-dominated world towards which Krauthammer guides the audience throughout the text. While the international system is, in Krauthammer's view, undoubtedly a unipolar one, it is not unipolar to the extent that every other state or actor willingly submits to American-imposed order. There are indeed new "threats" in the new world order. As he argues, weapons of mass destruction and "Weapons States" that acquire and use them "will constitute the greatest single threat to world security for the rest of our lives" (1990/91, 31-2). The "Weapons States" that he discusses are some of the few states mentioned at all in the text, presumably because they are the outlaws that do not conform to post-Cold War order as defined by the United States. North Korea, Iraq, Libya, Argentina, Pakistan, Iran, and South Africa all pose a blockage to American/global order through their possession (at the time) of weapons of mass destruction, even though some of these states are more threatening than others. The obstacle these few states pose to the fantasy of a truly unipolar world, where we no longer must "hope for safety" but can achieve complete safety, evokes the desire to remove them as obstacles to the fantasy. Desire is guided toward this image of a perpetually American-dominated world, yet pushes up against the signifiers that pose obstacles to it. Desire pushes towards that elusive object it believes will offer the *jouissance* of being a complete subject, here, an American-centered world with American-imposed global rules. Although this object is unattainable, since it is but a Symbolic manifestation of a void, a part of the Real that the subject feels is a piece of itself yet does not have, the subject's fantasy allows it to believe that it is attainable. An absolutely American-dominated global system is *presupposed* to have existed were it not for these few states that pose an obstacle. Krauthammer's entire discourse guides the audience to believe that a truly

American-centered world is entirely plausible and desirable, yet this very object or image of desire that promises the subject wholeness does not exist in Symbolic reality.

Far from the mere social construction of threats, Krauthammer's elaboration of the position of "Weapons States" in the new unipolar world order hinges upon the affective movements that give rise to self-other relations in the first place. The construction of these threats is in part the production of a hierarchy of "identities" in which America is differentiated from those states that are not part of America or the new American unipolar world. "Weapons States" constitute the opposing side of a binary that Krauthammer constructs between those states who are members of and who are perceived to openly welcome the new American world, and those states who are not "us." Yet, it is not simply the presence of these others who pose an obvious threat to "us." And, it is not enough to just make explicit the binary construction of national identities. As Žižek (1993, 206) argues, "it is not sufficient to point out how the...Other presents a threat to our identity. We should rather inverse this proposition: the fascinating image of the Other gives a body to our own innermost split, to what is 'in us more than ourselves' and thus prevents us from achieving fully identity with ourselves." In other words, the construction of the self through reference to the other, the construction of "America" through reference to "Weapons States," is premised upon a frustration of the American "self." The "self" is an impossible project, and "America" and a completely American-dominated international system are likewise impossible projects. The production of "Weapons States" in the discourse "gives a body," as Žižek would argue, to the ultimate frustration of the national "self" that Krauthammer's fantasy attempts to construct. These movements of frustrations and desire for a full "self" give rise to the construction of self and other in Krauthammer's discourse.

There are other elements of Krauthammer's discourse that illustrate the affective function of and attachment to fantasy obstacles. Particularly, the notion that fantasies often presume that others "steal our enjoyment" appear briefly several times in Krauthammer's text. Although "we" are without a doubt the only superpower, Krauthammer (1990/91, 29) asserts that "there will constantly be new threats disturbing our peace." Global stability is "our" stability, since American domination is, again, good, necessary, and vital if "chaos" is to be avoided. "Weapons states" who "brandish" their weapons must be policed in sufficient manner so to alleviate the threat posed by them, and the rise of "intolerant aggressive nationalisms in a disintegrating communist bloc" both can be read as moments of fantasmatic blockages in which the other is doing something "we" *should* be doing. One gets the sense that, as the lone superpower, America and America alone should have the right to "brandish" its weapons of mass destruction, for instance in "unabashedly laying down the rules of world order." No one else should have the weapons that the U.S. enjoys. One also gets the sense that the potential rise of "aggressive intolerant nationalisms" pose a blockage to the American subject desiring fullness because America itself should have the sole right to engage in the behaviors engendered by such forces. Krauthammer's entire discourse is constructed around the idea that America should aggressively promote its own ideas for how the world should be policed and organized, and that no other entity or state has the ability or license to do so. America alone should dominate the world, and, for Krauthammer, it should be intolerant of anyone else attempting to preempt this new opportunity. America has the "strength and will" that the rest of the world does not, and thus America rightfully should exercise them to the benefit of all. Others' "aggressive intolerant nationalisms" are threatening and not to be tolerated, but American aggressive intolerance of others and nationalistic expansion and dominance are to be welcomed. American nationalist-

driven internationalism is beneficial for the world, other nationalisms are threatening. This illustrates precisely the Lacanian notion that constructions of self and other are underpinned by desire and affect. “What we gain,” Žižek (1993, 206) argues, “by transposing the perception of inherent social antagonisms into the fascination with the Other... is the fantasy-organization of desire.” Through Krauthammer’s discussion of threats, one sees the fascination exhibited by what others are doing, the enjoyment that they are displaying, and how “they” are in a sense stealing the enjoyment that “we” should be having. It is the fullness they seem to attain in their enjoyment that they are perceived by the subject to have the very Thing that “we” seem to be missing (see Žižek 1993; Stavrakakis 2007). “America” is lacking in some sense, and the Thing it lacks is the very Thing that “Weapons States” brandish openly. These desires and frustrations, again, demonstrate the affective dynamics that give rise to the production of self-other relations.

Second, there is a sense in the text that despite being the sole remaining superpower, the subject “America” is not fully itself. There are indeed “Weapons States” that America must worry about, but in Krauthammer’s view the other substantial threat to unipolarity is the recurrent isolationism in the U.S. Indeed, if this revival becomes widely influential, an American “collapse to second-rank status will not be for foreign but for domestic reasons” (Krauthammer 1990/91, 26). Although the reasons remain unnamed, he alludes to national debt and “America’s insatiable desire for yet higher standards of living without paying any of the cost” (Krauthammer 1990/91, 27).

The other “domestic” political factors he fears are the international effects of American isolationism mentioned above. And, importantly, Krauthammer’s fears of isolationism arguably relate to the “strength and will” that he speaks of in closing his essay. Although he does not explicitly relate this to isolationism, in terms of the fantasy elements of his discourse it

constitutes another aspect of the lack of a full American “self.” He concedes that isolationism in America has a long history; one “must have respect for a strain of American thinking so powerful that four months before Pearl Harbor the vote to extend draft enlistments passed the House of Representatives by a single vote” (1990/91, 28). Yet, the manner in which isolationists, in Krauthammer’s view, define the national interest in fact goes against America’s true national interests, which extend beyond the narrow confines of the nation’s borders. America should “unashamedly” lay down its own rules for global order, since the world’s interests coincide with American interests (1990/91, 33). Although isolationism may indeed be an old theme of American foreign policy, it is simply out of place in a world that is so obviously unipolar which, by definition, must be dominated by the unipolar power.

“Isolationism” in this sense weakens the very part of the American “self” that must be utilized in imposing and enforcing world order. Krauthammer’s emphasis on the necessity of “American strength and will” for world security points to qualities that the subject “America” needs to have, in some sense has, yet in another sense does not have. In other words, “strength and will” are part of the subject that is missing and needs to fully become its own image of itself. These characteristics are, foremost, uniquely American. The rest of the world cannot act without America leading the way, since “where the United States does not tread, the alliance will not follow” (1990/91, 24). Indeed, major states such as Japan and Germany remained “hidden under the table” when global leadership against Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait was needed (1990/91, 24). The rest of the world lacks the “strength and will” needed to define and carry out global order. In a sense, however, so does the United States. As the unipolar power, America without a doubt has a great deal more “strength and will” than any other power. Yet, given a currently resurgent domestic “isolationism,” and other potential “domestic” problems, the United States does not yet

have the “strength and will” necessary to fully embrace the global role that it can only take upon itself. The national subject is lacking something which has served it faithfully in the past, but which it has lost at the very time when it needs it the most. What exactly Krauthammer means by “strength and will” is left undefined, yet there is any number of ways their meaning could be filled in. This lack of definition, indeed the impossibility of fully defining what they mean, is precisely why they function as signifiers of the national subject’s lack in Krauthammer’s fantasy.

“Strength and will” function as the Symbolic stand-ins for what the subject “America” currently lacks the full force of, yet they are still a part of the subject. They may have been temporarily and partly forgotten or lost during the current “isolationist” worries, but they are still a missing part of the national “self” that must be re-discovered and re-charged if “America” is going to more fully step into its proper role as global leader. The partial *jouissance* implied in both of these aspects – in the illusory and just-out-of-reach image of an American-dominated global system, and the “strength and will” that is both present and absent in/from the subject which it must fully reclaim – sparks the subject’s desire for their pursuit. In the fantasy of the “unipolar moment,” the subject “America” seeks the missing objects, the missing parts of itself, that it believes will bring it the wholeness or *jouissance* it seeks, yet the fantasy posits obstacles to explain to the subject why *jouissance* is not forthcoming and why its desire remains frustrated. Although figures such as “Weapons States” are posited as blocking the culmination and solidification of the national “self,” these figures merely Symbolically cover over the antagonisms, divisions, and frustrations that are inherent to national “identity.” Even though the signifier “isolationism” is offered for why our “strength and will” have not been delivered, this of course does not mean that “strength and will” would automatically be forthcoming if the “isolationist” movement were to subside. “Strength and will” do not represent anything but the

lack of what the subject believes it needs to pursue the image of an American-dominated world, itself an illusory object projected by the fantasy to contain the *jouissance* it desires. Both the image of an American-dominated world and the “strength and will” that are posited as necessary for its pursuit are the Symbolic manifestations of the subject’s loss of “self,” the incompleteness and ambiguity of the “self.”

However, the crucial point here is that the desires evoked by these dynamics of fantasy are very much in tension with the overall tenor of Krauthammer’s discourse. Again, as the subject “America” constructed as the sole superpower, there is not much desire in Krauthammer’s text for another missing object that might alleviate the ambiguities of the subject. As the unipolar power, the national subject is already “close” to the wholeness of *jouissance* in terms of a world shaped by American-imposed rules. However, once the subject approaches the “object” it desires, desire itself starts to fade. If one were to find the Thing that would truly make one whole, desire would die, and subjectivity would evaporate. The desires evoked by the fantasy obstacles posed and the evaporation of desire the closer it approaches the *jouissance* it seeks in the missing objects that promise it are in tension Krauthammer’s discourse. Indeed, the gaze constructed by the fantasy evokes little desire in an audience for a complete subject. The imagined gaze of the object back at the subject, from outside the subject, is “close” to how the discourse constructs the subject in the first place. There is not much “distance” between the subject and the missing object that offers the subject a view from which s/he could appear likeable to her/himself, and thus desire and strive for, that the subject does not already occupy. The subject in Krauthammer’s discourse, rather than evoking the desire for identification, in fact helps to dissolve desire. In closing in on a truly American-centered world, the desire for identification with the subject of this discourse (“America,” the “United States”) induces a kind

of dissatisfaction because it comes *too close* to the object(s) of desire. Without desire there is no subject, and here the subject is close to fulfilling its desire. In a sense, several aspects of Krauthammer's remarks resemble those of Jimmy Carter's examined above. The possibility that what "we" are missing is not only being blocked by others blocking our enjoyment, but rather is something in "domestic politics," in ourselves, recalls Carter's ill-fated comments on the national "mood" of the late 1970s. It is possible that the reasons for Carter's lack of social "grip" may similarly apply to this aspect of Krauthammer's discourse.

In terms of its affective appeal, then, a major reason why Krauthammer's thesis on unipolarity did not "grip" widespread audiences was because, presumably, it fails to spark substantial desires. If the United States now sits astride the globe with little to fear from other great powers, what's to desire? To evoke desire, and to set in motion the affective attachments of *jouissance*, the subject must feel as if something crucial is missing. Krauthammer's text constructed the United States, and the world, in terms of there being little left for the United States to do. There were few national "objects" left for desire to pull subjects towards. Although there are aspects of loss within the discourse, such as the loss of national "strength and will" necessary to impose global rules, and the sense that a world obeying American global rules is within reach, these aspects are in tension with the unipolarity thesis. The notion of the United States as the unipolar power and the United States as lacking the "strength and will" necessary to continue to be the unipolar power are in conflict with each other. For these reasons, Krauthammer's discourse of the "unipolar moment" largely fails to evoke the widespread desires that other neoconservative discourses had enjoyed, both in the past and subsequent to Krauthammer's text.

Hegemonic Logic

Lacan's framework offers insights into the affective appeal of Krauthammer's neoconservative text, which in turn helps us to understand its attempt at achieving discursive hegemony. In other words, Lacan's insights help to explain the extra-discursive dynamics that underpin the text's hegemonic logic. Mapping the constructions of equivalence and difference, nodal points, and universals and particulars through the above understandings of fantasy and desire can offer an understanding why this text was unable to achieve widespread resonance with audiences.

Laclau's theories of the logics of equivalence and difference are useful in demonstrating how political identifications and boundaries are drawn through the mutual construction of self and other. For Laclau, all social identifications are constituted at the intersection of logics of equivalence and difference, and these logics are at work in Krauthammer's discourse.

"American" identification in the essay is constructed through a series of prominent signifiers that bind together what "America" means. For example, "unipolar" is obviously used throughout the text to characterize the subject "America" as sitting "at the apex of the industrial West" (1990/91, 24). Almost by default being the lone remaining "unchallenged superpower," the United States is the unipolar power (1990/91, 23). Other signifiers contribute to building this image. "American preeminence is based on the fact that it is the only country with the military, diplomatic, political, and economic assets to be a decisive player in any conflict in whatever part of the world it chooses to involve itself" (1990/91, 24). "A dominant great power essentially acts alone," but "embarrassed at the idea," tries to project a façade of "pseudo-multilateralism" by recruiting "a ship here, a brigade there, and blessings all around" from its lesser allies" (1990/91, 25). And, again, the world's "best hope for safety" is "in American strength and will" (1990/91, 33).

These various signifiers together constitute American identification within Krauthammer's discourse, the "American" subject. "Unipolar," "superpower," "preeminence," "dominant," "strength and will" – each link in this chain of signifiers is deployed to express an aspect of American identification in the text, and all together attempt to express something similar between them. "Preeminence," for Krauthammer, means something close to "dominant" which is in turn underpinned by "strength and will" necessary for dominance. They are equivalent to each other insofar as they are meant to express the similarities between them. In this sense, their meanings collapse to the extent that they are seen as expressing some underlying or foundational quality. Yet, there is no extra-discursive "essence" of the subject that they refer to. The chain attempts to touch the "essence" of the subject that it tries to express directly, but there is no such foundation "beneath" the words themselves. Their meanings are continually deferred to the other links in the chain without traveling outside the chain, since such an "outside" would constitute the Real, which is inexpressible. Their meanings are both equivalent and different, which constitutes their deferral to others in the chain. "Unipolar," "superpower," "preeminence," "dominant," and "strength and will" differ inasmuch as we can speak of them as different signifiers, yet are also equivalent in Krauthammer's discourse inasmuch as they are meant to express something they all share. Yet what they share is simply their difference with the signifiers constituting the others in the fantasy.

The same logic is at work in the construction of the others of Krauthammer's discourse. As discussed above, several potential "Weapons States" are offered by Krauthammer as "new threats" that "will constantly be disturbing our peace" (1990/91, 29). These "aggressive" and "relatively small, peripheral, and backward states will be able to emerge rapidly as threats not only to regional, but to world, security" (1990/91, 23, 30). Additionally, China, or "the butchers

of Tiananmen Square,” are held up as embodying the opposite values the United States is attempting to create for the rest of the world (1990/91, 26). While these states pose threats because they flaunt their weapons of mass destruction and suppress democratic impulses, they must be countered because they pose blockages to the fantasy of an American-centered world order. If anything other than American-imposed global rules becomes dominant, “chaos” will engulf the world. “The alternative to unipolarity is chaos,” and since “the world does not sort itself out on its own,” the United States must actively do so (1990/91, 32, 29). Anything other than American-led unipolarity is “chaos,” thus confront these obstacles to the fantasy. “Weapons States,” “aggressive,” “small, peripheral, and backward,” “butchers,” “chaos” – this chain of signifiers together construct the identifications of the threatening other, and draw their meanings from both their similarities to each other (i.e., their equivalence) and their difference to the chain of signifiers constructing American identification. “Weapons States,” “aggressive,” “small, peripheral, and backward,” “butchers,” and “chaos” all have different meanings inasmuch as one can speak of them as different signifiers, but are also meant to express some similarity underlying all of them.

Yet, what they all share in common is not something positive, but rather their differences from its other, the American chain of equivalences. Both the American chain of equivalences and the other chain of equivalences draw their meanings from their mutual differences. Thus, they are mutually constitutive within Krauthammer’s discourse. Logics of equivalence collapse the boundaries between the “interior” elements of a chain, making their shared similarity nothing but their difference to an opposing chain. Logics of difference break down the boundaries produced by logics of equivalence. Both logics are at work in both chains in the way that a

boundary is constructed between the American chain and the chain of the other, and in the way the differences within each chain are suppressed in relation to their difference from the other.

It is also along each of these chains that desire flows. Desire, for Lacan, has the same metonymical movement as does signification and meaning within Laclau's logic of equivalence. Desire is the element that allows these signifiers to be brought together in chains of equivalence and difference in the first place. The subject's desire to be complete, desire for *jouissance*, is channeled through the fantasy of the "unipolar moment," and is largely concentrated upon the series of signifiers that represent the subject "America." Or, more specifically, desire is concentrated along the chain of equivalences that attempts, but ultimately fails, to represent the subject. The subject's desire for fullness travels along the various signifiers that promise representation, such as "unipolar," "superpower," "preeminence," "dominant," and "strength and will." Each offer partial representation for the subject, yet each fails to provide the fullness that the subject seeks within the Symbolic. What the subject truly desires does not exist in the Symbolic order, but is instead part of the Real. The missing object(s) that the subject feels will make it whole – again, the illusory and just-out-of-reach image of an American-dominated global system, and the characteristics, such as "strength and will," that it needs to reach this image – do not exist within the Symbolic order, and thus cannot be fully represented in the chains of equivalence that attempt to construct an American subject. Similarly, desire is also frustrated in the chain of differences, the chain of the other that is mutually constitutive of equivalences. Desire for subjectivity flows along both chains and is both partly satisfied and frustrated in this flow. Desire is partly fulfilled in the partial representations that "our" signifiers offer, although this representation is partial. Desire is also frustrated by the signifiers representing the other, which the subject believes blocks the fulfillment of its own representation.

The master signifiers/nodal points of Krauthammer's fantasy function through the same kinds of presence and absence that as the chains of signification in which they are positioned. The main messages of the essay rely upon the force of the nodal points Krauthammer deploys. And, as with all nodal points, Krauthammer's attempt to fill in their inherent ambiguity constitutes the attempt at hegemony of this text, since for Laclau (1996, 44) hegemony is this very attempt at filling. For example, the nodal point "America" and/or the "United States" is not a neutral descriptor that fully and accurately represents the country, but is rather a site of inscription upon which a range of meanings can be constructed. This is true of their role in Krauthammer's text. "America's" *real* interest, its *true* role is not that which the "isolationists" argue for, that America should largely keep to itself and should merely aim to defend its own "physical security" (1990/91, 28). Krauthammer ties "America" to a range of other signifiers which, through its very associations within the chain, shifts its meaning away from what the "isolationists" would have. "Unipolar," "superpower," "preeminence," "dominant," and "strength and will" all help to fill in the meaning of "America" and the "United States." For Americans, the timeless meaning of what the country is must always and continually be filled in by signifiers whose meanings are contingent. In other words, the supposedly "universal" meaning of "America" and the "United States" is partially filled in by the "particular" content that Krauthammer constructs.

Other nodal points function in the same manner. "Unipolar," for Krauthammer, names both the current structure of the international system and the United States' role in that structure. And, factors such as "strength and will" are "our best hope for safety" in such a world (1990/91, 33). "Unipolar" ties together a number of meanings in the text, from the structure of the international system, to America's role in it, to also expressing what it *can* be if America steps

up to the role. “Strength and will” also take on a number of meanings, such as those qualities that have gotten us through “difficult times past,” to what the United States has now that the rest of the world does not, to what the country needs to re-discover and re-charge if it is to more fully accept its proper “unipolar” role and “unashamedly” lay down the rules of global order (1990/91, 33). As nodal points, they do indeed tie together a “knot” of meanings in the text, helping to convey its major messages. As such, their contingent filling in constitutes the hegemonic effort in Krauthammer’s text.

Yet, discursive hegemony is always underpinned by the dynamics of desire and affective attachments that texts evoke in their audiences. As discussed above, Krauthammer’s neoconservative discourse on America’s world role did not offer fantasies that were particularly evocative of desires to be a full subject. Indeed, what he offers is a discourse in which the subject is already quite “close” to wholeness and *jouissance* as the text constructs it. In constructing a world order in which America, the national subject, has come fairly close to achieving what it desires (i.e. a global order based its own unparalleled power and the rules of its choosing), the hegemonic attempts at filling in prominent nodal points with his own preferred and contingent meanings presumably evoked little desire in audiences. The meanings of the text’s major signifying nodal points offered both senses of loss but at the same time offered a fantasy in which the subject was close to the wholeness of *jouissance*. The hegemony attempt to fill in these “universal” nodal points with “particular” neoconservative understandings failed because the underlying fantasy of the discourse offered little for subjects to desire, thus its lack of resonance and social “grip” (Glynos 1999).

To conclude this section, I argue that the relative lack of widespread social traction that neoconservatism had in the early 1990s can largely be traced back to the fantasies of subjectivity

that it offered. These fantasy aspects, taken together, help us to understand the relative lack of grip (Glynos 1999) that Krauthammer's neoconservative discourse had in the early 1990s. Compared to the early peak of neoconservative influence in the late 1970s, neoconservatives had trouble after the end of the Cold War. Using the ideas laid out in chapter three, this method of discourse analysis not only demonstrates a deeper understanding of self-other relations, but can trace how the affective dynamics of desire and *jouissance* play out in texts, which offer some insights into why some discourses are more successful than others. While neoconservatism in the early 1990s was unable to spark desires in widespread audiences, toward the latter part of the decade its political fortunes began to change. While Krauthammer remained within the movement as one of its foremost advocates, other writers, most notably Robert Kagan and William Kristol, began to articulate neoconservative themes that would turn out to resonate more with audiences than did similar discourses just a few years before.

“Resurrection”: Kristol and Kagan’s “Neo-Reganite” Foreign Policy

By the 1996 presidential election season, neoconservatives felt as though their movement, and conservatism in general, had lost energy. Although they had supported Bill Clinton over George H.W. Bush in the previous election (Bush's “prudent” *realpolitik* approach to foreign policy was anathema to the sweeping visions neoconservatives articulated), Clinton's first term focus on humanitarianism left them not only out of power, but without a leader who shared their vision. Even the “Republican Revolution” in the 1994 mid-term Congressional elections did not benefit neoconservatism as one might expect. As Chollet and Goldgeier (2008, 103) point out, “as the neoconservatives abandoned Clinton, the Republican Party abandoned them.” Of the ten policy positions of the Republican “Contract with America” only one mentioned foreign policy or national security, and foreign policy generally did not play much of a role in the campaigns of that year (Chollet and Goldgeier 2008, 107-9).

Although the 1994 Republican victories did not work out well for neoconservatives, the 1996 campaign season saw the beginning of increased efforts by the movement to have a heavier presence in foreign policy debates. Observers point out that it was around this time that neoconservatives did begin to gain more attention. As Halper and Clarke (2004, 74, 103) argue, during the 1990s neoconservatism not only swung from “near death” early in the decade to “resurrection” later in the decade, but experienced a “quantum increase” in influence. During these years of the late 1990s, Halper and Clarke (2004, 101) also argue that the considerable number of books, statements, and briefs offered by neoconservatives could all be summed up in “four very simple and doctrinaire notions: 1) supporting democratic allies and challenging the evildoers who defy American values, 2) America’s total responsibility for global order, 3) the promotion of political and economic freedom everywhere, and 4) increased spending on defense.” Furthermore,

“the greater part of the neoconservative doctrine that was elaborated during the 1990s and that now [in 2004] so heavily influences Washington’s priorities had little to do with terror. Instead the focus was the ‘emergence of China as a strong, determined, and potentially hostile power; the troubling direction of political developments in Russia; the continuing threat posed by aggressive dictatorships in Iraq, Serbia, and North Korea’: and ‘the increasingly alarming decline in American military capabilities.’ The mention of Iraq constitutes the only link to today’s war on terrorism” (Halper and Clarke 2004, 110).

Neoconservatism’s changing fortunes during the 1990s, then, seems in large part to have hinged upon the kinds of messages they were offering. Early discussions of spreading democracy and unipolarity, given the time, did not seem to catch on while statements about China, Russia, Iraq, North Korea, and potential American military weakness did seem to gain some traction.

Many of these ideas had roots in an essay that came to form the basis for much neoconservative advocacy during the latter 1990s. William Kristol and Robert Kagan’s “Toward

a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy” appeared in *Foreign Affairs* in 1996 and, as Heilbrunn (2008, 221) notes, “became the foundation for the new neoconservative crusade.” Many of the essay’s positions would constitute much of the ideological impetus behind the Project for a New American Century (P.N.A.C.), the think-tank formed by Kristol, Kagan, and others in the spring of 1997. P.N.A.C., of course, would later become synonymous with what many saw as the neoconservative hubris of the Bush Doctrine and the push for war in Iraq in 2003.

In one sense, Kristol and Kagan’s manifesto bears some initial similarity to Krauthammer’s earlier pronouncements. Both articulate world order which now, after the Cold War, centered around the United States. As Krauthammer had offered a vision of the world as unipolar with the United States on top, Kristol and Kagan also implored conservatives, the Clinton administration, and American citizens more broadly to recognize that the U.S. retains this position in the late 1990s. However, the particular dynamics of world political order differ notably in Kristol and Kagan’s eyes than through Krauthammer’s. Kristol and Kagan see themselves as the outsiders of a conservative movement and Republican Party that, in the mid-1990s, has little interest in foreign policy precisely at the time when they should be offering a new vision of American global leadership. For them, the mid-1990s felt like the mid-1970s for neoconservatives (Kristol and Kagan 1996, 19). Like the dominance of Kissinger-style realism of that time, neoconservatives felt dominated by the status quo of the isolationist stances of the then-current Republican Party. Patrick Buchanan’s outlook on foreign affairs was more popular with conservatives than Ronald Reagan’s bold visions. The Republican presidential candidate, Bob Dole, was “reduced . . . to asserting . . . that there really [were] differences in foreign policy between him and [Clinton]” (1996, 18).

What conservatives, and the nation, needed was a bold new vision offering a well-defined role for American power, a vision that neither party offered. In Kristol and Kagan's (1996, 20) view, the proper role of the U.S. was simple and concise: "benevolent global hegemony." With no other superpower to worry about, the U.S. was already in a position of strategic dominance, and the first goal of American foreign policy should be to preserve this hegemony by supporting allies, strengthening its military capabilities, and spreading its values around the world. Hegemony was not something to be feared, as some (especially traditional conservatives) often did. Rather than denouncing hegemony as something akin to imperialism, and rather than defending oneself against the charge from other countries, Americans should wholeheartedly embrace the label: hegemony "should be taken as a compliment as a guide to action" (20).

Kristol and Kagan walk through a list of events in the past six months that, although would strike few as a noteworthy period in world affairs, nevertheless demonstrate America's world role. American navy forces deterring Chinese aggression against Taiwan, American troops stationed in South Korea deterring a possible invasion by North Korea, American troops and a significant naval presence in the Persian Gulf to deter potential aggression by Iraq or Iran, and deployment and withdrawal of troops to and from Haiti – all of these actions demonstrate both the capacity of the U.S. to deal with a range of international problems, and reveal the indispensability of American power in the post-Cold War environment. According to Kristol and Kagan, the rest of the world prefers this arrangement, even if Americans by and large don't currently pay much attention. "Most of the world's major powers welcome U.S. global involvement and prefer America's benevolent hegemony to the alternatives" (Kristol and Kagan 1996, 21-2). Indeed, the fear of most around the world is not that the U.S. will overreach, but that it will not (Kristol and Kagan 1996, 22).

To maintain this dominance, and to make it clear to an uninterested American citizenry that they should desire world dominance (since they “fail to notice that they have never had it so good”), Kristol and Kagan (1996, 21, 23) proposed three goals that together should form the new centerpiece of American foreign policy. First, they declared that the \$260 billion defense budget was much too small. Instead of the additional \$7 billion that was added the year before, the U.S. should spend at least \$60-\$80 billion more each year. To clarify that this is not the radical proposal that it appears, the authors argue that their proposal was much less than the 50 percent of gross national product that the U.S. had spent at the height of the Cold War (Kristol and Kagan 1996 25). Second, they advocate greater citizen involvement in military matters. Since citizens were, by and large, unaware of the importance of American military efforts abroad, Kristol and Kagan advocate more programs to involve citizens in military service and to find other ways to “lower the barriers between civilian and military life” (Kristol and Kagan 1996, 27). Finally, foreign policy should “be informed with a clear moral purpose, based on the understanding that its moral goals and its fundamental national interests are almost always in harmony” (Kristol and Kagan 1996, 27). Just as Reagan had infused Americans with a sense of purpose and exceptionalism, so a neo-Reaganite re-orientation must embrace these fundamentals. Thus, many of the elements that characterize much of neoconservative thinking are forcefully articulated by Kristol and Kagan.

Discourse Structure

From a discursive perspective, Kristol and Kagan’s text is perhaps exemplary in its constructions of hierarchies and self and other. Supporting these overt manifestations of self and other, however, are implicit fantasies and subtle interplays of wholeness and lack, which spark desires for subjectivity and identification. As with the above analyses of neoconservatives texts, the first step in mapping these dynamics is to find out which of Lacan’s four discourse structures

(Master's, Hysteric's, University, Analyst's) best sheds light on Kristol and Kagan's text. The bulk of Kristol and Kagan's text is devoted to not only describing the current nature of the international system, but to offering a series of policy proposals that if enacted, in their view, will enhance America's position in the world. Given the relationships and dynamics between knowledge S_2 , master signifiers S_1 , split subjectivity $\$,$ and the position of lack a , Kristol and Kagan's essay seems close to the University discourse.

$$\text{University Discourse: } \frac{S_2}{S_1} \rightarrow \frac{a}{\$}$$

Although in the following discussion I argue that the dynamics of Kristol and Kagan's text are best understood through the framework of the University discourse, it arguably has elements of a Master's discourse. This will be pointed out as the discussion proceeds. First, however, we must first isolate the essay's different elements ($S_1, S_2, \$, a$).

What is the body of knowledge S_2 deployed in Kristol and Kagan's text. Although Kristol and Kagan's text, as this section argues, was sufficiently different from Krauthammer's earlier one such that it resonated more with audiences, the body of knowledge S_2 in both is quite similar. The authors state their express purpose as to "set forth the outlines of a conservative view of the world and America's proper role in it" (Kristol and Kagan 1996, 18). In doing so, their strategy is to present this worldview in terms of offering a picture of what they claim the world is actually like. Kristol and Kagan strongly protest what they deem the current consensus on American foreign policy. Having won the Cold War and defeated the Soviet Union, many in the United States were now either seduced by a renewal of the traditional Republican platform of isolationism, or were simply not interested in America's foreign relations. The "neoisolationism" of Pat Buchanan and many conservatives' assent to it, and "an American public that is indifferent, if not hostile, to foreign policy and commitments abroad" stood in stark

contrast America's actual global position (1996, 19). "Having defeated the 'evil empire,' the United States enjoys strategic and ideological predominance" (1996, 20). Although many find the idea of hegemony "either hubristic or morally suspect," the authors contend there is no reason for such suspicion (1996, 20). A "hegemon is nothing more or less than a leader with preponderant influence and authority over all others in its domain. That is America's position in the world today" (1996, 20). While the bulk of the essay is devoted to a policy agenda that Kristol and Kagan hope will be implemented to extend this hegemony into the far future, the knowledge they deploy as a-political is the "fact" that America "is" the global hegemon. It is, and it must do what it can to remain the hegemon. Of course, their "knowledge" is a particular construction of America's position in the world that actively contributes to maintaining that construction, rather than merely and a-politically representing an international system outside of the discourse used to describe it.

Recall that knowledge S_2 occupies the position of agent in the University discourse. Here "objective knowledge" has the power of authority because it is seen as separate from political perspective. Although it is actually underpinned by the force of master signifiers S_1 , they remain mostly latent or are seen as secondary in the discourse, their power and force covered by the deployment of a body of knowledge that is seen to legitimate them, rather than vice versa. Kristol and Kagan's text, though, seems driven by not only the "objective knowledge" they deploy but also by the sheer force of the master signifiers that take center stage in much of their argument. The overlap between knowledge S_2 and master signifiers S_1 is often close in any discourse (particularly in University discourses, given their positions as both its agent and latent truth), but they seem to be particularly close in this text.

To see this, we must next isolate the master signifiers S_1 of this text, and see how they relate to its knowledge S_2 . Kristol and Kagan's text relies on a substantial range of master signifiers that help to tie together its various meanings through their embedding within the fantasy offered. Their text seems to rely more upon the force of master signifiers than even the other neoconservative texts analyzed above. Kristol and Kagan deploy a multiplicity signifiers that are typically highly valued in American political culture, by the American "big" Other, and their entrenchment within their particular fantasy fills in their ambiguous meanings in particular ways. For example, they contend that most Americans do not realize that the rest of the world is now unprecedentedly receptive to American values in the form of the "spread of freedom and democratic governance, an international system of free-market capitalism and free trade" (1996, 22). Still, the United States must actively promote "American principles of governance abroad – democracy, free markets, [and] respect for liberty" 1996, 27).

For Kristol and Kagan, these and other principles are not worthy of promotion simply because they are in America's national interest, but they are universal principles whose spread is good for all who are exposed to them. Ronald Reagan's foreign policy, for them, epitomized what such a moral foreign policy looks like, and the revival of Reagan's priorities would reinvigorate these principles as the central part of American foreign policy. The United States "needs a neo-Reaganite foreign policy of military supremacy and moral confidence" (1996, 23). Reagan's foreign policy was "a very different kind of patriotic mission" than the one [then] currently pursued by the Clinton administration and a conservative Congress (1996, 29). Such a re-orientation would not only make conservatives realize that a "neoisolationist" foreign policy is unworkable in the current world order where America sits on top, but would also "challenge [the] public mood" that is the source of Americans' indifference toward their proper world role

(1996, 19). “Freedom,” “democratic governance,” “free market” “patriotic,” “moral confidence” – all of these function as master signifiers that help tie together, in the authors’ view, the international system that is currently organized largely in America’s favor and what America itself stands for. There are also many other valued signifiers that are offered throughout the essay, particular where they put forth their policy proposals. These will be elaborated below in terms of their role in the fantasy of the text, since they are signifiers that the national subject does not yet “have,” or both has and does not have, but that the fantasy promises.

In terms of the relationship between S_1 and S_2 here, Kristol and Kagan’s text seems to place knowledge S_2 in the position of agent, while positioning S_1 in a secondary, but ultimately supporting position. The “objective” knowledge S_2 of the current international system, the current default hegemony of the United States (the “unipolarity” Krauthammer emphasized), is presented as the condition that paves the way for stronger attachment to our master signifiers. The fact of American global hegemony is unarguable and readily apparent, in the authors’ view. Recent American actions abroad support this knowledge, such as the American navy deterring Chinese actions against Taiwan, American troops in South Korea deterring aggression by North Korea, and American troops and navy deterring potential aggression by Iraq or Iran (1996, 20-21). The past six months during which these events have occurred is “a period that few observers would consider remarkable for its drama on the world stage,” but its banality points directly to the obviousness of the role and necessity of American power (1996, 20). The very fact, in the authors’ view, of America as the last superpower points to the similarly obvious conclusion that the “first objective of U.S. foreign policy should be to preserve and enhance that predominance by strengthening America’s security, supporting its friends, advancing its interests, and standing up for its principles around the world” (1996, 20).

Although the current unipolarity of the international system is seen as automatically presenting the logical choice for the United States to further strengthen its position, one can also read this as American principles themselves are just as important for solidifying American hegemony as is the observation that American already is the hegemon. After all, the strength of American values is shown by contrasting who holds them and who does not: “America’s allies are in a better position than those who are not its allies” (1996, 21). “Most of the world’s major powers welcome U.S. global involvement and prefer America’s benevolent hegemony to the alternatives” (1996, 21-2). In fact, “the principal concern of America’s allies these days is not that it will somehow be too dominant but that it will withdraw” (1996, 22). American hegemony is underpinned not just by its military power, but by the power of its core principles. The “universal, enduring, ‘self-evident’ truths” as found in the Declaration of Independence, and as epitomized in Reagan’s foreign policy themselves legitimate America’s duty to spread their value to others (1996, 31). Indeed, if America chooses not to spread these values and turns to “neoisolationism,” they “will fail in their responsibility to lead the world” (32).

It is worth noting that some aspects of this demonstrate the dynamics of the Master’s discourse.

$$\text{Master's Discourse: } \frac{S_1}{\$} \rightarrow \frac{S_2}{a}$$

The master’s discourse, as discussed in chapter three, is one characterized by commanding and ordering. A discourse “becomes a discourse of the Master whenever its master signifiers (S1) and system of knowledge (S2) function as ends rather than means, that is, whenever its concepts are used to institute its preconstituted knowledge in its audiences and thus achieve closure” (Bracher 1993, 61). Here, the master signifier S₁ occupies the agent position, the most overt or prominent aspect of the discourse, and which address knowledge S₂ in the position of

the receiver. The split of the subject \$ is relegated to the position under the master signifier S_1 , yet it is also the latent truth of the master. The master S_1 attempts to present itself as one who is fully constituted and without division or incompleteness. The master gives the impression that it is fully represented by its signifier S_1 and that nothing escapes its representation, unlike most other subjects \$ who are split. Its adherence to its master signifiers S_1 gives the impression that it enjoys the wholeness and *jouissance* that is implied by the notion of being fully represented in discourse and missing nothing. Yet the master's enjoyment is in fact excluded from the discourse, and is found in the position of product on the side of the receiver, *a*. But this is a latent part of the discourse, overshadowed by the power of the master signifier S_1 . The master signifier is to be obeyed and followed for its own sake. "The master must be obeyed," Fink (1995, 131) explains, "not because we'll all be better off that way or for some other rationale – but just because he or she says so. No justification is given for his or her power: it just is" (Fink 1995, 131).

Parts of Kristol and Kagan's text seem to follow this mode of discourse. The spread of "freedom and democratic governance" (1996, 22) and "democracy, free markets, [and] respect for liberty" (1996, 27) themselves often seem to justify their own advocacy without elaboration. "Freedom," "democracy, free markets, [and] respect for liberty" are frequently offered as signifiers that should be desired for their own sake, rather than what can be gained from their pursuit and embrace. Their "self-evident-ness" itself becomes the reason for why "we" should not only keep our current attachment to them, but for why we should even more strongly attach ourselves to them and attempt to more fully represent ourselves under the force of the promise they hold. The body of "objective" knowledge S_2 , in this reading, is secondary to their force in and of themselves. The United States is the lone remaining superpower after the other

superpower fell, but it is the power of “our” master signifiers, the obviousness of their universal nature, that guides the flow of the text. Kristol and Kagan’s master signifiers S_1 address the “objective” knowledge S_2 they deploy ($S_1 \rightarrow S_2$), not vice versa. America’s default position as current superpower is secondary to the full embrace of the master signifiers S_1 that will bring about full “benevolent global hegemony” (1996, 20).

Yet, the force of these master signifiers S_1 is just as frequently linked to the body of knowledge S_2 about current world politics. The spread and adoption of American principles are good not just for Americans, but for everyone around the world. This is argued “empirically” by Kristol and Kagan by pointing to the various instances of American power holding back dark and threatening forces from those few states that reject American principles. Deterring China, North Korea, and Iraq does not merely illustrate American military prowess, but demonstrates what happens when those who do not share our master signifiers S_1 attempt to exert their own master signifiers. Thus, the power of their master signifiers S_1 is intimately linked to the knowledge S_2 they construct about how the world “is.” At different places in the text both master signifiers S_1 and its body of knowledge S_2 seem to propel its articulation.

Additionally, the subject as constructed within the discourse is indeed divided, and this division and incompleteness does take center stage in Kristol and Kagan’s fantasy. The major policy proposals that they advocate implicitly correspond to the fantasy of their discourse, which attempts to cover over the divisions they construct to bring the national subject closer to the *jouissance* it seeks. While the subject’s division is latent in the Master’s discourse, under the power of the master signifier, the national subject’s division is in many ways at the forefront of Kristol and Kagan’s text. “America,” despite being the superpower, is not all that it should be, and is missing something that will bring it what it desires. The body of knowledge S_2 they

deploy about America's current global hegemony arguably hails or addresses the place of loss in their discourse, the place where the subject's ("America's") missing Thing should be, but is not, which then produces and maintains the subject's division $\$$ further unless the fantasy is pursued. The policies proposed and the fantasy of the national "self" they implicitly promise and whose ambiguity they simultaneously cover are aimed at recovering the missing object(s) which will make the national "self" what it strives to be. The split of the subject $\$,$ then, is both covered over and produced by the discourse. In this reading, again, the dynamics of Kristol and Kagan's text can be understood as a University discourse.

The point of this is to demonstrate that not only are these discourse forms (Master's, Hysteric's, University, Analyst's) are seldom found in a pure form in political discourses, but that they often closely share characteristics. In this case, the close relationship between the body of knowledge S_2 and the master signifiers S_1 that Kristol and Kagan deploy complicates understanding its functioning as either a Master or a University discourse. Yet, as Alcorn (2002, 85) argues, the "discourse of the master and the discourse of the university comprise the largest visible component of social discourses." As such, it is perhaps unsurprising that these different modes of discourse would frequently overlap. In this case, the position and relationship between knowledge $S_2,$ master signifiers S_1 and the role of the subject's split $\$$ arguable constitute a dynamic closer to that of the University rather than the Master, although the two can be closely related.

If the subject's division and its relation to knowledge S_2 and master signifiers S_1 constitute the text as largely a University discourse, what is the split subject $\$$ of Kristol and Kagan's discourse? Understanding the split subject $\$$ also paves the way to uncovering the position of lack, the place of object $a,$ in the discourse. On the surface, their text, again, bears

some similarity to one strand of thinking that neoconservatives (and many others) had offered since the end of the Cold War. That is, that the U.S. remains the lone superpower, and that it should take advantage of this strategic opportunity to spread its values and influence as it saw fit. Kristol and Kagan overlap with Krauthammer in this sense. Yet, while Krauthammer's message largely emphasized the obviousness of unipolarity, Kristol and Kagan have by this time begun to discuss (or construct) potential pitfalls to American hegemony. There is no doubt that hegemony is, almost by default, "America's position in the world today" (1996, 20). Not only this, but the U.S. "has so far exercised its hegemony without any noticeable strain" (1996, 22). Kristol and Kagan combine "America" and most of the rest of the world as nearly a single entity. America is the "benevolent hegemon" and the rest of the world, in their view, welcomes this development. Since the rest of the world greets assertive American internationalism, not only is there not much need for Kristol and Kagan to discuss "the rest" as if they had their own agency, wishes, interests, etc., but it allows for the universalization of American values. However, there are significant threats and losses, both close and on the horizon, which will undermine the U.S. if it does not act. The subject of "America," the "United States", etc. is, in other words, close to achieving wholeness, but a series of obstacles threaten to chip away at it, thus pushing full "identity" further away.

The subject "America" is divided between its role, duties, and obligations as the world's lone superpower, and that which it is missing that would further solidify this role. In the post-Cold War environment, the U.S. has come close the (neoconservative) dream of total global domination, but lacks that which will allow it to fully accomplish this. *What* exactly it is missing is partly articulated in a number of ways by Kristol and Kagan. In an echo of Krauthammer and others, Kristol and Kagan's view of Americans' naïveté about their global opportunities and

responsibilities has, in one sense, more to do with domestic politics than with other states. “Today the lack of a visible threat to U.S. vital interests or to world peace has tempted Americans to absentmindedly dismantle the material and spiritual foundations on which their national well-being has been based (1996, 22). Indeed, Kristol and Kagan believe that the “main threat the United States faces now and in the future is its own weakness,” since “American hegemony is the only reliable defense against a breakdown of peace and international order” (Kristol and Kagan 1996, 23). The choice, as is typical in neoconservatism, is stark. Either the world acquiesces to American domination and America itself re-ignites the strength it once had, or it faces the disintegration of world order. This is precisely one of the reasons why the rest of the world sees American hegemony as good for it. Since most of the world supports and welcomes American values, interests, and aims, and since the rest of the world takes its lead from America’s example, the only likely source of weakness and breakdown of global order is from America itself. America does not follow the rest of the world, but the world follows America.

Yet, Kristol and Kagan largely leave open what they mean by “weakness.” They allude to “spiritual foundations,” the country’s current “insular mood” and “indifference,” but these factors can point to different things. America, despite having recently successfully exercised its military power around the world, “has done so despite the fact that Americans appear to be in a more insular mood than at anytime since before the Second World War. The events of the last six months have excited no particular interest among Americans and, indeed, seem to have been regarded with the same indifference as breathing and eating. And that is the problem” (1996, 22). “Today,” Kristol and Kagan (1996, 22) argue, “the lack of a visible threat to U.S. vital interests or to world peace has tempted Americans to absentmindedly dismantle the material and

spiritual foundations on which their national well-being has been based.” They criticize the conservative common sense at the time for betraying their domestic policy principles in their foreign policy. “For conservatives to preach the importance of upholding the core elements of the Western tradition at home, but to profess indifference to the fate of American principles abroad, is an inconsistency that cannot help but gnaw at the heart of conservatism” (1996, 31).

These attempts to pinpoint exactly what the subject “America” lacks not only makes clearer the subject’s division in the text, but points to the position of the object *a*. Their attempts to name, to attach a signifier to, what exactly the subject is lacking points precisely to the idea that the “missing object” does not exist in Kristol and Kagan’s text, and exists outside the Symbolic reality constructed by the text. That which the subject “America” lacks is not some marginal quality that can be supplemented by a rebalancing of priorities. The loss is central to “American” subjectivity and identification, and it is that which threatens to bring about global disorder. That which is Symbolically missing from their text is nevertheless that which sparks its very construction. That which is lacking in discursive reality evokes the desire for its recapture and reenergizing. “America” exists not only a discursive subject in the Symbolic order, but is an entity that slips in and out of the Real. The collective “we” of the text, coalescing around the signifier “America,” is constructed as present in terms of its positive and readily identifiable qualities, but is also absent insofar as a crucial part of ourselves has been lost. “America” the subject, in this sense, is both present and absent from Kristol and Kagan’s text – present and absent in Symbolic reality, and present and absent in the Real.

They attempt to articulate this in many different ways. For example, the lionization of Reagan illustrates several of these articulations. Reagan brought “greater moral clarity and purpose in U.S. foreign policy. He championed American exceptionalism when it was deeply

unfashionable. Perhaps most significant, he refused to accept the limits on American power imposed by the domestic political realities that others assumed were fixed” (1996, 19). The United States needs a foreign policy of “military supremacy and moral confidence” (1996, 23), since, as is obvious, “America’s world role is entirely different from that of other powers” (1996, 26). “Support for American principles around the world can be sustained only by the continuing exertion of American influence” (1996, 28). Reagan’s international promotion of American principles was a “very different kind of patriotic mission” than what today’s current isolationist conservatives pursue (1996, 29). “Over the long term,” they argue, “victory for American conservatives depends on recapturing the spirit of Reagan’s foreign policy” (1996, 30).

Kristol and Kagan point to “America’s” missing Thing in other ways. As is evident, they place a heavy emphasis on the role of morality in both domestic and foreign policy. “The remoralization of America at home ultimately requires the remoralization of American foreign policy” (1996, 31). The infusion of morality back into foreign policy means that not only is national “honor” at stake, but also the nation’s proper higher purposes, “an enlightened understanding of America’s interests” (1996, 31). A “true” conservative foreign policy “ought to emphasize both personal and national responsibility, relish the opportunity for national engagement, embrace the possibility of national greatness, and restore a sense of the heroic,” which has been missing since Reagan (1996, 31-2). Like Reagan and Theodore Roosevelt, who both “celebrated American exceptionalism” in contrast to the current foreign policy establishment, Americans should now re-discover an “elevated patriotism” and “national honor” (1996, 32). If Americans do not, they “will fail in their responsibility to lead the world” since, as George Kennan once said, these are “the responsibilities of moral and political leadership that history plainly intended them to bear” (1996, 32).

Kristol and Kagan thus list a number of factors that they believe hold back America from becoming what it can be, and in their view truly is. While the many factors that they list can be viewed as different elements that must come together to reinvigorate the nation to pursue the global hegemony that is its historical responsibility, the very multiplicity and re-articulation of these missing factors can be viewed as the position of loss underlying their construction of the national subject $\$$. And, as the missing place of loss, it implies the “location” of the national subject’s presumed-missing *jouissance*. Kristol and Kagan offer a range of master signifiers that are highly valued in American political culture, and deploy them in a way that points to something similar that they all share, despite their differences as different signifiers. “Moral clarity,” “American exceptionalism,” “moral confidence,” “American principles,” “American influence,” “patriotic mission,” “spirit,” “remoralization,” “honor,” “national greatness,” “heroic,” “elevated patriotism,” “responsibility,” “moral and political leadership” – these various discursive deployments, in a Lacanian sense, point not to all of the different aspects of character and quality that the country must embrace in order to further solidify its global hegemony, but to the very impossibility of fully articulating that which the national subject is lacking.

The national subject $\$$ that Kristol and Kagan’s text constructs is not only produced through its difference from others (such as China and Iran), but is produced as a subject that is missing something that is keeping it from becoming what it should properly be. The national subject, “America,” the “United States,” is split between what it is and what it is lacking. It is currently the default global hegemon, largely intervening around the world where it sees the need, but unfortunately has only done so reluctantly, after “strenuous and prolonged efforts to avoid intervention” (1996, 30). Hegemony is “America’s position in the world today,” yet America lacks that which it needs to more fully embrace and solidify its dominant position

beyond challenge (1996, 20). The multiplicity of attempts to pin down exactly what the national subject is missing points precisely to the desire for the *jouissance* or wholeness implied by these signifiers. Desire flows along these signifiers that promise full representation for the subject, yet none of them alone satisfies or fulfills the desire for wholeness. The *jouissance* the subject desires is inexpressible, and the frequent attempts and failures of Kristol and Kagan's discourse to pin down what is exactly is indicates not only the subject's desire for a signifier that it believes will represent it, but one that will bring back the *jouissance* it believes has been lost.

This multiplicity of attempts to articulate the *jouissance* implied by "honor," "national greatness," "heroic," "principles," and so on points towards something similar underlying them all that the subject once had, but no longer has, which evokes both the frustration of the national "self" and the desire to overcome this frustration. Of course, when the subject *did* have what it now believes was missing it was its "true self." Or more specifically, when the subject believes it had what it now believes is missing, its retroactive projection of this fullness sparks its desire to reclaim it. For Kristol and Kagan, when Reagan embodied all of these principles, when he led the free world by aggressively promoting American principles, when he placed universal morals at the center of the United States' approach to the rest of the world, the U.S. was its "true self," or at least much closer than it is currently. The fantasy of the full American self that is projected back draws out the contrast with the significant incompleteness of the subject now, and desire aims toward the object of the "self" that it believes then existed.

Perhaps even more so than previous neoconservative texts, Kristol and Kagan's deployment of privileged signifiers, and their role in defining what the subject "is" and what it is lacking, point to the kind appeal that discourses need if they are to hail individuals as their subjects. Žižek (1997, 21, emphasis in original) argues that "in every ideological edifice, there is

a kind of 'trans-ideological' kernel, since, if an ideology is to become operative and effectively 'seize' individuals, it *has* to batten on and manipulate some kind of 'trans-ideological' vision which cannot be reduced to a simple instrument of legitimizing pretensions to power (notions and sentiments of solidarity, justice, belonging to a community, etc.).” Much of Kristol and Kagan’s text is in fact devoted to this. Signifiers such as “moral clarity,” “American exceptionalism,” “moral confidence,” “American principles,” “American influence,” “patriotic mission,” “spirit,” “remoralization,” “honor,” “national greatness,” “heroic,” “elevated patriotism,” “responsibility,” and “moral and political leadership” constitute efforts to construct a fantasy of the national subject around signifiers that are not seen as political, but as “trans-individual” (Žižek 1997, 21) and a-political.

While Kristol and Kagan offer this range of master signifiers to an audience, their appeal stems not from their epitomizing what the subject is, but rather what it is *not yet*. These signifiers represent the subject’s *jouissance* insofar as Kristol and Kagan convey that when America fully embraces them it will lack nothing. However, the subject’s desire for them is sparked by their absence, not their presence. The national subject needs these signifiers and all that they promise if it is to become itself and heal the divisions that currently keep it from becoming whole. The embrace of “national greatness,” for example, will rid the subject of the “neoisolationism” that currently plagues it. The pursuit of “American principles” such as “moral clarity” and “honor” will allow it to become the “benevolent global hegemon” that it desires, but is not yet. What exactly these signifiers represent is something that does not fully exist within the Symbolic order constructed by the text, but are also absent from it. They are present as something the subject needs to re-discover and re-energize, but also absent as that which does not yet exist as part of the subject. The *jouissance* implied by these signifiers is both promised

by their partial representation of something that the subject believes has been lost, but also represent something that is just-out-of-reach that the subject desires. The fantasy offered is that by pursuing the policies that imply a stronger attachment to these signifiers, the subject will cover over the divisions produced by the absence of the missing Thing. Rather than acknowledge and deal with the possibility that the ambiguity of the “self” is not something that can be healed, the prospect of American global domination offers a fantasy that channels the desire for subjectivity in a direction that promises a lack of absolutely nothing for America. Yet, both this image of American global domination and the discursive attempts to pin down what the nation is missing are fantasy objects – partial manifestations of object *a* that indeed never existed, but are posited by the subject to have existed and whose presumed absence sparks the desire for the recovery of the wholeness and *jouissance* they promise.⁵

Fantasy and Identification

While articulating that they believe that what America lacks constitutes a likely source of global chaos, other aspects of their text soften the impact of this potential source of global disintegration. This, in fact, is the major way in which Kristol and Kagan’s text differs from Krauthammer’s earlier formulations. Whereas Krauthammer emphasized unipolarity for unipolarity’s sake, without giving too much gravity to potential threats or others, Kristol and Kagan’s text is replete with other potential obstacles to national subjectivity. Indeed, Kristol and Kagan offer up a variety of “rogue states” and other entities that, in addition to national weakness, are threats on the horizon. China and Iran, for example, appear frequently as states that will likely not accede to the international rules that the U.S. lays down, or that will adopt

⁵ Indeed, while Kristol and Kagan harken back to what they see as the glory days under Ronald Reagan, neoconservatives at the time distressed over what they saw as Reagan’s capitulation to Soviet deception. See footnote 11 in Chapter Six.

American values. “Whether or not the United States continues to grant most-favored-nation status to China is less important,” for Kristol and Kagan (1996, 23), “than whether it has an overall strategy for containing, influencing, and ultimately seeking to change the regime in Beijing.” America should develop a missile defense system capable of “shielding, say, Los Angeles from nuclear intimidation by the Chinese during the next crisis in the Taiwan Strait” (1996, 25). The greater defense capabilities the U.S. builds up the “less chance there is that countries like China or Iran will entertain ambitions of upsetting the present world order;” a world order, of course, defined by American principles (1996, 26). Spreading American influence abroad “means not just supporting U.S. friends and gently pressuring other nations but actively pursuing policies – in Iran, Cuba, or China, for instance – ultimately intended to bring about a change of regime” (1996, 28). And, more broadly, Kristol and Kagan (1996, 24) fear that given America’s indifference towards foreign affairs, it “may no longer have the wherewithal to defend against threats to America’s vital interests in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, much less to extend America’s current global preeminence well into the future.”

Figures like China and Iran play a crucial role in Kristol and Kagan’s text. On one level, they are prominent “others” against which American “identity” is defined. We are benevolent, while they are aggressive. We spread our universal values to the benefit of all, while they spread fear and threaten peaceful nations. We construct world order, they wantonly upset it. Yet, beyond the mere construction of “us” and “them,” on a deeper level the fantasy and incompleteness of the national “self” of Kristol and Kagan’s discourse is projected onto the figures of these states. Appealing fantasies require an other. As Stavrakakis (2007, 198) argues, if “identity itself is a slippery, ambiguous and insecure experience, then the political creation and maintenance of the ideological appearance of a true, natural identity can only depend on the

production of scapegoats... Only thus can I be persuaded that what is responsible for the impossibility realizing my (universalized) identity, what is limiting my identity, is not the inherent ambiguity and contingency of all identity... but the existence or activity of a localizable group..." In Kristol and Kagan's discourse, the entire world under America's protective and benevolent wing would be peaceful and largely free of antagonism, tension, and conflict if not for non-conforming states such as China and Iran. The fantasy of American security, which is the fantasy of global conformity to American "universal" values, is, like all fantasies, an impossible project. Due to the contingency of social relations, and all "identity," this impossibility is difficult to deal with, and evokes uneasiness in subjects. Fantasy offers a way to deal with this contingency through a discourse that Symbolically covers over the contingency of the Real in identification processes.

It is this aspect of fantasy that drives much of the identification appeal of Kristol and Kagan's discourse. While they do argue that American internal "weakness," "mood," "indifference" (equivalential signifiers only partly capturing object *a*) must be confronted with appropriate programs of national military service and more national patriotic spectacles (signified by "our" need to more fully adhere to "honor," "exceptionalism," "national greatness", and so on), the "others" of their text allow the construction of a fantasy in which a localizable set of others, "rogue states," constitute scapegoats upon which the inescapable contingency and incompleteness of American global domination can be projected. It is not the possibility that America's values may not, in fact, be universal, nor is it the possibility that the rest of the world may not welcome with open arms American "benevolent hegemony." It is not that "we," the national subject, are incapable of fully enjoying our *jouissance* because of the impossibility of its full experience, because we are not enjoying that which is our projection of the enjoyment we

have “lost.” It is, as the fantasy says, a relatively small group of others who impede American total hegemony. China, Iran, and others not only threaten us, but block the construction of the collective “we.” They pose an obstacle to our wholeness. If not for these others, the U.S., the world, would reclaim mythical wholeness – *jouissance*. The fantasy presupposes, implicitly, that the subject was unified before the “missing object” was lost. Again, Kristol and Kagan’s remembering the days when Reagan summoned the full potential of American spiritual and military might, stared down the Soviet Union, and won the Cold War for the side of freedom. They recall back even further in the past, when Roosevelt inspired Americans to embrace their global responsibilities. Together, they “both celebrated American exceptionalism” (1996, 32). America is missing *something* which it had during both Roosevelt and Reagan’s times. The fantasy itself, retroactively constructs what it says was lost, a unity that never was. The subject’s loss drives the desire for reclaiming that which has been lost (the indefinable object *a*) and Kristol and Kagan offer a neoconservative fantasy explaining what the subject must do to once again reach wholeness.

Hegemonic Logic

It is precisely the elements of fantasy that underpinned and formed the affective component of the neoconservative attempts at discursive hegemony in the late 1990s. The greater public resonance that neoconservatism started to claim in the later 1990s through understanding its fantasy, desires, and appeal, and through how these elements provided the implicit affective underpinnings of the text’s hegemonic logic, or how it constructed political boundaries and filled in prominent signifiers in ways that attempted to define “common sense.”

The logics of equivalence and difference function in much the same way here as they have in other neoconservative texts, and Kristol and Kagan’s discourse. Boundaries of the national “self” and its others are constructed throughout the text through strings of signifiers that

attempt to precisely pin down the subject within discourse, and others are constructed through strings of differences. The others against which the American “self” is defined are constructed through different predications that attempt to express who and what they are, and what they share against the U.S. U.S. forces “deter Chinese aggression against democratic Taiwan” in east Asia, help deter a “possible invasion” of South Korea by the North, and help to deter “possible aggression by Saddam Hussein or the fundamentalist regime in Iran” in the Persian Gulf (1996, 20-1). “Rogue states” like North Korea and “nuclear intimidation” by the Chinese both pose threats to the U.S. mainland (1996, 25). China and Iran “entertain ambitions of upsetting the present world order” (1996, 26).

For Kristol and Kagan, all of these examples illustrate how John Quincy Adams’s warning that the U.S. “ought not go ‘abroad in search of monsters to destroy’” is now outdated (1996, 31). “But why not?,” the authors ask (1996, 31). “The alternative is to leave monsters on the loose, ravaging and pillaging to their hearts’ content, as Americans stand by and watch” (1996, 31). “Aggression,” “invasion,” “fundamentalist,” “rogue,” “intimidation,” “upsetting,” even “monsters” – these various names and signifiers constitute not just a series of others in Kristol and Kagan’s text (mainly, China, Iran, and Iraq) but all seem to express a similarity underlying all of them. “Fundamentalists” “invade,” “rogues” are almost by definition “aggressive,” and “monsters” likely enjoy a combination of “ravaging,” “pillaging,” “aggression,” and “upsetting.” As they are constructed in the text, the similarities they share may seem to be some “essence” that such outlaw states must all have in common. Yet, their definition in the text is passed along this string of signifiers. When one’s definition is interrogated, one must rely upon the other signifiers in the chain to fill in the definition. Their meanings, then, both differ and are deferred. They differ to the extent that they are deployable as

different signifiers, such that one can speak of them as different. Yet each of their individual meanings is deferred to the others in the chain.

Similarly, logics of equivalence are at work in the construction of American identification. As discussed above, a range of signifiers is offered to express what Kristol and Kagan see as the “true” signifiers that should define “us.” “Moral clarity,” “American exceptionalism,” “moral confidence,” “American principles,” “American influence,” “patriotic mission,” “spirit,” “remoralization,” “honor,” “national greatness,” “heroic,” “elevated patriotism,” “responsibility,” and “moral and political leadership” all attempt to tie together what “America” and the “United States” means within the text. While each of these signifiers seems point to a different quality or characteristic of the national subject, they also seem to express a certain similarity underlying them all. Like the construction of difference in the chains constituting America’s others, all of the signifiers constructing “America” seem to share a quality that cannot be expressed by any of them individually. Their meanings, thus, differ and are deferred; each of the signifiers differs from each other in one sense, yet their meanings within the text are deferred to other signifiers in the chain constructing the subject “America.” Their meanings are collapsed to the extent that even though they are viewed as expressing a fundamental “American-ness,” there is nothing “fundamental” underlying any of the signifiers, or the chain as a whole. The meaning of one is deferred to another without touching an underlying “essence” of the subject simply because there is no such essence. The meanings circle around that which underlies the chain, which is simply a place of lack, the loss of the “self.” As Laclau (1996, 57) explains,

The ‘something identical’ shared by all the terms of the equivalential chain – that which makes the equivalence possible – cannot be something positive (that is one more difference which could be defined in its particularity), but proceeds from the unifying effects that the external threat poses to an otherwise perfectly

heterogeneous set of differences (particularities). The ‘something identical’ can only be the pure, abstract, absent fullness of the community, which lacks, as we have seen, any direct form of representation and expresses itself through the equivalence of differential terms.

Thus, logics of equivalence and difference are at work in the chains constructing both American identification and America’s threatening others. The signifiers constituting “America” differ from those constituting threatening others, and differ from each other to the extent that they can be spoken of as different signifiers, yet they are equivalent to the extent that they all give the impression of representing something shared between them. The signifiers constituting the other(s) (China, Iran, Iraq, monsters, etc.) differ to the extent that they can be understood as different signifiers, and differ from each other insofar as they can be understood as different signifiers, yet they are equivalent to the extent that their meaningful differences between them collapse in relation to their constitutive outside, “America.”

It is desire itself that allows for these chains of identification to be tied together. Desire for the “self,” for a signifier that will represent the split subject in a way that its divisions and ambiguities will be healed, moves from object to object. Desire in itself has no object, but is only a desire for more desire. Without lack there is no desire, and without desire there is no subjectivity within the Symbolic order. Within Kristol and Kagan’s discourse, the desire for subjectivity is guided along the chains of equivalence that construct both “America” and the other(s). The desire for the national “self,” for a signifier that will fully represent the subject and which will heal its divisions and erase its ambiguity, shifts along the series of signifiers that attempt to represent it. “Moral clarity,” “American exceptionalism,” “moral confidence,” “national greatness” and so on all offer the promise of wholeness as laid out in the fantasy, yet all fail in their promise to heal the subject’s split. Thus, desire for wholeness is constantly frustrated, and constantly shifts to avoid this frustration, just as desire is frustrated in its

inevitable encounter with the signifiers of the other(s). The two chains are mutually constitutive of each other, and desire is frustrated in the lack of representation in “our” chain, and by the other(s) who are seen to block our representation. The wholeness and *jouissance* that these chains of equivalence attempt to represent, or bring into the Symbolic order, cannot do so. The complete “self” that they imply is nothing other than the retroactive construction of a “self” that did not exist in Symbolic reality before it was presumed by the fantasy. The chain of equivalences attempts to touch this “America” that is/was without division, yet these signifiers merely cover over the lack of the “American self.” The chain of equivalences constructing American identification is implicitly supported by a fantasy that promises to represent that which is absent, yet what they attempt to close in on is nothing but the loss of the national “self” that they all share.

Implicit in these plays of equivalence and difference are also dynamics of filling and emptying of “universal” and “particular” meanings. For Laclau, the construction of discursive hegemony refers to the contingent filling-in of the ambiguous and indistinct shared political concepts that every society generates. Identifications are produced through the plays of filling and emptying of universals with particulars that constitute the political process. The “universal is part of my identity as far as I am penetrated by constitutive lack, that is as far as my differential identity has failed in its process of constitution. The universal emerges out of the particular not as some principle underlying and explaining the particular, but as an incomplete horizon suturing a dislocated particular identity” (Laclau 1996, 28).

The plays of universals and particulars are not just the politics of difference and similarity, but are, as shown above, blended with the plays of presence and absence of desire and *jouissance* in the discourse. Kristol and Kagan’s discourse is stuffed with universals whose

meanings they attempt to fill with particular neoconservative understandings. Most obviously, “America” and the “United States” are nodal points that Kristol and Kagan attempt to give meaning and fantasy. “America” is not by nature an isolationist nation, they argue. Instead, America’s true role is that of the global “benevolent” global hegemon (1996, 20). The nation, here, is an ambiguous site of inscription upon which Kristol and Kagan define their own understanding of “America.” The United States is a country that, properly understood, actively and aggressively promotes its ideals as those that should define global order. Wrongly understood, it is a country that merely sits on the sidelines to play exemplar for others to follow. Such a policy “of sitting atop a hill and leading by example becomes in practice a policy of cowardice and dishonor,” Kristol and Kagan scorn (1996, 31).

Other universals function in the same manner. “Moral clarity,” “American exceptionalism,” and “moral confidence” each can have a range of plausible meanings. “Moral clarity” is an idea that has been debated, of course, long before Kristol and Kagan, but it is one they deploy to represent what “America,” properly understood, should be. “American exceptionalism” can and has had a range of plausible meanings, yet for them it means the active promotion of “exceptionalism” to a world that does not have it, yet needs it. Global order itself depends upon it. Similarly, “moral confidence” in itself has no intrinsic meaning outside of the particular meanings attributed to it through hegemonic contests, and the authors fill it in here as that particularly “American” quality that the national subject must re-discover and utilize if it is to fully become itself again. The other prominent signifiers, embedded within the neoconservative fantasy offered, function in the same manner. “Moral confidence,” “American principles,” “American influence,” “patriotic mission,” “spirit,” “remoralization,” “honor,” “national greatness,” “heroic,” “elevated patriotism,” “responsibility,” and “moral and political

leadership” are all inherently ambiguous universal signifiers whose contingent meanings are filled in by the particular neoconservative fantasy offered. These universals, then, are not *merely* filled in by the particular meanings that Kristol and Kagan construct, but are intimately and inextricably bound to the plays of desire and *jouissance* that are channeled through the discourse of the text. The particular meanings of these universal notions are bound up with fantasies that promise a construction of the national “self” that implies an erasure of the ambiguities of the “self.” These fantasies are tied to images of others that block our *jouissance*, who stand in “our” way, who keep us from becoming who we “really” are. If not for these others, desire would be satisfied, *jouissance* would be achieved, and the subject would no longer feel the frustration of its incompleteness. The creation of political boundaries and frontiers, then, is inextricably tied with the politics of desire and *jouissance*. Through the contingent plays of equivalence and difference, universals and particulars, fullness and lack, and desire and *jouissance* through fantasy, Kristol and Kagan offer a discourse the promises to fill the lack of the national subject, itself an impossible project.

It is these aspects of Kristol and Kagan’s text that offer some insights into why neoconservatism began to recoup during the later 1990s. As Chollet and Goldgeier (2008) detail, the rise in neoconservative influence was likely the result of several factors. About a year after Kristol and Kagan’s essay appeared in *Foreign Affairs*, they founded the P.N.A.C. The social and political network that P.N.A.C. developed by neoconservatives undoubtedly helps to explain their rise in influence (see Halper and Clarke 2004, 103-110).⁶ However, the content of their message likely carries at least equal explanatory weight. “As the decade wore on,” Chollet and

⁶ P.N.A.C. sent several high-profile open letters to public officials during the late 1990s that continued the same fantasy offered in Kristol and Kagan’s (1996) essay. These letters focused on Iraq and China. See Project for the New American Century (1998a), (1998b), (1999).

Goldgeier (2008, 143) write, “the driving force for conservatives’ thinking became their focus on vulnerabilities and threats – whether from missiles launched by rogue states, rising powers such as China, or, they began to argue, the gathering storm on Iraq.” Thus, while early in the decade much of their concern focused on what the “lonely superpower” (Krauthammer 1991) should now do to fill its time, their concerns shifted later to both explicit and potential threats. More deeply, however, there was much more to neoconservative pronouncements than recognizing threats that already existed “out there” in the world. Neoconservative constructions of collective subjectivity offered stronger appeals for identification than earlier discourses emphasizing unipolarity. The greater loss of subjectivity in later neoconservative discourses, particularly Kristol and Kagan’s, sparked greater desires for subjectivity. The fantasies deployed in neoconservatism were more appealing because they offered more secure identifications for people looking for ways to avoid the Real at the heart of their identification processes. In terms of foreign policy discourses in the United States during the late 1990s, neoconservatism began to achieve a stronger “grip” precisely through the stronger desires these discourses evoked, and through the fantasies constructed to satisfy these desires by promising to reclaim a national and global wholeness that was ultimately impossible.

Conclusion

While neoconservatism saw the height of its influence during the first administration of George W. Bush, it has had substantial impact on American foreign policy debates over the last several decades. However, this influence has been unsteady. Neoconservatism has been more influential in public debates at some times and less so at other times. Although times and contexts change, this chapter has argued that neoconservatism’s ebbs and flows can be traced back to the kinds of identifications it has offered its audiences. In competition with other discourses, it has sometimes evoked more desires in audiences and sometimes less, and the

fantasies of subjectivity that it has offered has sometimes promised more appealing fantasies of subjectivity and sometimes it has offered less appealing fantasies. In utilizing insights from Lacan and Laclau to explore the affective-hegemonic appeal of these ebbs-and-flows of neoconservative influence, this chapter contributes fills a considerable gap in the growing literature on neoconservatism. Thus, my overall goal has been to both uncover subtle aspects of the affective lure of neoconservative discourses and to demonstrate the analytical strength of my theoretical framework that can fulfill that goal. In accounting for the desires and affects that are inextricably tied to the construction of subjectivity, my framework offers powerful tools that can move far beyond conventional social constructivist and discourse analysis as they are currently practiced in IR.

It should be noted that the reasons behind the political success of neoconservatism have not gone completely unnoticed. A few scholars have tried to explain the overall success that neoconservatism has had over the past several decades. Political theorist Shadia Drury (1997), in her examination of the links between Straussian theory and modern conservatism, argues that there four major reasons for its success. First, she argues that neoconservatism has been successful because of its ability to ally itself with multiple critics of modern liberalism, such as feminists, libertarians, communitarians, and Republicans (Drury 1997, 170). Second, neoconservatism thrives on the recent besiegement of American liberalism, as indicated by the word “liberal” nearly becoming a political insult during the 1980s and 1990s (Drury 1997, 173). Third, she argues that the “inevitable resurgence of a fierce gregariousness” has combined with the “natural weaknesses” of liberalism that plays to the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of both the proponents of neoconservatism and those in the majority who are likely its most eager listeners (Drury 1997, 174-5). Finally, the populist and nationalistic themes often deployed by

neoconservatives play to what Drury calls America's "puritan instincts" (Drury 1997, 176-7). While I do not disagree with Drury's assessments, she addresses the overall success of neoconservatism, rather than differentiating between its periods of greater and lesser political impact. In this sense, the analysis offered here is both a much more nuanced account of the political fortunes of neoconservatism, and offers a more nuanced account of neoconservative constructions of subjectivity.

Perhaps a bit closer to my own theoretical approach is communication scholar Kenneth Zagacki's (1996) study of the "priestly rhetoric" deployed by neoconservatives. He argues that neoconservatism has been successful because they have "constructed a discourse with both elite and popular resonance" (169). In their early concerns with domestic politics (found in the writings, for instance, of Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan), neoconservatives were able to blend a reliance on social science with the morality of traditional conservatism. Again, like Drury, Zagacki seems to homogenize neoconservative highs and lows without giving them due attention, and without offering a way to understand or explain its changing political fortunes. However, Zagacki focuses much of his analysis on early neoconservatives who were much more concerned about domestic policy than foreign policy. Specifically, his discussion focuses upon the rhetoric of early neoconservatives whose criticism of the welfare state was based upon the same social scientific discourse upon which much of the welfare state was built. So, although neoconservative principles on foreign and domestic policy overlap (Guelke 2005), my emphasis here on the desires and affectivity of the construction of neoconservative subjects goes deeper than Zagacki's rhetorical analysis of their domestic policy concerns.

Parts of what these other scholars have argued about the success of neoconservatism complement my argument here. However, a broader examination of the success of

neoconservatism than the one offered here would explore the populism and “puritan instincts” that Drury points to. Indeed, a more comprehensive study of neoconservatism could likely contextualize its rise and fall with the ebbs and flows of American nationalism, and would scrutinize the close relationship between the two. The question of how far has neoconservatism come to define recent past and contemporary incarnations and articulation of American nationalism is one ripe for study. Some recent works have already pointed toward these relationships. For instance, Anatol Lieven (2004) critically discusses the influence of neoconservatives in the Bush administration and the rise of nationalism after September 11, 2001, yet devotes relatively little attention to it within his historical study of American nationalism more broadly. What “neoconservatives have done,” he argues, “is to take some of the existing traditions of [American nationalism] and given them a radical and extremist twist. Thus, they have turned sympathy for Israel into support for Likud; and they have taken beliefs in America’s role as a democratic model and the need for U.S. national security and turned them into arguments for interventionist war” (Lieven 2004, 152). Further work into this relationship would contribute much to not only literature on nationalism and neoconservatism, but to the study of American foreign and national security policy more broadly.

Of course, this chapter has neglected what is most likely the most successful period of the neoconservative drama – its success after September 11, 2001. Indeed, as mentioned above, much of the attention that IR scholars have given to neoconservatism in recent years seems to stem from its relationship to the Bush Doctrine and the politics of the 2003 Iraq War. The Bush administration was, (in)famously, populated by many who fit easily into the neoconservative “persuasion.” The particular construction of the events of September 11, 2001 bear striking similarities to the kinds of apocalyptic language used by neoconservatives since they first broke

with the Democratic Party in the early 1980s. While not necessarily the only issue on the neoconservative radar screen during the 1990s, the construction of Iraq as an enemy after September 11, 2001 rested upon discursive foundations laid in large part by neoconservative writings during the decade before. The previous chapter, offering a Lacanian-Laclauian reading of the politics of the war on terror attempts to analyze the particular affective appeal of these fantasies, without necessarily framing the issue solely as the success of neoconservatism after September 11, 2001. In one sense, though, many of the texts analyzed in the previous chapter could be categorized as neoconservative.

There remains, of course, plenty of research to be conducted on neoconservatism. One major research question to be addressed is the one suggested above: a study of the relationship between neoconservatism and American nationalism more broadly. Another question to address regards the political fortunes of neoconservatism after the blunders of the Iraq War. Although, as of this writing, neoconservatives do not hold the place they once had in the halls of power. The Obama administration's foreign policies, while for some have not veered substantially away from many Bush administration policies, have predictably become targets of neoconservatives. Charles Krauthammer (2010), for example, recently criticized the Obama administration for allowing terrorist suspects who are American citizens to be read their Miranda rights, while William Kristol (2010) hoped that the "civilized world will be spared the fearful consequences of time wasting in the face of gathering dangers," referring to the Obama administration's initial approach toward Iran. While P.N.A.C. is now defunct, William Kristol and others recently founded the Foreign Policy Initiative, a new organization devoted to promoting the same principles that concerned P.N.A.C. While Heilbrunn (2009) has written on the recent musings of

neoconservatives, yet their future impact, both in terms of being out of power, and in terms of their close ties to the Iraq War, remains to be seen.

CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION

The crux of this dissertation's argument is that desire and affect are crucial dimensions of politics. The success of political discourses and the way they become instilled as "common sense" cannot be understood apart from the desires that they evoke in audiences and the affective appeals they offer. International Relations (IR) scholars have spent much of the last couple of decades trying to understand identity and all that it entails. How the self comes to be through reference to an other, that is, the mutual constitution of self and other, has been one of the major findings of several schools of thought in contemporary IR. However, the focus on the social construction of self and other has largely neglected the role of desire and affects, and the role that they play in how some constructions of self and other are more politically successful than others. Some discourses are powerful not merely because of the words that constitute them. Rather, they are successful because within these words are implicit yet powerful fantasies of subjectivity in which people affectively invest themselves so as to avoid the intrinsic ambiguity of their always-incomplete identifications. Discourses that offer stronger fantasies of subjectivity are often more affectively appealing to audiences than discourses that construct weaker fantasies of subjectivity that do not offer a veil over the ambiguities of their identifications. The desire for a secure and stable "self" evokes identification with fantasy discourses that offer such a promise, even though the "self" and "identity" are ultimately impossible projects. In utilizing these ideas to understand the affective appeal of recent discourses of American foreign policy, I hope to contribute to and enlighten both the discipline's understanding of self and other relations and its understanding of the social construction process more generally. In this conclusion, I summarize this dissertation's main arguments, discuss briefly the areas of IR research that it impacts, and discuss a few directions for further research and policy implications that it suggests.

Summary of Arguments

Substantial gaps in the IR literature on the war on terror and the 2003 Iraq war initially prompted the questions and concerns raised in this dissertation. While much has been written on these issues, most of the IR literature that addresses the political dominance of the war on terror, in the sense of achieving a dominant understanding of American foreign policy after September 11, 2001, glosses over the crucial questions on why and how it was able to become so successful. Many studies which assume that the war on terror “gained currency” with, “resonated” with, and “appealed to” people after September 11, 2001. These claims, while on face value are plausible, they in fact overlook substantial gaps in our understanding of not only the discursive power of the war on terror. They are also symptomatic of important shortcomings in several bodies of literature on IR theory. Chapter Two addresses these shortcomings. The limitations in the war on terror literature point to larger gaps in the understanding of some issues and concepts that have been high on the discipline’s agenda for some time now. The social constructivist, poststructuralist, affects/emotions, and ontological security literatures all offer insights into what explains the resonance and affective appeal of certain discourses. Yet none satisfactorily addresses the main questions posed in this study: What accounts for the resonance and political success of some foreign policy discourses over others? How do desire and affect fit into an explanation of why some foreign policy discourses are more successful than others?

The question of political success invites another major question that has guided this study: What is the relationship between affect and discourse? This is a question that has received little sustained theoretical and conceptual attention in IR, and Chapter Three offers one answer to it. Drawing upon the theories of Jacques Lacan and Ernesto Laclau, I developed a framework that accounts for both the affective power of discourse and the politics of contestation that entail with hegemonic struggles to define what counts as “common sense.” Lacan’s psychoanalytic

theory offers considerable insights into the social construction of subjectivity and identification. Its also offers a nuanced understanding of the relationship between affect and discourse. For Lacan, the lack of a foundational “identity” sparks an entire dynamic of desire and affect (what Lacan calls enjoyment, or *jouissance*) which comprises both frustration and satisfaction. People achieve some level of affective security or satisfaction in identifying with the social resources of the Symbolic. Yet the desire for *jouissance* is always frustrated since no Symbolic manifestation of the subject’s presumed-to-be-missing part (object *a*) brings the fullness that fantasies promise. People often identify with political discourses that offer a promise of a fully secure “self” through the attainment of the “self’s” missing piece, thus covering over the constitutive ambiguities, the intrusions of the Real, into their identifications. These dynamics play out in different ways within different structures of discourse and desire (in terms of Lacan’s theory of the four discourses) and are intensely political. Laclau’s theory of discursive hegemony offers a framework to think about the political implications of Lacan’s insights into desire, affect, and identification. Through logics of equivalence and difference, and the emptying and filling of particular and universal political values, discursive hegemony is constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed. The affective dynamics of desire and fantasy are constitutive and ever-present features of hegemony.

The subsequent chapters offer analyses of various episodes in recent American foreign policy guided by questions that the literature has thus far neglected. Chapter Four begins by offering a brief review of existing social constructivist and discourse-based arguments about the war on terror. Many of these arguments focus on and emphasize how the war on terror discourse constructed a world of self and other, us and them, good and evil, and civilization against barbarism. These binary oppositions in which the American “self” was defined against a

terrorist, and later Iraqi, other served to legitimate widespread support for American foreign policy after September 11, 2001, but the scholarly literature's focus on these aspects alone ignore the complex movements of affect and desire that constituted these self-other relations in the first place. The power and resonance of the war on terror discourse, I argue, can be traced back to the particular desires it evoked and the fantasies it offered audiences. Later, the discursive incorporation of Iraq into the war on terror narrative was constituted by these same kinds of affective movements. Through logics of equivalence and difference that were brought together by the movements of desire for a full "self," the Iraq war came to appear as a natural progression in the war on terror. A focus on the constructions of self and other alone cannot account for the power of these particular discourses, since not every construction of self and other is political successful. Even though some discourses are more successful than others, no discourse is complete. Rather, any discourse is always in the process of articulation and re-articulation, and is thus politically contestable, even if in certain contexts it might appear that a discourse is stabilized or "natural" due to processes of sedimentation that always seek to erase the non-foundational origin of the discourse. The politics of discursive struggle which constitute hegemony were evident in the 2004 presidential campaign, where George W. Bush and John Kerry offered competing fantasy discourses that functioned to channel the desires and affects of audiences in particular directions.

Much research into the war on terror and the Iraq war has discussed the role of neoconservatism in American foreign policy after September 11, 2001. Chapters Five and Six offer analyses that explore the affective politics of the varying success and influence that neoconservatism has had in debates in American foreign policy over the last several decades. The politics of the Iraq war have sparked an increased interest by IR scholars in the topic, and

much of this recent work has focused on issues such as the prominent positions held by neoconservatives in the Bush administration, the status of neoconservatism as a theory of international politics, and the latter's theoretical underpinnings as an approach to foreign policy. This literature however has left untouched questions about the affective appeal of neoconservative discourses. Thus, these two chapters ask what accounts for the rise and fall of neoconservative appeal over the last three decades. My framework, based upon insights from the theories of Lacan and Laclau, offers a way to identify the desires and affective appeals (or lack thereof) of discourses that most constructivist and poststructuralist frameworks are unable to discern. Through close readings of how neoconservative discourses have offered different kinds of fantasies of identification at different times, thus evoking different degrees of desire for identification, I offer an explanation for the changing fortunes, the ebbs and flows, of neoconservatism in American foreign policy debates.

Chapter Five presented the first analysis of an early period of neoconservative influence, and offered a close reading of two influential political texts of the late 1970s. By closely analyzing the competing discourses of Jimmy Carter and Norman Podhoretz I demonstrated how and why Podhoretz's neoconservatism was able to gain ground in the hegemonic struggle against the Carter administration. Carter's "crisis of confidence" speech offered a less-defined fantasy of the national "self," a weaker screen against the intrinsic ambiguity and vagueness of the collective subject than did Podhoretz's discourse, which offered a more-defined fantasy of the national "self."

The influence neoconservatism was gaining at the end of the late 1970s, however, contrasted with its relative lack of influence during the early 1990s, as the Cold War came to a close. Chapter Six contrasted neoconservatism's relative lack of influence during the early

1990s with its increasing appeal during the later 1990s. Charles Krauthammer's arguments about the "unipolar moment" immediately following the Cold War offered a fantasy in which the national subject was close to the object it presupposed was missing. This fantasy failed to spark desire for identification since it constructed a subject that was, in a sense, not lacking much, and was close to its fantasized fullness of total global domination. In contrast, a few years later neoconservatism seemed to gain more appeal, and I trace this back to the fantasies that were offered in William Kristol and Robert Kagan's call for a "neo-Reaganite" foreign policy. Unlike Krauthammer, Kristol and Kagan's discourse offered a fantasy that constructed a series of obstacles to the national subject's fullness, sparking the desire to overcome them and to attain national wholeness. This fantasy functions to evoke stronger desire and affective appeal than Krauthammer's text and thus, I argue, helps to explain why neoconservative gained ground in American foreign policy debates in the later 1990s.

Each of these case studies ask questions that have largely been ignored by IR scholars, and hence offer substantial contributions both to the literature on the war on terror and the Iraq war and to the growing body of work on neoconservatism. In offering these specific contributions this study also engages and contributes to several theoretical areas in IR more broadly.

First, it contributes directly to the burgeoning literature on affect and emotions in IR. Although political thinkers have long recognized the role of emotions in politics (stretching back at least to Thucydides's [1972, 80] arguments about fear, honor, and self-interest as peoples' strongest motives in politics),¹ concerns about emotions and affects in global politics has largely been obscured during the past several decades by rationalist disciplinary orthodoxies. Only

¹ On a related note, Richard Ned Lebow (2009) has recently developed an approach that combines constructivism with ancient Greek insights on motivation and identity (such as appetite, spirit, reason, and fear).

recently have IR scholars re-discovered affects and emotions. However, much of this recent work has focused on lamenting the lack of attention to affects and emotions in politics, has made general statements about the importance of emotions in the solidification of political community, or has studied the role of specific emotions in particular global contexts. I add three major contributions and new perspectives to this literature. (1) I offer a systematic framework that theorizes the part affect plays in the construction of the subject. Lacanian theory offers a picture of the subject as a constant pulsation between lack and fullness, satisfaction and frustration, and full presence and absence. Lacan's ideas about the dynamics between desire, affect (as *jouissance*), and identification offers a much more comprehensive picture of the subject than does constructivism and poststructuralism. (2) To the best of my knowledge, this is the first work that offers a sustained engagement on the question of the relationship between affect and discourse in IR. This is a crucial aspect of affects that IR scholars have yet to address. If discourse is viewed as constitutive of social and political life, rather than just a transparent medium through which a more fundamental reality is transmitted, then the question of how discourse shapes that which it brings into Symbolic existence is one ripe for investigation. In this pursuit, this study offers one perspective on this problem of the relationship between language and affect, and does so in a manner that does not view language and affect as coterminous. It instead conceptualizes discourse as an appealing site of identification when it is composed of strong fantasies of subjectivity. Such fantasies provide a more appealing Symbolic channel for affect. (3) I offer a framework with which we can analyze the hegemonic politics of affect. In discussing discourse one is led to discussing its contestation. Not only do I demonstrate how discourses themselves engage in hegemonic contests. I also show how desire constitutes these struggles, and how the latter are channeled through affect-imbued fantasies of

subjectivity. Therefore, discursive hegemony is not just a struggle over meaning. It is also a struggle between fantasies that offer more or less appealing constructions of “self” for audiences.

Second, this study is a major contribution to the IR literature identity. Identity, of course, has constituted a significant part of the IR research agenda since at least the late 1980s and early 1990s. Indeed, Felix Berenskoetter (2010, emphasis in original) finds that identity “has been one, if not *the*, conceptual shooting star in International Relations (IR) scholarship since the 1990s, at least among scholars seeking an alternative to the realist-rationalist vocabulary.” At a general level, this study goes beyond conventional constructivist understandings of how self and other are mutually constitutive thereby offering a much more comprehensive and substantial view of what is involved in social construction processes. Constructivist arguments that identities are mutually constituted through social interaction (rather than being primordially or naturally given) is an important insight which however does not say much on the desires and affects that are inevitably bound up in social construction processes in the first place.

What I have attempted to demonstrate is that identity is not merely the reflection of a dynamic of a “self” against an “other,” but rather involves an entire array of affects and desires that play into how the “self” and “other” cohere. Indeed, I have argued that there is no originary “self,” strictly speaking. The “self” is a lack. It only comes to “be” by identifying with objects that are “outside” of it. Others scholarly works in IR have argued that the identity is an always-incomplete project due to the instability of language. Yet they have overlooked the affective power bound up in this process. The “self’s” incompleteness evokes a desire to become complete. And to be able to function and to believe that it will be able to become “itself” once again, the self constructs fantasies within which a crucial part of itself is presumed to have been lost. The subject presupposes that the presumed missing piece of itself must have caused its

desire. However, this is only a fantasy that enables the subject to believe that it is not a split subject which is ultimately unable to be a “full” subject or to have a fully secure “identity.” The subject thus engages in continual processes of *identification* with fantasy discourses that promise to heal its lack. The desire that sparks these processes and the “little bits of *jouissance*” (Miller 2000, 37) gained in identifying with fantasy objects are overlooked in the current IR literature on identity. Identification, the attempt to secure an “identity,” is thus a contestable and unsteady process that involves affective movements that are both inside and outside of discourse, both present and absent in/from Symbolic representation, and both satisfying and frustrating in the attempt to construct subjectivity. Thus, the social construction of the “self” is much more deeply involved than what the current literature allows for.

Third, this study contributes to the security studies literature. In one sense, my analysis of the power of discourse and identification in debates over American national security is another addendum to the movement in recent years to broaden the notion of security beyond its traditional emphasis on the physical security of the state. By moving beyond state-centric conceptions of security, scholars have engaged in both “widening” and “deepening” its meaning: widening it to include aspects such as environmental, economic, and human security, and deepening their interrogation of the concept through approaches and epistemologies that had traditionally remained outside of state-centered security studies, such as critical theory, constructivism, poststructuralism, the Copenhagen School, feminism, and other approaches (Buzan and Hansen 2009, 7; see also Baldwin 1997; Beier and Arnold 2005; Booth 2008; Krause and Williams 1997; Sjoberg 2009). My own understanding of security has been deeply influenced by these and other works, and this study is indebted to the disciplinary trails that they have blazed.

Constructivism and poststructuralism have often argued that security politics is “fundamentally about the construction of a radically different, inferior and threatening Other, but also, since identity is always relational, about the Self” (Hansen 2010). Security discourses do not merely reflect actors and threats. They also socially produce and reproduce them. My analysis has shown is that others are indeed needed for a self, and that there are intricate projections and imaginings of others that are comprised within affective politics of enjoyment or *jouissance*. The other is necessary for the self’s reflection, but the “theft of enjoyment,” as Žižek puts it, is also a crucial part of this reflection. The subject feels that its missing “essence” has caused the desire for its recapture, and to believe this the subject identifies with fantasies in which it appears that an “other” is enjoying precisely the quality that the subject has lost. The missing Thing is seen as recoverable if an “other” is seen as having it, which poses both a blockage to the subject’s desire and prompts desire to overcome it and recover the Thing. In recent American national security discourses, this Thing often has taken the (partial) image of the Nation without division or antagonisms, or a global system dominated by American-imposed rules and order. Both images are simultaneously present and absent in/from the national subject, both there and not quite there, something that the subject partly has but also something it needs to more fully recapture. In other words, these fantasies that the subject believes it “truly is” veil the intrinsic ambiguity and vagueness of the nation itself. The affective politics that construct these images of the national “self” and the threatening “other” thus both complicate and add to the poststructuralist security studies program examining not only how subjects of (in)security are produced, but also how the politics of desire and affect are an integral part of the legitimation processes of national security policies.

Future Research

The arguments and analyses of the dissertation suggest a few directions for further research. Although this is (to the best of my knowledge) the first major work to systematically address the above questions posed about conceptualizing discourse, identity, affect, desire, and emotions in the way I do it, the research presented is of course far from the last word on these complex issues. Indeed, I see this study as one of the initial steps towards a more enlightened understanding of the role that affects and emotions play in global politics. As Chapter Two discussed, IR scholars' interest in affects and emotions has only come about fairly recently, and the work that has thus far been written, while illuminating, has a long way to go before IR scholars can say they have a firm grasp of the tremendous complexity and myriad of roles that affects and emotions have in global politics. I count this study as one of these still-initial forays into this complex and nebulous dimension of human social life and politics.² Although work on affects and emotions in IR is still relatively new, the potential payoffs in political and social insights are tremendous. Incorporating these dimensions not only into IR theory (i.e., what are the affective and emotional presuppositions of the various schools of thought in IR? What kind of affects and emotions do they presume drive global politics?), but also into the various sub-fields and specialties in IR holds remarkable promise (such as, for example, political psychology

² To view the present study through the lens of the theoretical framework it develops, the study "speaks" largely from the position of the agent in a University discourse, with some elements of a Hysteric's discourse. This study presents a new body of knowledge S_2 (a dissertation on affect, discourse, and identification in American foreign policy). This new knowledge S_2 is presented as "objective" knowledge, untainted by the prejudices of the subject who offers it. The product of the discourse is a remaining set of ambiguities and dissatisfactions of the fantasy that the knowledge deploys. Although the discourse is presented as offering objective knowledge for the sake of knowledge itself, it deploys an array of master signifiers S_1 upon which this knowledge is based (the terms of the theoretical vocabulary elaborated throughout). These master signifiers refer not to an "intrinsic" reality "out there," but whose definition is inevitably deferred to the battery of other signifiers that constitutes its body of knowledge S_2 . Additionally, part of the discourse displays the structure of the Hysteric. The subject is dissatisfied with the current order (i.e., the current state of knowledge about affects, emotions, identity, discourse, and social construction in IR) and seeks a new set of master signifiers ("desire," "fantasy," "Lacan," "Laclau," etc.) that it hopes will alleviate its lack of fulfillment. In doing so, the study produces a new system of knowledge S_2 based upon the master signifiers that anchor it.

and social psychology). Indeed, the potential insights into global political life through the pursuit of these lines of research are comparable, if not greater, to the insights the discipline began to gain in the late 1980s and early 1990s with the rise of constructivism and poststructuralism.

One big question that poses substantial theoretical obstacles is: How is it possible to capture the diversity and multiplicity of affective and emotional responses to major events and crises? Chapter Four of this study analyzed the affective power of the war on terror discourse, and in doing so it explored how the Symbolic fantasies of a wounded Nation functioned to invite subjects to identify with the fantasy to avoid the lack around which their identification processes cohered. Although Chapter Four asks a question that has yet to be asked by the existing literature (what accounts for the power of the war on terror beyond its mere social constructedness?), and although it identifies the hitherto-ignored dimensions of desire and affect at work in that discourse, it does not explore the multiplicity of emotions that likely circulated in the months and years following the events of September 11, 2001. Andrew Ross (2006, 214-15) asks a similar question in his study of constructivism and emotions, and closes by pointing to the likely differential political effects of affects and what he calls “feelings” (which is close to my definition of emotion). While I focus explicitly on the affective dimension, and thus differentiated my approach from those who focus more on the role of specific emotions, the complexity of affective and emotional responses to crises is an issue calling for more investigation. Is it possible to capture the multifaceted complexity of collective emotional responses to a traumatic event like that of September 11, 2001? Is there a single theoretical approach that can capture such diversity? Or is understanding such complexity better served by breaking it down into more manageable parts (such as the continued study of specific emotions)?

The current IR emotions literature has yet to address such a thorny theoretical and empirical question, yet at some point it will need engagement and elaboration.

Another question that relates to affective and emotional diversity is: How can we capture the affective interactions between agents that offer fantasy discourses and receivers who accept and who likely modify them? How should we conceptualize these affective exchanges and interactions in the first place? This dissertation has addressed the problem of how we can understand the affective appeal of discourses. It has largely analyzed elite discourses that were offered to mass audiences. In doing so, it has mostly neglected the question of how these fantasy discourses were received by audiences. In this sense, this dissertation has captured perhaps only half of the relevant picture of the affective politics that play out between discourses that are offered and received. This is not, however, a shortcoming of this dissertation alone. By and large, most studies of discourse in IR focus on the discourses that are offered to audiences, rather than analyzing texts that illustrate how audiences receive and adapt them. These studies typically analyze political discourses as they are articulated within elite texts such as speeches and policy documents. Other scholars have also turned to analyzing how popular culture texts (re)produce political discourses.³ Both of these approaches largely focus on capturing how discourses are projected to audiences rather than how audiences themselves receive them.⁴ What is needed, therefore, is an approach to conceptualize how affects are received by audiences.

³ See Chapter Two above.

⁴ Within the popular culture literature, however, the lines between “elites” and “masses” are more blurry. As Jutta Weldes (2003, 7, emphasis in original) explains, “Official representations thus depend on the cultural resources of a society. So too do the ways in which they are understood. The plausibility of official representations depends on the ways in which publics understand world politics and the location and role of their own and other states and actors in it. It matters very much that state officials are able to represent world politics, tend thus their foreign policies, in ways that at least significant portions of their publics find plausible and persuasive. Plausibility comes, at least in part, from the structural congruence between official representations and peoples’ everyday experiences. This explicitly indicates *popular* culture in providing a background of meanings that help to constitute public images of world politics and foreign policy.” There is variation in how far the scholars in this literature pursue the ways in which popular culture representations are received by audiences.

Several questions follow from this. How do we conceptualize the relevant “audience” of the particular discourse under analysis? What texts does that audience produce that will enable the researcher to examine the reception and adaptation of the affective discourses that were offered from elite texts? How exactly should we conceptualize what texts count as “elite” and “mass” in the first place? To the best of my knowledge, these questions have yet to be asked by affects and emotions scholars in IR.

There is another question which relates to affects, emotions, reception, and change. Taking this study’s distinction between affect (those forces that are inexpressible and remain outside of discursive representation, yet are nevertheless channeled through certain kinds of discourses) and emotion (responses that come to have Symbolic existence once they are named and specified, i.e., fear, happiness, love, hate, etc.), what exactly is the process involved in affect becoming emotions? How exactly does inexpressible affect come to be named as a more readily identifiable emotion? What kinds of desires, subjectivities, and discursive performances are involved in such shifts? What are their political ramifications of this shift? To the best of my knowledge, these questions have yet to be asked, and will likely pose substantial challenges to current disciplinary understandings of affect and emotion.

One possible guide for how such a conversation might conceivably be played out is the debate between constructivists and poststructuralists overall the importance and role of changes in state identity in world politics. It has been a common constructivist argument that changes in a state’s behavior can be traced back not to its exogenously given self-interest, but rather to its identity and perceived role in the particular social structures within which it acts (Jepperson, Wendt, and Katzenstein 1996). Poststructuralist scholars have criticized this conception of identity and identity change, arguing that state identities are so multifaceted and contestable

within a single state that it is impossible to isolate one “identity” and argue for its direct influence in state behavior (Zehfuss 2001). Ross (2006, 214) finds that constructivists “are now in a promising position to examine the manifold channels through which identities are reproduced in global politics” and are thus similarly well-placed to “consider the complex and volatile emotions that mediate political relations among nations, institutions, networks, and other global bodies.” He rightly cautions that “careful attention should be paid to the range of emotional expression,” and he offers critical suggestions for how constructivism might be modified to investigate the affective dimensions of identity (Ross 2006, 214). Ross, however, neglects to address the possible consequences of positioning constructivism as “the” school of thought in IR which may best suited to tackle emotions and affects. It is quite possible that constructivism’s absorption of emotions/affects research will result in the same kind of theoretical watering-down of identity that many poststructuralist scholars have lamented. David Campbell (1998, 207-227) found that by the late 1990s mainstream constructivism (epitomized for him by the work of Alexander Wendt and 1996’s *The Culture of National Security* edited by Peter Katzenstein) was actively domesticating many of the most radical and innovative insights that had been drawn from earlier explorations of the concepts of discourse and identity. For him and others (see Zehfuss 2002), this cooptation signaled not only less interesting insights into world politics through the development and application of these concepts. Their watering-down also, more importantly, served to de-legitimize and ostracize poststructuralism as a disciplinary “other” to the “legitimate” approaches to language and identity.

The same potential seems to exist with how the future study of affects and emotions will play itself out in IR. Future arguments over the role and influence of affects and emotions in world politics could plausibly split off into a couple of different camps, with one arguing that

shifts in state behavior can be traced back to a shift in “state emotion” (whatever this might mean), while others could possibly reply that emotions are much too complex to be isolated and be attribute causal power. Given IR’s current paradigmatic lunch tables, such a debate is conceivable.⁵ The affects/emotions literature is still relatively new, if no longer in its infancy then perhaps in its adolescence, and thus disciplinary politics have yet to spring up to the degree that they have reached around the concept of identity. Therefore, it is timely that its exceedingly important insights and radically innovative theoretical potential should be actively cultivated and pushed in order to ward off the kind of domestication that has occurred recently in close by conceptual neighborhoods. If identity, a highly complex and perpetually disputed and contested concept, can be reduced to one of many discrete variables in an equation where its relative influence is tested against other variables, then there seems to be little doubt that affects and emotions can also be similarly reduced to the standards of social scientific hypothesis testing. As of this writing, these points are admittedly moot. Yet such concern about the silencing of theoretical potential is far from groundless.

Policy Implications

Given the above possible trajectories for future research into the politics of affects and emotions in American foreign policy and global politics more generally, this study also suggests a few implications for foreign policy practice. Although written primarily to make a contribution to a number of theoretical and empirical literatures in IR, the analyses here do offer some potential policy-relevant insights. The construction and legitimizing processes through which foreign policy discourses become politically successful, that is, whether or not they resonate with audiences, depends upon the affective appeal of the fantasy of subjectivity that they offer. As the

⁵ For a recent critique of the tendency to divide IR into paradigms, see Barkin (2010).

preceding chapters have demonstrated, discourses that offer fantasies of a secure collective subject often resonate more with audiences than discourses that offer fantasies of a less-secure collective subject. Jimmy Carter's ill-fated 1979 address on the "crisis of confidence" arguably offered a weaker fantasy, a less affectively appealing screen against the ambiguities of the national "self," and hence other discourses such as neoconservatism were able to gain social traction against it. As a Hysteric's discourse, Carter's speech put front-and-center audiences' split, and offered little in the way of overcoming the anxiety provoked by the split. Charles Krauthammer's declaration of the "unipolar moment" in the early 1990s evoked little desire for identification with the national subject it constructed, while William Kristol and Robert Kagan's neoconservative call for a "neo-Reaganite" foreign policy (composed of structures from both the University and Master's discourses) arguably began to play better for neoconservatives later in the 1990s. Additionally, as a University discourse that offered a stronger fantasy that invited identification as a subject within it, the war on terror discourse was highly politically successful for a time after September 11, 2001.

A few initial implications can be drawn from these examples of how different kinds of discourses have played out in American foreign policy debates over time. It seems as though discourses that offer weaker fantasies of the national subject are often less politically successful than those that offer stronger fantasies. Constructing a fantasy of the collective "self" seems to depend upon evoking strong enough desires so that people will identify with, and thus be interpellated as subjects within, the fantasy. This, in turn, depends upon how a fantasy object is constructed/not constructed within a discourse. If, for example, the collective subject, such as the Nation, is constructed as substantially lacking something that its subjects see as central to themselves, be it "freedom," "justice," or "democracy," then the Nation cannot be viewed as *too*

close to the missing Thing. As shown in the analysis of Krauthammer's discourse on unipolarity, the subject "America" was constructed as quite close to the object of fantasy – a unipolar world with "America" sitting on top. Thus, that fantasy worked to evoke relatively little desire for subjectivity. To be a subject one must desire, and to desire one must feel to be lacking a substantial part of oneself. The "America" of Krauthammer's discourse evoked little desire for identification because in doing so, the subject's desire would evaporate due to its perceived closeness to the fantasy object of a unipolar world. Something *must* be felt to be missing from the fantasy for it to evoke desire. A fantasy discourse constructed where its subject is viewed as nearly complete will likely resonate less than fantasies that offer a more lacking image of subjectivity. Subjects are likely to be drawn to a fantasy which they feel more securely channels their affective experiences toward a fantasy object. Subjects are perhaps less likely to be drawn to fantasy discourses that do not seem to construct these dynamics.

Fantasies of the subject are always articulated through a particular (yet ultimately unfixed) structure, the components of which are staged in particular relationships with each other. In two of Lacan's discourse structures, master signifiers S_1 and knowledge S_2 are at the forefront. In the Master's discourse, master signifiers S_1 have the force of agency while "objective" knowledge S_2 occupies the receiver position. In the University discourse, knowledge S_2 itself has the force of agency. Master signifiers S_1 and knowledge S_2 are often the most forceful elements of a discourse. They often constitute the Symbolic anchors upon which subjects' identifications are fastened. Thus a discourse that positions these elements as its most overt elements may be expected to resonate more than discourses that position them differently, as less overt and forceful. The other two discourse structures, the Hysteric and the Analyst, do just this. In the discourses of the Hysteric and the Analyst, the most vulnerable aspects of

subjectivity are front-and-center as the most overt factors of a discourse. In the Hysteric's discourse, the subject's \$ division and ambiguity is the agency driving the discourse, and the missing fantasy object *a* is in the receiver position. In the Analyst's discourse, the subject's \$ incompleteness is in the receiver position while the missing object *a* occupies the agent position. These two discourses are consequently much more critical and potentially unsettling to subjects than the Master and the University. Discourses that tend to unsettle subjects' identifications and fantasies are likely more anxiety-inducing and uncomfortable than discourses that offering reassuring masters signifiers and knowledge in an overt manner. As what we might call a general expectation, then, discourses that offer master signifiers and knowledge overtly, sometimes with the force of agency, may often resonate more than discourses that offer a subject's ambiguity and division with the force of agency. When competing in a hegemonic struggle against Hysteric's or Analyst's discourses, University and Master's discourses may prevail more often and be more affectively appealing.

This is not to say, though, that critical discourses like the Hysteric's and Analyst's will *always* resonate less than University or Master's discourses. Indeed, in Lacanian theory the only way to counter a University or Master's discourse is with an Analyst's or Hysteric's discourse. If Analyst's or Hysteric's discourses never resonated, then this would likely lead to the conclusion that social change against established Master and University discourses could never occur, and this is obviously not the case. And, these general expectations are complicated when discourses with similar structures compete against each other. For instance, when two Hysteric's discourses compete against one another, what should we expect for which one will succeed? I argued in Chapter Five that both Carter's and Norman Podhoretz's discourses could largely be understood as Hysteric's discourses. In this case, the particular fantasy that each text deployed

mattered for the affective appeal that each text evoked. Thus, in discourses with the same or nearly the same structure the “winner” may depend upon the particular kind of fantasies offered by each, and the consequent desires evoked by each. These are merely some initial thoughts and expectations about what kind of discourse structures may tend to be more successful than others, but as this study has shown, the affective appeal of a discourse (or lack thereof) is composed of an array of dimensions and dynamics which also depend upon the larger social and cultural contexts within which the discourses are articulated.

We could perhaps imagine how some of these insights might be employed in current American foreign policy discourses regarding Iran. Despite Barack Obama’s campaign promises of serious engagement and diplomacy with Iran, such overtures (as of this writing) have not materialized. American leaders have for years been concerned that Iran’s development of nuclear energy options is a thin veil covering their attempt to produce nuclear weapons. Iran’s possession of such weapons, American leaders argue, would threaten American troops and bases throughout the Middle East and close allies such as Israel. As both George W. Bush and Obama have repeatedly emphasized, the US has said it will not allow Iran to build nuclear weapons. As such, all options (i.e. military) remain “on the table,” as the American diplomatic slogan goes.

The American public, by and large, shows similar tendencies in their opinions regarding Iran. A Pew Research Center report in October 2009 showed that although the public approves of direct talks between Iran and the US, most are not sanguine as to their success. Furthermore, a majority polled (61%) said that it is more important to keep Iran from developing nuclear weapons, even if this means taking military action, than it is to pursue negotiations (Pew Research Center 2009). Only a relatively small minority (24%) said that that it is more important to avoid military action even if it means that Iran would acquire a nuclear weapon.

These views were shared across the political spectrum, to varying degrees. A strong majority of Republicans (71%) and independents (61%) said that it is more important to keep Iran from developing nuclear weapons even if it means military action. This view was less widely held among Democrats (51%), but far fewer (31%) said that it is more important to avoid military action than it is to allow Iran to possess a nuclear weapon (Pew Research Center 2009).

If the Obama administration decided that it wanted to revive its campaign idea that direct talks between Iran and the US would be productive and mutually beneficial, what kind of discourse might the administration deploy to try and shift public opinion toward this idea? If the Obama administration decided that it wanted to pursue serious direct talks with Iran, it would have to address the public pessimism regarding the anticipated failures and futility of such talks. Direct talks are widely supported, yet cynicism about the potential failure likely feeds into similarly widespread support for military action. First, the administration would likely want to articulate and deploy a discourse to the public that positions knowledge S_2 and master signifiers S_1 as the most overt or manifest elements of their discourse. University and Master's discourses are often more powerful and appealing because of the fantasy of secure subjectivity that they offer (in contrast to Hysteric's and Analyst's discourses) through the force of agency of their knowledge S_2 and master signifiers S_1 . A University discourse offered to the public which constructed an "objective" body of knowledge S_2 about the potential and likely benefits of direct talks between the US and Iran would be a first step. Such a discourse may put front and center (in the agent position) a construction of the US-Iranian relationship that did not focus only on supposed Iranian duplicity but instead upon potential benefits to the US to be gained from direct engagement.

Constructing a discourse that offers audiences a secure position of subjectivity (as the University discourse does) is only a first step. The fantasy of the national “self” sustaining the discourse must also be appealing to audiences seeking to invest themselves in the secure image of a collective subject. As we have seen, to evoke desires for identification, a fantasy must maintain a kind of balance so as to not evoke too little desire. Construct an image of the subject which is vague and ambiguous (as Carter did), and few desires for secure subjectivity will be evoked. Construct an image of the subject that has nearly reached its fantasized *jouissance* (as Krauthammer did), and this similarly will evoke anxiety rather than desire for identification. If the Obama administration were to articulate a vision of the current US-Iran relationship in which “we” were lacking something constructed as “essential” to ourselves, then this might produce the kind of fantasy which would evoke desires for identification on the part of audiences. For example, a vision could be articulated in which the United States’ current non-engagement with Iran is a blockage to the American “self.” Rather than a sign of strength, non-engagement (and the consequent non-achievement of American foreign policy goals) could be articulated as hindering the full potential of America’s international role as a global leader. America could be achieving much more than what it currently is if it only pursued direct engagement with Iran. Such engagement could be a fantasy to be pursued, the endpoint of which is the fulfillment of America’s global potential. This vision of engagement with Iran could be constructed as taking away from our master signifiers. Engagement could be a sign of “strength” rather than naïve appeasement. The lack of direct talks hinders our “freedom” to attain our foreign policy goals around the world, rather than supposedly teaching Iranian leaders a lesson. “Democracy” in the US could be directly linked in a variety of ways to the democracy movement in Iran. A discourse that constructed a vision of the US-Iran relationship in terms of how the status quo is

blocking the full potential of our master signifiers would likely evoke more identification than a discourse that discussed the issue solely in the language of policy and/or Iranian deceit. To adequately deploy knowledge to solve political problems, “desire must be mobilized to use knowledge. Desire itself must be altered if knowledge is to be effective” in solving issues deemed to be problems (Alcorn 2002, 5). Articulating the Iran issue in terms of an American national subject that is being blocked or hindered by the status quo of self-imposed non-engagement could begin to channel national desire toward this fantasy.⁶

⁶ That is, if the goal is a serious and direct engagement with Iran. As stated above, the Obama administration’s current foreign policy toward Iran is far from the the approach Obama campaigned on. As of this writing, for example, the administration (Secretary of State Hilary Clinton specifically) recently criticized a potential deal between Iran, Turkey, and Brazil where Iran would ship supplies of enriched uranium to these two countries. At the same time, the US is currently pushing for new sanctions against Iran in the United Nations Security Council. See Slackman (2010).

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