

MASS MEDIATED KNOWLEDGE AND POSSIBILITIES FOR POLITICAL
PARTICIPATION:

Reading Chomsky, Baudrillard, and the Gulf War
by


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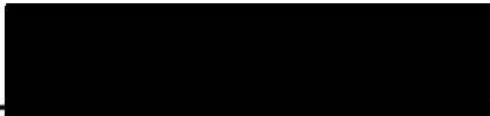
ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses the problem of communication and the possibilities for political participation. More specifically, it looks at the effects of the knowledge made available by and through the mass media, that is *mediated* knowledge, on the political, both as a concept and as a practice. To elucidate this problem, the theorists Noam Chomsky and Jean Baudrillard are turned to for their contrasting perspectives and interpretations. Their parallel critiques of the 1991 Persian Gulf War exemplify their description of mediated knowledge and the construction of the political, as well as illuminating the propaganda model and simulation, their respective analytical frameworks. Following this is a comparison of Chomsky and Baudrillard that questions them in terms of epistemology, ontology and political subjectivity and agency. The conclusion is a synthesis of their analyses that suggests that considerations of the message and the medium need to inform critiques of the mass media to open possibilities for inclusive political practices.

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For Rick LaFleur

**The one who will be with me
wherever I go.**

Ex-Spectator

looking out for cars and mortality
trying to find some geometry
avoiding mistakes
keep an eye on every step i take
everything is building and it appears
that you're all architects and engineers
that's how it looks
that's how it looks from here

i'm an ex-spectator
can't you see?
i'm an ex-spectator
never let my, never let my, never let my vision get in the way of

here's some questions that the writer sent
can an observer be a participant?
have i seen too much?
does it count if it doesn't touch?

if the view is all i can ascertain
pure understanding is out of range
if i make that call
why can't i make that change?

i'm an ex-spectator
can't you see?
i'm an ex-spectator
never let my, never let my, never let my
vision get in the way of
me¹

¹ Fugazi. "ex-spectator," from *The Argument* [Washington, D.C.: Discord Records, 2001, © Fugazi].

Preface: *Locating the Author (or Dear Reader)*

You're question is: why am I so interested in politics? But if I were to answer you very simply, I would say this: why shouldn't I be interested? That is to say, what blindness, what deafness, what density of ideology would have to weigh me down to prevent me from being interested in what is probably the most crucial subject to our existence, that is to say the society in which we live, the economic relations within which it functions, and the system of power which defines the regular forms and the regular permissions and prohibitions of our conduct. The essence of our life consists, after all, of the political functioning of the society in which we find ourselves. So I can't answer the question of why I should be interested; I could only answer it by asking why shouldn't I be interested? -Michel Foucault²

Before approaching the following work I would like to share a little bit about myself and what has made the questions addressed in this thesis so important for me to undertake years of struggle with them. To begin, I would suggest that I could easily be caricatured as the paranoid type. In looking at the world around me, my reactions could often be placed somewhere on a continuum between dumbfoundedness and outrage, though usually I am just stuck shaking my head, wondering what the hell is going on. In relation to the textual world, I am either amused or terrified by the absurdity of the news. I am freaked out by popular culture. Since moving to B.C. to do my Master's I have stopped watching TV, I rarely read magazines, and I find myself overwhelmed by mainstream movies. Music remains my only (marginal) cultural connection.³ So, basically I have retreated into academia in search of a hole that I can stick my head in and wait out Armageddon.

Luckily, while I have been shuffling through the halls and classroom of my bunker I have stumbled upon many people and texts that have provided me with some sort of solace. These people, who will pop up periodically in this work, have discussed passionately the political and social world that surrounds us. They have come through the pages to confirm that the world has always been a scary place but that it is worth fighting for and changing. Though this thesis focuses on Chomsky and Baudrillard, I

² Michel Foucault and Noam Chomsky. "Human Nature: Justice versus Power," in *Reflexive Water: The Basic Concerns of Mankind* [ed. Fons Elders. London, UK: Souvenir Press (Educational and Academic) Ltd., 1974. Pp. 167-168].

³ See the appendix for a listing of the music that accompanied me through this academic journey and as a resource for your future listening pleasure.

wouldn't place these two at the top of my list of emotionally supportive shoulders to lean on. Both can be depressing and frustrating. However, they have been very influential for me and I want to explain why I have chosen a dialogue between them as necessary for my intellectual comfort.

I can remember reading Chomsky when I was still early in my undergraduate degree and waking up to the fact that my dissatisfaction with the world around (Calgary Alberta, no less) was not due to my own personal neurosis. The world was a mess, but it was also always in the process of being cleaned up. There was energy in the air with social movements gaining predominance in the media and on the streets. Having lived in the peripheries of punk rock anarchism seemed the way to go. Down with authority! Naturally, Chomsky was an appealing figure. We shared political ideals and were angered by the same injustices. He spoke a language that I found accessible and had perseverance for combating social injustices that I am still in awe of. So, I became more educated in a history of international political affairs that happened before my time and, which I might as well have slept through, while I was alive. I began to take politics seriously. I didn't blame this previous ignorance on myself or my parents (who already had enough in my books to account for); yet, I did start to look at the world more critically and tried to move my wishing for something better into actions to change them. I tried to follow Chomsky's dedication to make myself-not part of the problem but part of the solution through direct interest and actions in the decisions that shape the 'glocal' world. I wanted to make others and myself accountable. I don't know how successful I have been. I tend to get a little too dogmatic at times to foster much communication with those who oppose me politically.

Anyway, besides being attracted to the likes of Chomsky and other 'leftist' political commentators, I also became interested in cultural theory. The enigma of semiotics and psychoanalysis seemed so sexy to my (conservatively trained) sociological self. I wanted to see the world through these lenses. This was also at a time where I could still stomach pop culture and was a customary participant, even if it was only because I didn't know that I didn't have to be. Baudrillard, of course, figures large in theorizing 'culture'. Though I didn't really have any clue what he was talking about when he referred to simulations and hyperreality, I was sure that he must be onto

something (at least that is what the equally unaware though more self-assured people - read pretentious coffee shop folk- around would have me believe). So, I got acquainted with Baudrillard and other cultural thinkers. What they said rang true. Appealing to my nascent nihilistic self I saw the world spinning out of control. There was no ground to get hold of truth and reality and no one was going to tell me how it was. I guess at the time I was another consumer begrudging my liberties of choice. I concluded that if what I was being told (sold) through popular media was actually going on, then the world was most certainly surreal and we were all going to hell in (this year's latest) handbag.

Fastforwarding to graduate school, I had the usual pressure to get a thesis topic. Sitting around one night drinking beer and complaining yet again about the state of the world, a friend and I came upon a problem that seemed worthy of consideration. How is it that we have a world that is at once constructed as if there were puppet-masters dictating our fate and simultaneously a hyperreal advertisement where freedom dissolves in the displaced desires for consumer choice and narcissism? We were thinking about how the political apathy surrounding us was reflected through movies, like *Enemy of the State* and *The Matrix*. The former is a conspiracy theory about governmental cover-ups and the latter a sci-fi tale about reality being nothing other than a computer simulation. So we were thinking about information and how it is understood and how this understanding can lead to or prevent political actions. We were trying to reconcile how there could be powers that controlled political knowledge and action within a world that had a split reality, where no one could be sure what was really going on, including the powerful. Chomsky and Baudrillard seemed to encapsulate for us these two understandings of the world. Chomsky described propaganda and thought control and Baudrillard described hyperreality and simulations. Both perspectives would need to be understood to address the schizophrenia of contemporary political culture. A thesis question was born.

So, my humble beginnings have led me to the problem of communication and politics. The mass media seemed like a good place to start deciphering what knowledge was accessible and how its availability affected people politically. In this thesis I have tried to ground myself in two very different perspectives of the world: modern and postmodern, each critical. I am sympathetic to both. Chomsky has continuously

postmodern, each critical. I am sympathetic to both. Chomsky has continuously (re)strengthened my commitment to the political in the face of looming odds of apathy. He makes me remember that patience and passion for justice are needed above all. Reading him also reminds me that I have not always seen the world the way that I do now and that engaging people in a language that is understandable is important, as is taking seriously (not cynically) what people are reading in the newspapers. A dialogue needs to be initiated to allow for education of people around the political (including my own). Baudrillard affirms for me the disbelief I have in mass media and society in general. He seems to be able to articulate the strangeness that I feel when I hear that the world is continuing on a path that is obvious to me to be absolutely absurd. He tells me fantastic tales of a hyperreal world that I just happen to live in. Chomsky and Baudrillard have been mentors who have helped me deal with the paradoxical world that I live in.

In continuing on in this work I hope these parts of me will stick in your head. This project hasn't been abstract for me, even when I write abstractly. It is a living body that attempts to map my political, social, and intellectual growth. It is also a witness to my emotional and physical toils, which include a track record of psychological breakdowns, unending backaches, and a blood clot. A lot of this work has proved to be a struggle, and in the end much of what is said isn't exactly how I would have like to articulate it (my paranoid, hyper-critical self rears its menacing head), but I use it as a place to start thinking and talking about the effects of mass media on the political. The voice shifts throughout the chapters as I approach the different styles of the theorists and topics addressed; yet throughout it all the voice I seek is my own. So, while it is rude to read over others' shoulders and direct them in a particular interpretation, I hope to be guiding a conversation with two thinkers that I believe to be necessary for critiquing mediated knowledge and constructing our possibilities for political participation.

Abbreviations:**Baudrillard**

- SS *Simulations* (1983).
 SM *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities or, The End of the Social* (1983).
 EC *The Ecstasy of Communication* (1988).
 IE *The Illusion of the End* (1994).
 PS "The Precession of Simulacra," in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994).
 IMM "The Implosion of Meaning in the Media," in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994).
 GW *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* (1995).
 SOO *The System of Objects* (1996).
 MMC "Mass Media Culture," in *Revenge of the Crystal: Selected Writings on the Modern Object and its Destiny, 1968-1983* (1999).
 JB/SO "The System of Objects," (exert) in *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings, 2nd Edition* (2001).
 JB/FS "Fatal Strategies," (exert) in *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings, 2nd Edition* (2001).
 ISM "The Masses: The Implosion of the Social in the Media," in *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings, 2nd Edition* (2001).
 JB/GW "The Gulf War Did Not Take Place," (exert) in *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings, 2nd Edition* (2001).
 IMS "Information at the Meteorological Stage," in *Screened Out* (2002).
 GU "The Global and the Universal," in *Screened Out* (2002).
 TV "TV Fantasies," in *Screened Out* (2002).
 EP "Exorcism in Politics or the Conspiracy of Imbeciles," in *Screened Out* (2002).

Chomsky

- HN and Michel Foucault. "Human Nature: Justice versus Power," in *Reflexive Water: The Basic Concerns of Mankind* (1974).
 MC and Edward S. Herman. *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (1988).
 LR *Language and Responsibility* (1977).
 NI *Necessary Illusions: Thought Control in Democratic Societies* (1989).
 LSP "Language in the Service of Propaganda," in *Chronicles of Dissent: Noam Chomsky Interviewed by David Barsamian, 1984-1991* (1992).
 SPDE "State Power and the Domestic Enemy," in *Chronicles of Dissent: Noam Chomsky Interviewed by David Barsamian, 1984-1991* (1992).
 PS "The Propaganda System," in *Chronicles of Dissent: Noam Chomsky Interviewed by David Barsamian, 1984-1991* (1992).
 PGW "Prelude to the Gulf War," in *Chronicles of Dissent: Noam Chomsky interviewed by David Barsamian* (1992).
 WO "World Orders: Old and New," in *Chronicles of Dissent: Noam Chomsky interviewed by David Barsamian* (1992).
 GPR "The Global Protection Racket: Reflections on the Gulf War," in *Chronicles of Dissent: Noam Chomsky interviewed by David Barsamian* (1992).
 DD *Deterring Democracy* (1992).
 WW "The Media and the War: What War?" in *Triumph of the Image: The Media's War in the Persian Gulf - A Global Perspective* (1992).
 CC "'Consent Without Consent'," in *Perspectives on Power: Reflections on Human Nature and the Social Order* (1997).
 SAP *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda, 2nd Edition* (2002).

Chapter 1. Introducing Mediated Knowledge and Political Participation

I. Backdrop: Politics within Mediated Space

Political participation has traditionally been conceived to occur in the public sphere. The public sphere has been delimited as the space where citizens can address collective existence in an open debate amongst the participants.¹ While the method with which to bring about an active political community varies, it is generally agreed that all forms of governing require a definition of the boundaries, the participants and the techniques that will be used;² however, who gets to be included or excluded from this space has been plagued with controversy.³ Some contemporary political theorists have claimed that public space is being colonized by bureaucracy and concerns of administration, instead of providing a space for politics and democracy, and engenders a passive citizenship.⁴ These political theorists call for a political space that will allow for contestation, through political participation and critique, that will invigorate the meaning of contemporary understandings of politics.⁵

Communication technologies are further complicating conceptions of political participation and public space. Media have usurped traditional fora of politics and have assumed a dominant role in the global world in disseminating and shaping our

¹ Thiele, Leslie Paul. *Thinking Politics: Perspectives in Ancient, Modern and Postmodern Political Theory* [Chatham, NJ: Chatham House Publishers, 1997. Pp. 63].

² Rose, Nikolas. "Governing Liberty" in *Governing Modern Societies*, eds. Richard V. Ericson and Nico Stehr. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000. Pp. 147].

³ Numerous authors have written on the exclusion/inclusion to public/political space. A very few are: Chantal Mouffe (1996, 2000), Bonnie Honig (1996), Arendt (1954). However, this is not part of the discussion in this paper I just wanted to indicate a particular genealogy in thinking about political participation and the boundaries of political space.

⁴ See: Honig, Bonnie. *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993]; Mouffe, Chantal. "Democracy, Power, and the Political," in *Democracy and Difference* [ed. Seyla Benhabib. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996] and *The Democratic Paradox* [London: Verso, 2000]; Villa, Dana. "Democratizing the Agon: Nietzsche, Arendt and the Agonistic Tendency in Recent Political Theory," in *Why Nietzsche Still?* [ed. Alan D. Schrift. Berkley: University of California Press, 1999. Pp. 224-246].

⁵ See for example: Arendt, Hannah. "What is Freedom?" *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* [New York: The Viking Press, 1954. Pp. 143-173]; Honig, Bonnie. *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993]; Mouffe, Chantal. "Democracy, Power, and the Political," in *Democracy and Difference* [ed. Seyla Benhabib. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996], *The Democratic Paradox* [London: Verso, 2000]; Villa, Dana. "Democratizing the Agon: Nietzsche, Arendt and the Agonistic Tendency in Recent Political Theory," in *Why Nietzsche Still?* [ed. Alan D. Schrift. Berkley: University of California Press, 1999. Pp. 224-246].

ideas of the good (social and political) and the means to affect it.⁶ As a result, the construction of knowledge falls heavily on the shoulders of the media. They are responsible for most of the coverage of political issues and public fora to discuss governmental and corporate policy, both locally and globally. Consequently, political and social discourse has, for at least the last century, been mediated activity, through print journalism, radio, television, and so on. It follows from this that media's 'staging' (imaging or framing) of representations of 'real' events (disasters, wars, fiscal policy, environmental destruction, elections, etc.) greatly contributes to the construction of our understanding of the world and our role within it.

However, the representations that come out of media, especially corporate media, do not necessarily lend themselves to all issues or perspectives. Stuart Hall, in discussing the denotative and connotative codes within visual signs, suggests that the media hierarchically maps images and information into 'dominant' or 'preferred' readings.⁷ These preferred readings that the media send must be seen as embedded in an 'ideological apparatus' that is structured institutionally by an elite and that has limited accessibility (ED: 516). Similarly, Ursula Franklin points out that images within communication technologies start to replace actualities, with the unusual taking precedence over lived experiences, and that questions of how these images are chosen/formed rarely makes it into common discourse.⁸ She claims, "Media images seem to have a position of authority that is comparable to the authority that religious teaching used to have. The images seem infallible..." (RWT: 36).

When images within the media begin to appear more real than the actualities around us, it becomes difficult to critique dominant paradigms of knowledge, and by extension engage in contestation. Because the media are not performing a benign role (the media are not a mirror to reality), they play a role in defining our understandings of reality. The media bound what is acceptable to be represented and how. As our

⁶ See for example: Nesbitt-Larking, Paul. *Politics, Society and the Media: Canadian Perspectives* [Toronto: Broadview Press, Ltd., 2001]; Taras, David. *Power and Betrayal in the Canadian Media* [Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press Ltd., 1999]; Franklin, Ursula M. *The Real World of Technology, Revised Edition* [Toronto: House of Anansi Press, Ltd., 1999, 1990].

⁷ Hall, Stuart. "Encoding, Decoding" in *The Cultural Studies Reader* [ed. Simon During. London: Routledge, 1999, 1993. Pp. 508-517]. Hereafter, 'ED'.

⁸ Franklin, Ursula M. *The Real World of Technology, Revised Edition* [Toronto: House of Anansi Press, Ltd., 1999, 1990]. Hereafter, 'RWT'.

knowledge has expanded from a local world to a global world, the site of public fora for political participation has increasingly shifted away from face-to-face encounters (RWT). Consequently, human communication is now almost exclusively mediated by communication technologies, such as the media.

Not only do the representations within media construct the world in an authoritative and largely inaccessible manner, they also serve to position the audience in a particular way. Marshall McLuhan described the significance of the modes of communication in his assertion, 'the medium is the message'.⁹ Media, like radio, print, and TV, have structured social relationships and personal subjectivities through privileging certain sense experiences and correspondingly shifting the ways in which the participants interact with each other, the medium, and its symbols. As McLuhan states, "Societies have always been shaped more by the nature of the media by which men communicate than by the content of the communication" (MM: 8). He further asserts,

All media work us over completely. They are so pervasive in their personal, political, economic, aesthetic, psychological, moral, ethical, and social consequences that they leave no part of us untouched, unaffected, unaltered. The medium is the message. Any understanding of social and cultural change is impossible without a knowledge of the way media work as environments (MM: 26).

As environments, media influence understandings of time and space, as rates and rhythms of transmission speed up and slow down. They posit particular truths and realities. The medium unifies and separates people as well through filtering perceptions and perspectives. To grapple with the effects of mediated knowledge on political practices thus requires considering not only the representations within mass media, but also the medium itself.

II. Focusing the Problem...

As the medium and message of mass media prevail in constructing the world, it is of great importance for us to consider the implications of political dialogue and contestation manifesting itself most dominantly within mediated communication technologies, within a mediated space. Control of these communication technologies is

⁹ McLuhan, Marshall and Quentin Fiore. *The Medium is the Message* [New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1967]. Hereafter, 'MM'.

largely inaccessible to the majority of people in the West, let alone the rest of the 'global village'. Within this situation, it is important to understand how the media work to construct meaning and send messages with particular desired readings contained in them. It is also important to consider the context in which the medium is embedded and how the organization of communication works to position social and political relations and subjectivities. Accordingly, I have three general concerns, which overlap and intertwine. The first concerns the role and mode in which the media construct popular knowledge. The second surrounds issues of popular participation in democratic practices, such as our ability to critique existing political discourses. The nexus of these two problems leads me to wonder how media's construction of knowledge, or mediated knowledge, affects possibilities of political participation.

The central question that grounds this thesis is then: What are the implications of having the media as the dominant forum of public (being both political and ontological) discourse? This question is of particular interest because I am concerned that democracy is compromised through a lack of accessible public space in which to engage in political activity. A public space demands the conditions of possibility for participants to be changed and to change others, both individually and collectively. Democracy, if it is to have any useful meaning for my purposes, is the ability to directly engage in political activity through practices (such as voicing our own understandings or feelings) that can affect political decisions about how we are to organize and live together. This is our ability to critique. However, critique necessitates communication. It requires active participation in the contestation and negotiation of our truths and realities. I am thus seeking an accessible and inclusive public space, especially in regards to perspectives and knowledge claims that deviate from the norm, where we can engage in rigorous and productive critique with others.

This question of mediated knowledge and political participation is large and complex. Snippets of these concerns can be focused upon in an attempt to conceptualize and understand the implication of media's role in effecting political practices of critique. To pursue this problem, I am interested in bringing together theories of political participation/space into a dialogue with communications theory to try to understand media as a contemporary matrix for public and political participation. My particular

interest for my thesis is: How can theorists who examine the intersection of communication and politics help us understand political practice within a space of mediated knowledge? More specifically: How do the theorists, Noam Chomsky and Jean Baudrillard, help us to understand media in the context of possibilities of political participation?

III. Snapshot: Why Chomsky and Baudrillard?

Central to this project is the investigation of whether we have political agency in regards to mediated knowledge and how the communication of the political affects possibilities of popular democratic participation. There are many schools of thought that have approached this relationship between media and politics. Traditional and emergent theories, such as feminist theory, structuralism, semiology, Marxism, cultural studies, and postmodernism, have all provided analyses and critiques of the mass media. Chomsky and Baudrillard can be seen as representing two dominant, and divergent, critical paradigms, loosely defined as modernist and postmodernist. The former approach can be conceptualized as one that looks to the structural aspects of media and politics, while the latter tends to analyze audience's interpretation of the representations. Accordingly, Chomsky and Baudrillard offer different understandings of how we communicate and what the possibilities are for contesting knowledges, or to put it differently, how we engage in political activity. It is these two paradigms that I want to understand in order to initiate a project of critique against mass media.

Chomsky is much more in line with a critical modernist perspective¹⁰ and sees the world of mass media communication as fundamentally flawed. Chomsky suggests that there is a creative human nature that is not being actualized because of the structural arrangement of the state capitalism.¹¹ He argues that social inequality leads to only those who have economic and political power having the ability to direct the institutional

¹⁰ I am using the term 'critical modernist' loosely, only to indicate a general tendency that Chomsky appropriates in regards to the conflictual interests within social, economic, and political structure. While this is close to Ritzer's (1996) definition of conflict theory, I chose my label in order to avoid unnecessary generalizations to a particular sociological perspective that has a particular context, canon and history.

¹¹ See: Chomsky, Noam and Michel Foucault. "Human Nature: Justice versus Power" in *Reflexive Water: The Basic Concerns of Mankind* [ed. Fons Elders. London: Souvenir Press, 1974. Pp. 136-138]; Rabinow, Paul. "Introduction," in *The Foucault Reader* [ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon, 1984. Pp. 3].

organization of society, representations of knowledge and political practices.¹² The lack of popular participation, in effect, prevents ‘true’ understanding of the daily workings of governance and our connection to the political.¹³ To receive real knowledge about political and personal relationships we must uncover and remove the hegemonic powers of the ruling class and engage in direct democracy where participation is crucial and necessary.¹⁴ Thus, Chomsky is asserting that there is truth, but it is being concealed in order to propagate particular classed agendas that are actually detrimental to the majority of the members of society.

Chomsky’s social commentary is not merely of academic interest; rather, he takes his anarcho-syndicalist¹⁵ politics as the springboard into critiques of media and US foreign policy. While Chomsky is not aspiring to be a media, social, or political theorist, his understandings of the workings of contemporary politics and society can easily be extended to describe social and political relationships. Chomsky believes that the role of the media in a democracy is to objectively report on the world to facilitate public dialogue. Through a comparative media analysis of news coverage of similar enactments of U.S. foreign policy, Chomsky shows the ideological workings of American ruling class and its effects on political subjectivities.¹⁶ Chomsky outlines this in the workings of the ‘propaganda model’. In regards to the effect of media in framing popular perceptions, as described by the propaganda model, Chomsky states:

¹² See: Chomsky, Noam and Edward S. Herman. *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* [New York: Pantheon Books, 1988]; Chomsky, Noam. *Chronicles of Dissent: Noam Chomsky Interviewed by David Barsamian, 1984-1991* [Vancouver: New Star Books, 1992]; Chomsky, Noam. *Perspectives on Power: Reflections on Human Nature and the Social Order* [Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1997].

¹³ Chomsky, Noam. “State Power and the Domestic Enemy,” in *Chronicles of Dissent: Noam Chomsky Interviewed by David Barsamian, 1984-1991* [Vancouver: New Star Books, 1992. Pp. 89]. Hereafter, ‘SPDE’.

¹⁴ Chomsky, Noam. *Necessary Illusions: Thought Control in Democratic Societies* [London: Pluto, 1989. Pp. 89].

¹⁵ Anarcho-syndicalism refers to a branch of anarchism that believes in a non-hierarchical way of acting, thinking and relating to other people, which also privileges small communal living centring around community and work (Maher, John and Judy Groves. *Chomsky for Beginners* [Cambridge, UK: Icon Books, 1996. Pp. 135]).

¹⁶ One example of the differing news coverage of similar global atrocities that Chomsky compares is the genocide in East Timor (supported by arms traded by the US to Indonesia) and the Pol Pot massacres in Cambodia (condemned by US) (Chomsky, Noam. “Language in the Service of Propaganda,” in *Chronicles of Dissent: Noam Chomsky Interviewed by David Barsamian, 1984-1991* [Vancouver: New Star Books, 1992. Pp.12-13].)

The mass media serve as a system of communicating messages and symbols to the general populace. It is their function to amuse, entertain, and inform and to inculcate individuals with the values, beliefs, and codes of behaviour that will integrate them in to the institutional structure of the larger society. In a world of concentrated wealth and major conflicts of class interest, to fulfil this role requires systematic propaganda.¹⁷

Chomsky sees propaganda as particular to democratic societies. The need to secure ideological control over the population while also retaining the illusion of freedom necessarily inhibits the use of direct physical violence within the borders of the society.¹⁸ Propaganda is also directed most heavily toward the educated middle-class and elite themselves, as they are the ones that propagate the system and have the most invested in its beliefs (SPDE: 89).¹⁹ Further, criticism of the workings of the governing bodies and communication industry is contained through controlling the content of news reporting (SPDE: 80). Chomsky's critique then is targeting the message of the mass media and the structural power that maintains the hegemonic powers of the elites.

In contrast with Chomsky, Baudrillard, who views society through speculative postmodernism²⁰, denies the 'real' and 'truth' in all senses. The contrast lies in the fact that Baudrillard feels that we have moved from a time of the 'real' to an era of surfaces, ecstatic communication, and implosive systems of meaning, otherwise termed the 'hyper-real'.²¹ He states:

This ... means the collapse of reality into hyperrealism, in the minute duplication of the real, preferably on the basis of another reproductive medium – advertising, photo, etc. From medium to medium the real is volatilized (sic); it becomes an allegory of death, but it is reinforced by its very destruction; it becomes the real for the real, fetish of the lost object – no longer object of representation, but ecstasy of denegation and of its own ritual extermination: the hyperreal (SS: 141-142).

¹⁷Chomsky, Noam and Edward S. Herman. *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* [New York: Pantheon Books, 1988. Pp. 1].

¹⁸ Chomsky, Noam. "The Propaganda System," in *Chronicles of Dissent: Noam Chomsky interviewed by David Barsamian, 1984-1991* [Vancouver: New Star Books, 1992. Pp. 48].

¹⁹ Chomsky, Noam. *Perspectives on Power: Reflections on Human Nature and the Social Order* [Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1997. Pp. 152-153].

²⁰ I am choosing the term 'speculative postmodernism' to highlight a similarity with postmodern assumptions, such as the blurring of reality and fantasy, challenging universal paradigms and so on. While Baudrillard has denied the label postmodernism, his hypothetical form of rhetoric does find some alliances within this perspective.

²¹ Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulations* [trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman. New York: Semiotext(e), 1983]. Hereafter, 'SS'.

Baudrillard is following in the steps of McLuhan by investigating the medium. He argues that it has blurred borders and negates the stability of the real and truth. Accordingly, we can no longer access knowledge, in the sense of a 'true' or authentic understanding, because the medium gives us only appearance and a feeling of uncertainty in our ('Western') compartmentalized and limited world of knowledge.²² We have no more public, or private, space, or space for communication due to the saturation of space by signs (EC: 19-20; 24). Baudrillard implies that our fragmented truths, while allowing for multiple interpretations of information, prevent a capacity for agency because communication technologies have lost the ability to secure stable meanings within the proliferation of signs (EC: 43).

Baudrillard's analysis of the mass media therefore focuses on communication and the foundational shift that our consumer culture has brought about. Baudrillard starts his critique of consumer society by disrupting the privileged position of production within traditional Marxism, by suggesting that it is not production but consumption that is the driving characteristic of contemporary capitalism.²³ Following from this critique, Baudrillard breaks away from critical theory and starts down the path of simulations.²⁴ Within this rupture, Baudrillard concludes that we have to rethink our conception of reality. He is suggesting that signs, for example Disneyland, advertisements, DNA, et cetera, no longer represent a fixed referent, and instead they act as abstracted models that destroy the real in a simulation (SS: 148-152). Signs have become detached from the objects, subjects and the relationships they represented. They have been abstracted to a point where they have been emptied of all their particularities, to be unique only as a (virtual) model, which is beyond the real. The real has collapsed into the imaginary, thus 'truth' or 'reality' no longer make sense in the circulation of symbols. By keeping in mind Baudrillard's understanding of the hyperreal society, consumption, and simulation, I hope to analyze the contribution that 'critical' postmodernism has made in helping us

²² Baudrillard, Jean. *The Ecstasy of Communication* [trans. Bernard and Caroline Schutze, ed. Sylvere Lotringer. New York: Semiotext(e), 1988. Pp. 39-41]. Hereafter, 'EC'.

²³ See: Baudrillard, Jean. *The System of Objects* [trans. James Benedict. London: Verso, 1996, originally published in French 1968].

²⁴ See: Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulations* [trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman. New York: Semiotext(e), 1983] and *The Ecstasy of Communication* [trans. Bernard and Caroline Schutze, ed. Sylvere Lotringer. New York: Semiotext(e), 1988].

conceptualize consumer-capitalist society; how the latter has affected and been affected by media and where political agency lies within this context.

It is Chomsky's and Baudrillard's different approaches to mass media and political practices that have made me choose them for this project. I have picked them in order to conceptualize and critique the contradictory world in which I live. I am seeking a serious political project that values popular participation in democracy and I want serious attention given to the frivolity of popular media. So, I want to have the realness of politics and media considered along with the unrealness of media and politics. Chomsky and Baudrillard provide an entry point into this project of critique. Chomsky focuses on the message and Baudrillard on the medium. Further, Chomsky predominantly investigates the traditional political domain of print media and Baudrillard looks at the emergent political subjectivities of electronic media. As the effects on possibilities for political participation are multiple and complex, considering Chomsky and Baudrillard's perspectives, in relation to one another, engenders a richer critique of mass mediated knowledge.

IV. Analysis: Questions and Critical Engagement

In terms of analysis, there are three general questions that will inform this thesis: what knowledge is available through the media? How do the media construct knowledge of the political? And, most importantly, what is the effect of mediated knowledge on the possibilities of political participation? Directed specifically at Baudrillard and Chomsky, I will ask: what does mediated knowledge look like? What is media's message in regards to the political? What is their epistemology when considering media and politics? What is their ontology as it influences their reading of mediated knowledge? And, what are the possibilities for political subjectivity and participation?

In order to understand Baudrillard's and Chomsky's analytical frameworks in practice and the types of critiques they engender I investigate their work on the same media event: the 1991 Persian Gulf War. I approach their work using a methodology that could be considered discourse analysis, that examines in depth their texts on the Gulf War. I have refrained from looking to outside sources to clarify their different writings.²⁵

²⁵ I have not embedded myself in the secondary literature on either Baudrillard and Chomsky because I wanted this interpretation to be my own. Further, the critiques that are available of each differ greatly.

Rather, I have conceptualized this project more as an intense interview with each of the theorists, which is followed up with a conversation between us all. I did not want to lose their voices in a crowd. The separate explorations into the Gulf War serve to illuminate Chomsky and Baudrillard's divergent approaches.²⁶ Chomsky discusses the Gulf War in terms of the role the media played in representing the events and ideas behind the war and the ideologies that drove actions of the US government. In applying the propaganda model, he highlights the economic, military, political and social underpinnings of the Gulf War that were masked in the content of the mass media. Starting at a different level analysis, Baudrillard claims, in his polemical title that *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* (1995). Reading the news coverage through the lens of the medium, Baudrillard declares that we experienced a 'non-war', a simulation of war in the virtuality of our mass media culture. Baudrillard is not concerned with the 'reality' of the war, but the way in which it is relayed to us through the media. With both having discussed the same event, outlining their different approaches serves as a roadmap into the epistemological and ontological frameworks Chomsky and Baudrillard appropriate to understand mediate knowledge and the possibilities for political participation.

The course of the thesis will thus begin with the Gulf War, as a nexus of media and politics, and will end in a comparative analysis of Baudrillard and Chomsky as theorists. In the next two chapters I will focus on Chomsky and Baudrillard's reading of the relationship between the mass media and the events of the Gulf War. Within these chapters I will address their description of the knowledge that is made available through the mass media, the media's construction of the political and its effect on possibilities for popular participation. These are essentially questions of epistemology, in terms of understanding their respective analytical frameworks and methodological approaches. The final chapter will place Chomsky and Baudrillard into dialogue through comparing and contrasting their ontological assumptions, as they affect notions of reality and truth and political subjectivity and agency. After pulling out the strengths and weaknesses of

Baudrillard's work has been repeatedly attacked and not taken too seriously as a political critique and Chomsky's media analysis and political activism tends to be revered not analyzed academically. To be fair to both, I thought I would remain the judge and jury in regards to their analysis of mass media and the political.

²⁶ I am using the Gulf War as a way to focus the study, but further readings of their work will contribute to the analysis.

their epistemological and ontological assumptions, a synthesis of their critiques will be made. It will suggest that neither analysis of the message nor analysis of the medium is sufficient in and of itself. In our mass media culture, both the message and medium need to form the core of a critique that opens the conditions of possibility for political participation.

Chapter 2: Chomsky

The major problem – one of the major problems, for there are several – one of the many major problems with governing people is that of whom you get to do it; or rather of who manages to get people to let them do it to them. To summarize: it is a well known fact, that those people who most want to rule people are, ipso facto, those least suited to do it. To summarize the summary: anyone who is capable of getting themselves made President should on no account be allowed to do the job. To summarize the summary of the summary: people are a problem. And so this is the situation we find: a succession of Galactic Presidents who so much enjoy the fun and palaver of being in power that they very rarely notice that they're not. And somewhere in the shadows behind them – who? Who can possibly rule if no one who wants to do it can be allowed to? – Douglas Adams²⁷

The Possibilities of Content: Reading Media, Politics, and Propaganda

Newspapers, as particular media outlets, have had a traditional stronghold in shaping the knowledge of the political. Since their inception, newspapers have been used to communicate to the citizenry the nature and issues of governmental policies and actions. Joined to this, they have been conceived as a space to enable dialogue and debate that would affect the decisions made by the government. The content filling this medium has worked to structure the conception of political engagement, as it reports, comments, and frames the discourse regarding political thought and action. Justifiably, then, newspapers have been thought to create the condition of possibility for democracies, as they sustain a mediated public space. Consequently, in order to understand the possibility of political participation and how the media influences it, a reading of the messaging of newspapers is crucial. Chomsky, by way of articulating the propaganda model, provides an analysis of the media from the position of political economy. He examines the message of this medium to ask the question of whose perspective is privileged, how, and why. Problematizing the content of newspapers thus offers an essential means to conceptualize and critique the representations of political participation in democratic societies. And this is particularly the case in trying to elucidate the necessity for war.

²⁷ Adams, Douglas. *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe in The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy: A Trilogy in Five Parts* [London, UK: William Heinemann, The Random House Group, Ltd., 1980, 1995. Pp. 278].

I. Introduction: Chomsky

In a democratic society, the theory is that if the political leadership is committed to war, they present reasons and they've got a very heavy burden of proof to meet because a war is a very catastrophic affair, as this one [the Gulf War] proved to be. The role of the media at that point is ...to present the relevant background. For example, the possibilities of peaceful settlement, such as they may be, have to be presented, and then to ... offer a forum, in fact encourage a forum of debate over this very dread decision to go to war and in this case kill hundreds of thousands of people and leave two countries wrecked and so on. That never happened. - Chomsky²⁸

Whether in a benevolent, transparent or malicious, covert fashion, the media play a central role in politics through constructing a knowledgeable public. Their presentations of 'facts', which cannot be experienced first hand, create a worldview accompanied by particular beliefs and values. While all may not share these understandings of the world, it can be surmised that these representations form a foundation in which dialogue is initiated, and grounded. The media thus have the ability to set the basis and tone of the agenda for any given community (or audience). Noam Chomsky in his analysis of American mass disseminated news media²⁹ is astutely sensitive to this role. In analyzing dominant media representations of United States foreign policy, Chomsky points to a symbiotic relationship between corporate media and elite interests³⁰. He attests that the media are neither benign nor benevolent; rather, mass media serve the interests of classed power (of the American state and corporations) to the detriment of popular political participation. To serve the elite, Chomsky claims that the mass media distort public perception of the actions and ideologies of the state in order to streamline citizens' political engagement within certain parameters, mainly those of passivity and compliance to state and corporate interests. This is the process of thought control that is central to the maintenance of elite ideology³¹ (and privilege) within democratic societies. In trying to elucidate this relationship between the media's

²⁸ Chomsky, Noam. In *Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media* [eds. Peter Wintonick and Mark Achbar. Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1994. P. 74]. Hereafter, 'MC'.

²⁹ Chomsky's focus is on corporate owned mass media based in the United States.

³⁰ The 'elite' class is meant to highlight corporations and the American state; however, elites within the United States are in connection with counterparts across the world and are also intimately related with the intellectual community.

³¹ As ideology has many meanings, I will be using it to signify a system of ideas or way of thinking. However, Chomsky's use of the term does carry with it some sense of mystification, which is a theme that will be critiqued throughout the thesis.

presentation of elite ideology and limited possibilities of political participation, this chapter will focus on understanding Chomsky's analysis of mass media, and how he uses the propaganda model to assist in deciphering the message of politics as it is found in the print of American newspapers.

The case study of the media representation of the 1991 Gulf War provides insight into the theoretical and analytical underpinnings of the propaganda model.³² It is an investigation into the elite interest propagated within mass media news coverage. Chomsky argues that what was experienced in the Gulf was not a war, but rather state actions of aggression and human rights abuses that are underpinned by ideological pursuit of American political and economic sovereignty on a global scale.³³ In the details of this study, it becomes apparent that there is an exaggeration of empirical 'facts' and ideology within mass media that serves the American state. This service to the state elite conversely works to stunt public knowledge of the event and to contain dialogue within narrow parameters. Consequently, the news media tended to support the Bush administration in its drive to use force while negating public debate concerning the imperative and alternatives of going to war.

Chomsky's analysis is textually based in that he applies a methodology that compares the American mainstream media news account of the Gulf War to alternative news sources. The mainstream sources include the agenda setting press, such as the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and the *Wall Street Journal*, while the alternative accounts are taken from news media centred outside the United States (like Britain and Germany), from non-profit organizations (such as Greenpeace Military Research Groups), from the American marginal alternative press (like *Newsday* and the *Nation*), and also directly from the documents of international organizations (such as the United Nations). Identifying a schism in the topics broached in these sources, Chomsky assesses the interests represented in the agenda-setting media news as those that have a favourable bias toward state actions and ideology. The corporate media are thus constructing a knowledgeable public that is informed dominantly by the interests of the elite.

³² Chomsky and Edward S. Herman articulated the propaganda model in their book, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* [New York: Pantheon Books, 1988].

³³ Chomsky, Noam. *Deterring Democracy* [New York: Hill and Wang, 1992. Pp. 413]. Hereafter, 'DD'.

Mapping out the gaps in information and context in the content of mainstream representations of the Gulf War, Chomsky's analysis makes available a critique that attests to the complicity of the news media with elite power³⁴. Through highlighting state rhetoric of morality and principles, which negated public dialogue over the use of force, he argues that these are ideological substitutions that mask empirical facts. Through challenging media servitude to the state and corporate interests, this mode of analysis enables new channels of information and knowledge to open up that have the possibility to construct political participation in a new light, one that engenders an active-knowledgeable, rather than passive-misinformed, public. Chomsky's propaganda model thus works to establish a counter-hegemonic critique that targets the content, and silences, of the mass media, and particularly those of the agenda-setting news press.

Embedded within Chomsky's analysis of the representations of the Gulf War there similarly is found a critique of the mass media's tendency to construct the political within the discourse of sovereignty. Within this paradigm, politics is reducible to the use of force. This is articulated through limiting discourse of political actions to wars and political actors to states and their leaders. As a result of this conception, the mass media propagates a notion of popular political participation that is determined by the dictates of the sovereign, leaving the possibility for mass democracy dim. However, this need not be the dominant conception of political participation. Countering the disinformation of propaganda campaigns that are disseminated in mainstream media, Chomsky is read as privileging a conception of the political that fosters an informed public with the ability to turn the communication of information into democratic action. Chomsky's analysis makes paramount having knowledge, stemming from a diversity of sources, not just mass media, where people are able to hold governments accountable and put forth a foundation of intersubjective dialogue as central values of political participation. Politics is thus (re)presented as deliberation (the foundation of democracy) and not force, which is more closely aligned with totalitarianism. Consequently, understanding Chomsky's analysis can assist in a description and critique of media hegemony over conceptions of the

³⁴ Power, for Chomsky, is dependent on the ability to unilaterally control the conduct of others (through force or rhetoric), and it tends to suggest that it is concentrated, stable and fixed. Chomsky's understanding of power will be returned to in chapter 4.

political that makes possible alternative articulations that are more in line with democratic ideals of public participation.

Accordingly, the purpose of this chapter is to outline Chomsky's contribution to the analysis of the relationship between media and possibilities for political participation. Investigating Chomsky's articulation of the newspaper's mass mediation of the Gulf War illuminates the strength of the propaganda model that comes in the form of an analysis that facilitates an intertextual dialogue, a paradigmatic substitution of elite ideology for critically grounded empirical fact, and the provision a common language for critiquing the mass media. It will be argued that Chomsky's propaganda model opens up channels to critique the content of representations in mainstream media and invigorate a conception of the political as deliberation. However, in the concluding chapter (when Chomsky and Baudrillard are compared in terms of ontology, and critiqued for such) it will also be made apparent that further consideration needs to be taken of the initial premises of this work to aid in an inclusive articulation of political participation that questions that very foundation of the categorical conceptions found in media. The course that this chapter runs is then: an explication of Chomsky's analysis of the mass media representations of the Gulf War; the lessons that can be learned from this about the possibilities of political participation; and, lastly, an outline of the analysis enabled by Chomsky's propaganda model.

II. Chomsky's Analysis

A. The Mass Media and the Gulf War

Considering the overall message from the mass media concerning the Gulf War, Chomsky asserts that the consensus held was that the American state's use of force was inevitable to ensure peace and security in the Persian Gulf region. Rhetoric asserted that Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait had breached all limits of tolerance within the international community. The ability of the United Nations to keep Hussein contained had faltered, and the strength of the U.S.'s convictions of democracy, freedom, and peace were the only remaining option to ensure global security. Diplomacy was pursued to no avail and the United States had to enforce Bush's proclamation that "There can be no reward for aggression. Nor will there be any negotiation. Principle cannot be compromised" (DD: 208). Thus the general opinion appeared to be that bringing war

upon Iraq was the only guarantee that the tyranny of Hussein would be stopped, allowing for global peace and order to resume.

Chomsky argues that the mass media propagated this message of force through limiting context to ahistorical renditions of Hussein's dictatorship and circumscribing public dialogue to tactical issues of American military strategy. The mass media assisted the state in its mandate by barring facts that would potentially provoke debate about the necessity of force in the Persian Gulf region to mediate the threat of Saddam Hussein. Similarly, the role of political and economic considerations in motivating the American military intervention was never entertained. Chomsky points to facts that were censored within the mass media, including the historically amicable (political and economic) relationship between the Bush Administration and Hussein, the role that the United States has played (and plays) in obstructing the work of the United Nations in combating state aggression, the Iraqi Democratic Opposition's call for a parliamentary democracy without Western military intervention, and the multiple attempts at peaceful negotiations on the part of the Hussein administration.³⁵

None of these crucial facts were presented in the newspapers of the American mainstream media. Chomsky claims that to have revealed them would have undercut the American state's (unstated) strategy of relying on forceful means of political engagement while publicly espousing principles of non-aggression, peace and global security. Further, he argues that the facts needed to be actively concealed from the population in order to divert public attention away from the (ideological) underlying reason for American military intervention: their inability to pursue politics through persuasion, through deliberation.³⁶ Since the intent of the Gulf War was to ensure the continuance of the U.S.'s economic control over energy reserves within the region, while simultaneously teaching the political lesson that third world sovereignty is unacceptable if it interferes with American interests, the media needed to use rhetoric to obscure the facts.³⁷ The

³⁵ Chomsky, Noam. "The Media and the War: What War?" in *Triumph of the Image: The Media's War in the Persian Gulf – A Global Perspective* [eds. Hamid Mowlana, George Gerbner, and Herbert I. Schiller. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, Inc., 1992. Pp. 51-63]. Hereafter, 'WW'.

³⁶ Chomsky, Noam. "Prelude to the Gulf War," in *Chronicles of Dissent: Noam Chomsky interviewed by David Barsamian* [Vancouver: New Star Books, 1992. Pp. 193-194]. Hereafter, 'PGW'.

³⁷ Chomsky, Noam. "The Global Protection Racket: Reflections on the Gulf War," in *Chronicles of Dissent: Noam Chomsky interviewed by David Barsamian* [Vancouver: New Star Books, 1992. Pp. 221]. Hereafter, 'GPR'; PGW: 189.

mass media therefore finessed the news coverage of the Gulf War to pacify the American audience into accepting the state's justifications necessitating war, which was that of the Administration's claim that 'aggression won't be rewarded' and that the American government was 'going the last mile' to ensure global peace and security (WW: 53-54).

Chomsky asserts that the active concealment of context and coverage in the mass media of alternatives to military force firmly establish the Gulf War as a propaganda campaign. Only one perspective of the Gulf crisis was presented in the media, and that was the one that was sanctioned by the elites themselves (WW: 56, 58). Corporate media framed the story of American involvement in Iraq as the legitimate use of state force in the service of international security. The mass media's unwillingness to stray from the confines of this official line resulted in the choice of force not being on the agenda for public debate. Diplomacy was dismissed as an option. Correspondingly, the mass media regulated a circumscribed public discourse of the Gulf War that focused primarily on the pragmatism of military tactics. This, in effect, limited debate to issues of military strategy (WW: 56). Perspectives that fell outside of state rhetoric of the 'need for force' were preferably silenced, and those that did surface were made to appear absurd and ignorant of the stakes involved (PWG: 195; DD: 416). By concealing criticism of the state's justifications, mandate and course of action the mass media were further complicit with the interests of state power.³⁸ Therefore, the mass media were seen as refraining from their role in providing the needed forum to allow for public dialogue surrounding the necessity of war and possibilities of peaceful alternatives.

The ideology of the elite was thus communicated to the public through the media as it supported the war effort through relaying the 'proper' tale. The need to lead the public astray from the context and ideological motivations was accomplished through the propaganda campaign that painted the American state as the purveyor of peace and the Iraqi leader as irrational and evil. The public was left ignorant - kept in the dark of the truth of the circumstances as the media substituted patriotic slogans ("Support our Troops!") in the place of critical inquiry. The American peoples' consent for the war was therefore manufactured through the mass media's misrepresentation of the regional

³⁸ Chomsky, Noam. "World Orders: Old and New," in *Chronicles of Dissent: Noam Chomsky interviewed by David Barsamian* [Vancouver: New Star Books, 1992. Pp. 206]. Hereafter, 'WO'.

context (situating it ahistorically), the exaggeration and distortion of Hussein's military threat to Americans, and the dismissal of peaceful negotiations as (legitimately) outside the state's purview. As a consequence of the lack of knowledge, the public, and the intellectual class in particular, were not seen as contesting the American invasion of Iraq, and, in effect, legitimated the state's use of force as the primary mode of political intervention. Thus, the media's presentation of the Gulf War can be regarded as a regulation of political action and public knowledge that resulted in the unconditional support of the elites' interests.

Extending the analysis past specific misrepresentations and cover-ups in the case of the Gulf War, the mass media can more generally be charged with serving the interests of the powerful through their prevention of public participation within the domain of the political. As witnessed in the media representations of the Gulf War, there was the propagation of a conception of politics as the use of force and the prerogative of state actors, where the need of public dialogue was constructed as unnecessary under conditions of impending threat to national and economic security. Through upholding the state's claim that negotiations would not be pursued in the face of violated principles, the media contributed to the negation of diplomacy through deference to the state line of the use of force and war. As Bush was not going to engage in dialogue with Hussein, the American population also did not need to be consulted or engaged through the mass media. The absence of public involvement in the decision-making process culminates in the categorization of politics as the autonomous (sovereign) actions of individualized leaders and states. The implication for popular political participation under this conception is a rendering of democracy as a vacuous term, that indicates doing what the elite experts prescribe as the 'right thing', or stated otherwise, staying within the boundaries of acceptable discourse and not questioning the sovereignty of the state.

Understanding how it is possible to position and propagate particular conceptions of the political is paramount in forming a critique of the mass media content and articulating alternative accounts and promoting other sources of information. In explicating the reading of possibilities for public participation in the political, Chomsky will be shown to describe a schism in perceptions of democracy in the United States between those held by (and for) the ruling elite and those assigned to the masses.

Additionally, it will become apparent that the mass media play a primary role in mediating this dualism through their participation in propaganda campaigns. Therefore, utilizing Chomsky's description of the (mis)representations of the Gulf War illuminates the presses' posturing of the political.

B. The Mass Media and the Construction of the Political

...New and more imaginative ways will have to be found to 'put the public in its place,' and to deter the dread threats of democracy and freedom. (DD: 438)

Before discussing the conception of politics that is prescribed in the mass media, it is useful to consider Chomsky's understanding of democracy as he sees it playing out in the United States. In *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda*,³⁹ Chomsky put forward two different conceptions of democracy. He writes,

One conception of democracy has it that a democratic society is one in which the public has the means to participate in some meaningful way in the management of their own affairs and the means of information are open and free. If you look up democracy in the dictionary you'll get a definition something like that. An alternative conception of democracy is that the public must be barred from managing of their own affairs and the means of information must be kept narrowly and rigidly controlled (SAP: 9-10).

Chomsky asserts that it is the second conception of democracy that characterizes the politics practiced in the United States. It is this conception of democracy that necessitates the manufacture of consent of the population because the common good is outside their grasp⁴⁰. There are two political classes: the masses and the elite. The masses are indoctrinated to be "spectators, not participants in action" (SAP: 17). It is the middle and upper classes that are held to be actors of the political. As a specialist class (as intellectuals, as entrepreneurs, and so on) their contributions are needed for the management of society. Unlike the masses, they need to be active in upholding the dictated ideology, since as a group they are in a position to threaten this conception of (directed) democracy. Accordingly, propaganda is directed most heavily at them (SAP: 16-18); they are indoctrinated with the proper beliefs, which under capitalism are "the values and interests of private power and the state-corporate nexus that represents it"

³⁹ Chomsky, Noam. *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda, 2nd Edition*. [New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002, 1991]. Hereafter, 'SAP'.

⁴⁰ Chomsky is basing his critique on the liberal democratic theory articulated most poignantly by Walter Lippmann, who originated the term 'manufacture of consent' (SAP: 14).

(SAP: 19). So while the first conception of democracy is generally the one that people believe to be operating, Chomsky states that, indeed, it is the latter that needs to be attributed to democracy as it is currently practiced in the United States.

The mass media contribute to this 'undemocratic', this 'directed', form of democracy. Ideally, the media have a key role in constructing the public through providing the knowledge that forms the means of democratic participation and by creating and sustaining an open forum where private opinion is voiced publicly, which has the potential of influencing other citizens and the state. Since the media are crucial to the democratic processes, they have generally been assumed to be objective and able to act as fora to represent the diverse perspectives in society.⁴¹ Chomsky states, "Perhaps this is an obvious point, but the democratic postulate is that the media are independent and committed to discovering and reporting the truth, and that they do not merely reflect the world as powerful groups wish it to be perceived" (MC: xi). Accordingly, Chomsky states, "The media are to make the relevant facts publicly available and provide a forum for debate and discussion of the basic issues" (WW: 59). However, the media are embedded in the political (and economic) machine and cannot be considered apolitical. Propaganda campaigns, such as the Gulf War, construct the public conception of the political and suggest ways that the audience, or the public, can engage with the political. The Gulf War needs to be read as an elite message for proper modes of public political participation. The content of the news therefore had a political perspective, was a political message.

The mass media were responsible for setting the tone and content of debate during the Gulf War. According to their message, all that was expected of civilian political subjectivity was to be an audience of mass media, to be informed, but not to talk back in a way that would be considered public. The mass media contributed to this positioning of the audience. As Chomsky attests, "When the guns are firing, even if in only one

⁴¹ Hrynshyn, however, counters that it is only a recent phenomenon to view the media as objective, and thus to be described as apolitical. He points out that it is with the increased cost of producing and distributing printed news media that large corporate media producers marginalized radical newspapers, which had a stated political view. This should also make it apparent that objectivity was never a product of news and that the views of corporate press are those of monopoly capitalism, which are furthered through lack of credible and widely distributed alternative sources (Hrynshyn, Derek. *Filling the Threat: News Objectivity in the Transformation of the Ideology of World Order* [Unpublished MA thesis. University of Victoria, 1993. Pp. 184]).

direction, the media close ranks and become a cheering section for the home team. Overwhelmingly, that is what happened in the Gulf conflict" (WW: 54). The role of cheerleader is to excite the fans through predetermined chants, to get the cries going in unison, and of course, to not encourage the audience to join the field of play. This is the role that the media subscribe to during the Gulf War. Considering Chomsky's analysis of the message from media representations of the Gulf War, political participation appeared to be the privilege of the elite and centred on the use of force. For the general population, on the other hand, political participation appeared to be passivity and deference to the acts and expertise of state actors. Therefore, politics, as reported by media, was exclusive; it is open only to the few and only in particular ways.

In upholding the interests of the elite in their draconian global economic and political policies and actions, the dominant message emerging from the mass media during the Gulf War was that of state sovereignty. The state has both the autonomy (electoral majority) and resources (American military) to pursue its own ends. Contributing to the notion of sovereignty is the categorical importance of the individual. The privileged source of political power comes in the form of elite actors who are constructed as autonomous, and effectively decontextualized from the communities and their history from where they originate. There is no information within the mass media, for example, about Bush's history within government and how his different positions within the state have led to his approach in dealing with the similarly uncontextualized Hussein. These people were both constructed as sovereign and autonomous agents who were, as if by chance, the heads of states that therefore enable decisions to come from them without contestation.

Accordingly, the domain of their authority is rendered absolute in lacking representations of dissent or direct public participation. Popular movements, collectives of citizens that oppose the ruling regimes, are marginalized, as was the case with the lack of media coverage regarding the Democratic Iraqi Opposition or the international peace movement. In this case, it would appear to the North American audience, based on the mass media's information, that the individual leader of Iraq is unchallenged within the country; therefore actions by their state against this unquestioned homogenous state (since without representation of local dissent, Hussein can function as the metonymical

Iraq) are justified. If a person feels uncomfortable with this, s/he is made to feel alone and pathological (SAP: 31). This focus by the media on the autonomous individual, whether it be a leader or state, removes the actors from the set and play in which they are involved. Consequently, the importance and potential power of collective organizing of nations, like the UN, is downplayed and the collective forms of dissenting citizens, such as local and global peace movements, are marginalized. The result of such neglect of divergent response to state authority is that people are left isolated in their perspectives and pacified through feelings of alienation. Chomsky comments, "A mass movement without any major media support, and subject to a great deal of active press hostility, suffers a serious disability, and struggles against grave odds" (MC: 15-16). Without mass distribution of representations of dissent, the present rulers are more easily able to maintain the status quo, that is, the pursuit of their private ends. The power of the people therefore becomes singular as the power of the person. Therefore, the sovereignty and autonomy of the political actors is confined within the elite, to individuals that hold and have access to private power, like the President, and his/her actions are represented as uncontested and encompassing the will of the people.

As a result of the political being articulated within the discourse of state sovereignty, the American administration is legitimated as the absolute authority in guiding foreign policy, without need of substantial input from the public. Chomsky points to this lack of influence from the citizenry on the policies of the American state. Chomsky highlights a national poll published in the *Washington Post* on January 11th, 1991 (prior to the American use of force) that revealed two thirds of the population were 'favor[ing] a conference on the Arab-Israeli conflict if that would lead to Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait' (WW: 58). However, the media, being complicit with the interests of the state, prevented public debate on this issue, thereby negating dialogue regarding the necessity of war or possibilities for peaceful alternatives; in essence, it was undercutting the democratic process by upholding the state's sovereignty. Chomsky explains:

It is likely that those who... gave a positive response believed that they were virtually alone in that stance. Few, if any, would have found any advocacy of their position in the media or the political system... Had the media permitted the crucial facts to be known to the public, and had they been willing to tolerate

discussion of the basic issues, the percentage favoring a peaceful settlement would have been far higher, probably overwhelming. In short, had minimal standards of journalism been observed, it is doubtful that the administration would have been able to pursue its unwavering commitment to undermining the pursuit of peaceful means and establishing the preferred rule of force (WW: 58-59).

He explains further:

The rhetorical stance [rejecting the use of diplomacy] cannot survive a moment's scrutiny, but that caused no problem, because it was subject to none within the mainstream. Debate continued, but on narrow tactical issues, a framework in which the Administration was sure to prevail. From almost the first moment, then, the options were successfully narrowed to the threat or use of force (DD: 180-181).

The lack of dialogue that Chomsky points to, in regard to the peace process, amounts to a sense that the dialogue has already occurred, has been decided upon, and only needs ratification. The public is not seen as a source of information or opinion about the actions of the government. Rather, the public has the ability to be knowledgeable (to an extent) about international affairs, but not to be actors within it. The delivery of this message by the mass media conforms to Chomsky's second definition of democracy, where "the public must be barred from managing of their own affairs and the means of information must be kept narrowly and rigidly controlled" (SAP: 9-10).

The lack of a mediated forum prevented the means and ends of the war from being open to public contestation. These were not debated because the principle decision was made; force would bring peace. As a result,

From the outset, the president made it clear and explicit that negotiations were excluded. The options were reduced to total Iraqi capitulation to U.S. demands or war. The media approached unanimity in their unquestioned support for this stand. When the president thundered that there would be no negotiations, a hundred editorials and news columns lauded him for 'going the last mile for peace' in 'extraordinary efforts at diplomacy' (WW: 56).

The media not only prevented dialogue regarding peaceful negotiations, they conferred authority unconditionally upon the state. This is witnessed in the mass media's support (and lack of criticism) of the state's rationale for the war. Chomsky asserts that no reasonable justification was presented to the public for going to war with Iraq. He explains,

A decision to go to war is always a grave matter... We understand very well how the decision is supposed to be made in a democratic society. The chief executive is to present his case for going to war. The media are to make the relevant facts publicly available and provide a forum for debate and discussion of the basic issues. The population then expresses its agreement or dissent, directly or indirectly through its elected representative. None of this happened (WW: 59).

He continues,

No reason was given for going to war, and the media suppressed this fact with virtual unanimity, just as they as successfully barred politically incorrect fact and opinion on every crucial issue. This is the very hallmark of a totalitarian culture... (WW: 60).

The explanation of the need for war presented in the mass media was that 'aggression can't be rewarded'. The mass media accepted this justification, and further, they never questioned the logic that aggression needs to be combated by violence (WW: 59). The mass media, therefore, propagated the ideology of state sovereignty through limiting debate, preventing criticism, and accepting unconditionally the state's stance. Thus the potential for political participation was relocated from the public and into the hands of the state through the actions of the President and his military.

In addition to framing the war as necessary and the prerogative of the state, the media's use of the language of war ultimately contributed to a conception of the political that was inaccessible and a government policy that was beyond public discourse. War has a standard jargon, along with particular actors, rules and playgrounds. Knowledge and agency are held in the hands of experts trained in military strategy. Consequently, this is not a space for public participation. Unlike a debate about economic sanctions, which allows for the direct link between the economy and the political and which enables multiple entrance points of knowledge, war keeps the political in a narrow definition as the use of force. This contributes to the hegemonic conception of the political that is locked into Weberian-Hobbesian discourse; where state legitimacy rests in its monopoly of the use of force (Weber) and in its ability to hold the subjects in awe (Hobbes). Within this language, the political is determined and located by the violent power of the sovereign, its ability to 'have a monopoly of force', and politics ultimately becomes violence, power over, and force to the detriment of deliberation, dialogue or diplomacy. Further, by focusing the political as the use of force against the foreigner, domestic

politics are negated, or at least downplayed. Politics assume the role of securing the borders, rather than pursuing a good within them. Keeping politics within this arena of war necessarily closes space for new actors and alternative definitions and roles for political participants that would have a greater potential for democracy for all, not only the elite.

The message heard from mass media regarding possibilities for political participation is therefore one of exclusion. As seen in the representations of the Gulf War, the political was conceptualized as sovereignty. There was absolute authority in the head of the state and its elite was framed as the natural and privileged political actors. This conception was communicated through limiting and channelling public input into the debate to that concerning the necessity of war. Similarly, the mode in which political action was known was confined within the use of force. War was portrayed as the epitome of political acts. Diplomacy, the expression of political deliberation, was framed as ineffectual and unnecessary. It was might that counted, not persuasion. Because of this limited and selective categorization, public actors and acts were kept outside of the definition of political. The culmination of representations from the mass media was consequently a passive rendering of popular political agency, where sovereignty and autonomy were the right and responsibility of the elite.

While it may appear obvious that the media construct the political in a particular way, it is important to understand how Chomsky provides a reading of news content. Therefore it must be asked how Chomsky is able to formulate this description of the media's presentation of political participation. How does Chomsky implement his methodology to articulate the media's relationship with politics, and more particularly, the ruling elite? What are the nuances of the analysis that allow the Gulf War to be interpreted as a propaganda campaign? And further, how is Chomsky able to shred the veil of ideology, to invert the elite propaganda, in order to see the truth through the mystifying practices of the corporate media in its representations of the Gulf War? To understand Chomsky's description, a turn to the analytical approach of the propaganda model is in order.

III. Analyzing the Analysis: Reading the Propaganda Model

Chomsky's analysis of the mass media's representation of the Gulf War is informed by the application of the propaganda model. The propaganda model is a structural mapping of the American corporate news media, particularly that of the printed press. It is textually bounded, as it reads the surfaces of the news that is 'fit to print'. It treats these surfaces as expressing empirical realities, yet engenders a question of the perceived truth of the statements found in the mass media. To this end, the propaganda model places corporate news in an intertextual dialogue. With the employment of a horizontal cross-comparison of texts from a variety of sources and sites, the absences of context within the American mass media are seen as dumbfoundingly cynical and startling ideological. Further charting of the institutional privilege of corporate media, within the structural inequalities of capital-driven 'democracies', reveals the ideology contained in mass media to be that representing elite interests; that is, the news media propagate the private values and interests of corporations and the state. In challenging the media's naturalization of ideology as truth, official statements are read paradigmatically⁴². The ideological surface is opened to vertical substitutions in the form of historical context, economic motivations, and political ends that are present in other news sources. As a result, the propaganda model is able to expose the submerged and censored facts within the corporate media's representation of the news. Thus the analytical approach appropriated by Chomsky is one of intertextual dialogue and paradigmatic substitutions in order to present a factually intricate critique of mass media's disinformation and servitude to elite power.

Chomsky takes for granted that texts are a reflection of empirical processes. He assumes that the construction of news has the ability to report objectively on the real world. However, because of unequal distribution of resources within the capitalist economy, the mass media are utilized to present information that serves the interests of those in power. In describing the need to understand class interest in the structuring of mass media, Chomsky writes,

...the dominant media firms are quite large businesses; they are controlled by very wealthy people or by managers who are subject to sharp constraints by

⁴² I am using 'paradigmatic' in the semiotic sense of vertical exchangeability of nouns, verbs, et cetera, which is in contrast to linearly organized meaning created through syntax.

owners and other market-profit-oriented forces; and they are closely interlocked, and have important common interests, with other major corporations, banks, and government. This is ...[a] powerful filter that will affect news choices (MC: 14).

Because the media are in themselves big business a particular perspective is presented that inevitably affects the content of the news. This perspective, which is that of members of the capitalist class, acts as a filter that necessitates the manipulation of facts so that they will support the views and values of the owners and those with whom the 'product' is marketed. Consequently, the corporate relationships contribute to the structuring of news content and permeate the perspective put forth in the mass media. Therefore, while the perception of the mass media is that it is an independent and objective source of information, indeed they function to uphold and perpetuate a particular class view.

The views reported in the American mass media are reflections of their sources, with those being primarily the state and corporations. The reliance upon these actors for sources of information is dependent on the structure of news production. As Chomsky explains, "The mass media are drawn into a symbiotic relationship with powerful sources of information by economic necessity and reciprocity of interest" (MC: 18). Mass media, due to time pressure and the need to fill the news, turn to the state and corporation as primary sources of information, without questions or criticism. Chomsky states, "Government and corporate sources ... have the great merit of being recognizable and credible by their status and prestige. This is important to mass media...." (MC: 19). He continues,

Another reason for the heavy weight given to official sources is that the mass media claim to be 'objective' dispensers of the news. Partly to maintain the image of objectivity, but also to protect themselves from criticism of bias and the threat of libel suits, they need material that can be portrayed as presumptively accurate (MC: 19).

Further,

Because of their services, continuous contract of the beat, and mutual dependency, the powerful can use personal relationships, threats, and rewards to further influence and coerce the media. The media may feel obligated to carry extremely dubious stories and mute criticism in order not to offend their sources and disturb a close relationship. It is very difficult to call authorities on whom one depends for daily news liars, even if they tell whoppers. Critical sources may be

avoided not only because of their lesser availability and higher cost of establishing credibility, but also because the primary sources may be offended and may even threaten the media using them (MC: 22).⁴³

Sources in the mass media therefore need to be seen as presenting a subjective perspective that infiltrates the content of the news. Although the media are assumed to be objective, they actually are disseminating the values of those that they most easily access for information. Accordingly, the propaganda model necessitates the consideration of sources within the mass media. As well, an analysis needs to acknowledge the privileged, and fixed, nature of the state and corporations as the media's unquestionable sources. Therefore, in mapping the sites of sources, bias within the content becomes obvious and it is accounted for in decoding and critiquing the representations within the media.

Because the mass media is characterized as reporting information as objective, or as self-evident truth (at least in the sense of not providing critical or counter viewpoints outside of a narrowly defined discourse) the propaganda model necessitates consulting a multitude of sources to compare, contrast, and verify the facts as they are officially presented. By contrasting corporate media perspective with a diversity of perspectives, which fall outside direct capitalistic control, Chomsky is able to access a wealth of knowledge in the form of historical, economic and political context becomes available. Consequently, news coverage that is produced outside of the United States and alternative non-profit media in the United States are the two major sources to which the propaganda model directs one looking for comparisons of truth(s). This cross-reading is what creates an intertextual dialogue amongst the various sites of knowledge production and dissemination.

Preceding, during, and following the Gulf War, Chomsky employed this intertextual dialogue. Chomsky detailed the divergent information as it appeared within news texts. In the alternative news sources a particular framing of the events and the facts were presented. Comparing this to the agenda setting media's news coverage, some

⁴³ It is also of interest to point out that American citizens are in fact paying to be indoctrinated with the views of the state. Chomsky writes, "It should be noted that in the case of the largesse of the Pentagon and the State Department's Office of Public Diplomacy, the subsidy is at the taxpayers' expense, so that, in effect, the citizenry pays to be propagandized in the interest of powerful groups such as the military contractors and other sponsors of state terrorism" (MC: 22).

of these facts were present and others absent. By placing the various depictions of the events and their justifications in relation to one another, by noting the absences and presences of facts, the mainstream press in comparison with the alternative press attests to the former's ideological component. Chomsky is able to state,

The reader of the European press, human rights reports, or exotic US sources could learn something of the winter 1990-91 exploits of the man [Turkish President Turgut Ozal] who George Bush hailed as 'a protector of peace,' who joined all of us who 'stand up for civilized values around the world.' But those who depended on the mass and prestige media were shielded from such improper thoughts [which was learning of his oppression and slaughter of Turkey's Kurdish population] (DD: 418).

Similarly, (in regards to the attempts for democracy in Iraq, by the Iraqi Democratic Opposition) he explains,

On this crucial matter, the media upheld the party line virtually without deviation. Readers of the British and German press, or the marginal alternative media here, could learn, for example, that as the January 15 deadline approached, the Iraqi Democratic Group reiterated its call for the overthrow of Saddam Hussein but also opposed "any foreign intervention in the Near East," criticizing U.S. "policies of aggression" in the Third World and its intention to control Middle East oil and rejecting U.N. resolutions "that had as their goal the starvation of our people" (WW: 55).

And again, "The media kept a dutiful silence – at home, that is. In the less disciplined Third World, the facts were reported in reviews of U.S. terrorism and 'U.S. imperial policy' generally" (WW: 53).⁴⁴ In regard to a lack of comparisons found in mainstream media of US aggression with those whom they attack, he writes:

The dramatic difference between letters and professional commentary... illustrates the failure of the ideological offensive of the past years to reach beyond the educated elites to all sectors of the general public. Overseas, simple truths could be perceived outside of the major power centers, where deviation from established truth is too dangerous. A lead editorial in the Dublin *Sunday Tribune*, headlined "Moral Indignation is Pure Hypocrisy," recalls the Western reaction to Iraq's invasion of Iran, the US invasion of Grenada and Panama... [and so on] (DD: 187).

Mapping Chomsky's methodology makes it apparent that news produced outside of the United States are more able to report facts that are censored within the US, because the writers are not solely dependent upon the American state for their sources. The reporters

⁴⁴ Chomsky is quoting from *Third World Resurgence* [Malaysia][October 1990].

more readily provide historical context, suggest economic motivations and question the political ends of the American government, and its foreign interventions. Consequently, to find the missing pieces (the suppressions) of information and knowledge in mainstream American media, the analysts using the propaganda model need to read a variety of texts, ranging from a diversity of sources and sites of production.

Therefore, the intertextual dialogue created with the propaganda model begins with the comparisons and contrasts of news from the mass media and alternative sources that then lead to a questioning of truth. Due to the lack of substantiation of sources and the presentation of official statements as self-evident truth, the absence of facts in American mass media, which are simultaneously reported in alternative sites, illustrates the operating of ideology. It is the singular perspective of mass media that attests to the ideological character. However, through an investigation into the claims that are made in the American corporate news media, truth can be deduced from all available facts. As Chomsky asserts, "There is a very simple test of the truth..." (WW: 60), and that is verifying unsupported statements with the existing documentation, whether these be human rights reports, United Nations records, or Pentagon papers, themselves. This, of course, is not the practice by reporters working in the mainstream, but must be for those critiquing media ideology and American hegemony. The point, then, of the propaganda model is to seek out perspectives and facts that are missing in the one-dimensional representations of news in the mass media. By pursuing an intertextual exchange of information, the propaganda model accesses a multiplicity of perspectives and facts. It does not necessarily require believing all that is stated outside of the 'official' press to be true, but it does insist that a diversity of texts be resourced.

Finding the gaps in information, through an intertextual dialogue, necessitates the replacement of ideology with 'fact'. This is the second aspect of the propaganda model's analytical approach, which is paradigmatic: making the necessary substitutions of empirical fact for ideological truth. Making the surface of the news a more accurate and reliable representation of the empirical events requires the verticality of paradigmatic substitutions. It allows for the splitting apart of the top level of the text to see beneath to the historical misrepresentation, the economic ambitions, and the political wordsmithing

that are involved in making the news that serves the interests of the elite. This is what Chomsky terms ‘translating the rhetoric of political discourse into English’ (DD: 421).

There is a repertoire of language (words and phrases) that is utilized in the mainstream media to mask the actuality of events. This language is dependent upon convention. Words that are commonly used to distort U.S. acts of aggression tend to be described in terms of ‘pragmatism’ or seeking ‘stability’. Chomsky explains, “...our moral purity is tempered with an understanding of the need for ‘pragmatism’ and ‘stability,’ useful concepts that translate as ‘doing what we choose’” (DD: 417). He continues to clarify,

The *Times* version kept to convention in approving US support for Hussein’s terror in the name of “stability”. One must, however, bear in mind the technical meaning of the term, explained in the internal record... In short, “stability” means security for “the upper classes and larger foreign enterprises”. It is therefore possible to destabilize in the name of stability... (DD: 419).

Chomsky provides numerous other examples of ideological rhetoric that serves the purpose of masking the state’s, and other elites’, interests. On whether or not to invade Iraq, he critically reveals,

Expounding the consequences of the Iraqi invasion, the *New York Times* reports that “the Middle East has now split into a clearly moderate pro-Western camp” and “a fiercely nationalistic anti-Western constellation”... If Saddam Hussein were to fulfill “his threat to scorch” Israel, Bernard Trainor adds, “it would generate further support from millions of disenfranchised Arabs who lionize him and who could ignite civil disorder in the conservative and moderate Arab states”... Note that Trainor⁴⁵ follows convention in denouncing Hussein as a Hitlerian maniac on grounds of his threat to scorch Israel – in retaliation for Israeli aggression, a fact completely overlooked, as in this case, or simply dismissed as irrelevant. In contrast, a murderous Israeli reaction to Iraqi aggression, were it to be authorized, would be regarded as a righteous act of self-defense. Note also that the phrases ‘moderate pro-Western’ and ‘fiercely nationalistic anti-Western’ are redundant. ‘Pro-Western’ implies ‘moderate’; ‘anti-Western’ implies ‘fiercely nationalistic’ – that is, evil and fanatical (DD: 202).

And, yet again, Chomsky questions the official rhetoric,

In a typical example of the genre, *Times* Middle East correspondent Alan Cowell attributed the failure of the rebels to the fact that “very few people outside Iraq

⁴⁵ Bernard Trainor was the former *Times* military correspondent and later became the director of the national security program at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government (DD: 186).

wanted them to win”; here the concept “people” is used in the conventional doctrinal sense, meaning people who count, not “meddling outsiders,” quite a few of whom wanted the rebels to win (DD: 417).

By having detailed knowledge, access to a multiplicity of perspectives of news events (particularly those regarding U.S. foreign policy), and facts less grounded in (corporate) bias, Chomsky is able to point to the ideological content of the mass media. With this knowledge, Chomsky clarifies the meaning beneath the ambiguous language of the elite. He excavates the actual signification of the words, and in doing so, exposes the ideology of the elite and opens its rhetoric to critique and accountability.

In addition to conventional ‘wordsmithing’ on part of the mainstream media, the ideological substitutions of the facts can be seen in the chants that justify U.S. domestic and foreign policy. Chomsky terms these ‘empty slogans,’ which were originally developed by the public relations industry for the purpose of strikebreaking. Chomsky explains,

The basic idea was to try to mobilize popular opposition to the strikers around vacuous slogans, patriotic slogans like harmony, Americanism, togetherness, that kind of thing. The idea was to flood the community with propaganda. The basic tone of the propaganda is that it’s us against them (GPR: 243).

These methods were applied during the Gulf War, with phrases like ‘Support our troops’. Pointing out the implications of these phrases, Chomsky continues,

The point of the public relations slogans like “Support our troops” is that they don’t mean anything. They mean as much as whether you support the people in Iowa. Of course, there was an issue. The issue was, Do you support our policy? But you don’t want people to think about that issue. That’s the whole point of good propaganda. You want to create a slogan that nobody’s going to be against, and everybody’s going to be for... Its crucial value is that it diverts your attention from a question that *does* mean something: Do you support our policy? That’s the one you’re not allowed to talk about... That’s like Americanism and harmony. We’re all together, empty slogans, let’s join in, let’s make sure we don’t have these bad people around to disrupt our harmony with their talk about class struggle, rights, and that sort of business (SAP: 26).

These slogans, therefore, sap the content of debate and unify people in support of the state without providing any knowledge or reason to, which is not unlike the rhetorical conventions of elite ideology also found in the mass media.

However, the content of debate can be modified and facts can be known and debated in public. The factual substitutions enabled by the propaganda model present a diversity of knowledge that can be utilized to correct, critique and counter the messages propagated by the mass media. The strength of the propaganda model is thus in its ability to facilitate counter-hegemonic articulations of the world that are divergent from those in power and which are intertextually supported by empirical evidence. It investigates a common and shared reality that is sustained through news media. In many ways, Chomsky's analytical approach teaches how to use the master's tools to break down the fortress. This model is an avenue of critique against mass media news. It structurally maps the capitalist network that media are embedded within; it provides avenues of inquiry; it decodes language; it recommends alternative textual sources; and most importantly, it facilitates a common language in which dissent can be articulated, communicated, and organized to challenge the hegemony of the state. The task left to the individual (or collective) thus becomes one of being heard overtop of the noise created in the masses of media.

IV. Concluding Chomsky

The analysis provided by Chomsky's propaganda model allows for an alternative reading of the American mainstream (printed) media. His description of the Gulf War enabled the ideology of the state to be apparent. Through cross-comparisons with alternative press and that of the mass media, Chomsky pointed to absences of context in relation to Bush and Hussein, and of American foreign policy and the Middle East in general; he showed how the coverage was ahistorical and how voices of dissent (in and outside of Iraq) to the interests of the (American) elite were silenced. Chomsky exposed the ideology of the American state to be that of the use of force to the exclusion of deliberation. As well, Chomsky reveals how the mass media situate the political as elite sovereignty and public passivity. The methodology that assists Chomsky in these descriptions is intertextual. A dialogue is created between different texts that points to absences and presences of empirical fact in the mass media. These are shown to be a result of the media's subservience to elite interest. Further, noting the disparity in representation between the mainstream and alternative media, Chomsky engenders a critique that charges the mass media with evading their role of sustaining a public forum

where democratic processes can manifest. Moving from this critique, the paradigmatic substitutions contribute to the translation of elite rhetoric into transparent English. They facilitate the introduction of historical context, economic motivations, and political goals into the stories of American military interventions that are lacking in dominant representations. The propaganda model thus offers a framework in which to read, critique and correct the elite messages as they are presented the mass media.

By focusing his analysis and critique predominantly on the printed press of the American mainstream media, Chomsky can be seen as approaching the political in its traditional breeding grounds. He is putting into question the safeguard of democracy, the newspaper, which is thought to act as the check and balance against state autocratic policy and actions. Likewise, he hopes to intervene into the representations and context that reach the largest audience and by focusing on mainstream news coverage he is seeking to critique the traditional conceptions of political activity. With the intentions of justice, fairness, and humanity the propaganda model is used to analyze a shared reality (that which comes from mass media) that is grounded in textual presences and absences, which reflect a particular (corporate-state) bias. This starting point allows for communication between mass produced representations of preferred readings by the elite and the context that is missing. The propaganda model literally reads the messages of mass media and provides alternative information to those that come in the form of elite interest that are witnessed in historical, economic, political and social relations. However, by keeping the focus of analysis on the site of news production and dissemination, Chomsky is addressing an already politicized audience. The readers of the news press are those who already regard the political and economic policy of the state as crucial to public participation in decision-making processes. These are the people who see themselves as political agents, those that see the political as a worthy pursuit and a responsibility. This is not the case universally with citizens. Many people do not turn to newspapers or the mass media for information, for truth, or alternatively confirmation of their own beliefs, but are rather seeking entertainment, advertisements, or the classified, if they turn to the newspapers at all.

While many people assume a certain level of politicization, many at the same time appear to be sceptical of all information (who believes the media nowadays anyway?)

and in many ways have turned away from the political in general. Mass media, in this sense, have tended to separate into specialized outlets. For the political, people do indeed turn to the respectable and established printed press, which is where Chomsky is hoping to make an intervention into the discourse of the public policy and government actions. For many people, however, the medium of television has supplanted the privileged place of the newspapers in sustaining a shared reality. The citizenry is watching soap operas, music videos, sitcoms, and real-life dramas on the tube. They are bombarded with advertisements that seek to create a different type of political agent: the consumer of identity that shifts democracy to be that of the freedom of choice (to buy into lifestyles). News on television reflects this structuring of the medium. To his disadvantage then, Chomsky does not address the depoliticization of the public in the sense of tracking where people are looking for information. He is assuming that knowledge of the political and economic sphere matters (which it clearly does), yet it may not be of any importance for a large portion of the North American population. The people inclined to Chomsky's analysis are those who are looking for a systematic critique of mass media and American foreign policy and who already tend to sympathize with his political project. This is not to find fault with Chomsky's work, but it does speak to his success in capturing a particular segment of society, a critical and politicized segment. Chomsky is thus not addressing the citizens who have lost a commitment and sense of responsibility to the polis, but is communicating to a (possibly) limited and narrow political class.

Because people do not necessarily find politics proper to be of significance to their daily lives, other media need to be considered in trying to understand possibilities for political participation. If one is interested in understanding how a common conception of life and reality (and so the political) are established and sustained, the medium of television is a central site that needs to be placed under scrutiny. Where is the political found in television? What is the conception of the political? How is it communicated on TV? What is the role of the citizen, what is the role of the state, and how do these interact? Are these even credible questions to be asking in regard to this medium? Therefore, the crucial question is what is the (political?) reality that is presented on TV? While Chomsky is able to address the (propagandized) content of the news and how it constructed the political as it appears in the traditional (printed) site of

democracy, his analysis is inadequate to deal with the questions that need to be posed of television and its rendering of political participation. He does not ask what is the message of this medium. In tackling this 'new' medium, Baudrillard's understanding of simulation becomes critical. Baudrillard analysis calls attention to the hyperreal aspects of television and the information that it presents. He suggests that the time of the real, and therefore the political, has passed. The television audience has lost the desire for truth, which is matched by this electronic media's inability to produce it. Thus, Baudrillard's analysis of the Gulf War, the first TV war, and as he describes it a 'non-war', assists in addressing the message of the medium of television and how it (may) contribute to a (de)politicized audience, the citizenry. This analysis of the medium is at odds with Chomsky's analysis of content. However, it cannot be dismissed as political heresy, just as Chomsky need not be rejected for his focus on the medium of (news)print. The following chapter will accordingly turn to the analysis that Baudrillard provides of the televisual medium and the simulation of the Gulf War. After considering this approach to media and the possibility of political participation, a return will be made to Chomsky in an in-depth comparison with Baudrillard that will focus on the ontological assumptions of their divergent analyses. It will also place Baudrillard and Chomsky in contrast to each other to open up space for their mutually held criticism of the other's theoretical frameworks. This will further allow for critique of both of their failures to provide an adequate conception of political agency within mediated society.

Chapter 3: Baudrillard

He believed all the news he heard and had faith in none. He was on the alert constantly for every signal, truly sensitive to relationships and situations that didn't exist. He was someone in the know who was striving pathetically to find out what was going on. – Joseph Heller⁴⁶

The Impossible Sign: Reading the Medium, Politics, and Simulation

If you take one-thousandth of what you see on the TV news to heart, you're done for. But television protects us from this. Its immunizing, prophylactic use protects us from an unbearable responsibility. Its effect and its images self-destruct in the mind. So is this the zero degree of communication? Certainly, it is: people fear communication like the plague.⁴⁷

Television has increasingly taken on the role of creating a sense of, and a space for, commonality for the North American population. It is particularly blasphemous not to own a television, and not to partake in viewing its many programs is much like a self-imposed cultural quarantine. It appears that people relate to each other through references to TV shows and characters, and this is particularly the case for the younger generations who have grown up with this medium as the predominant source of knowing and gaining information about the outside world. Families sit around the TV watching what is going on, rather than sitting around the table, reading and discussing global or local events.⁴⁸ This in many ways reflects how the medium of television has restructured everyday life. In changing the modes in which people relate to each other and to the world around them, television has also shifted the way in which people think about and engage in the political (not to mention the economic and social). News is presented as another TV program that operates along the same line as police dramas. Clips of war,

⁴⁶ Heller, Joseph. *Catch-22* [New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., Scribner Paperback fiction, 1955. Pp. 198].

⁴⁷ Baudrillard, Jean. *The Illusion of the End* [trans. Chris Turner. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1994, originally published in French, 1992. Pp. 63]. Hereafter, 'IE'.

⁴⁸ This is of course an idealization of what (family) life was before TV, but exaggeration can sometimes point to changes that have been felt more subtly. However, I would suggest that the claim of TV's centrality does hold resonance as the importance of a TV for family functioning was parodied in a Christmas commercial that suggested that the worst possible thing for the holidays was for the set to breakdown and for the members to have to talk to one another (I believe that it was Future Shop, or some other electronics company that produced this advertisement). And to add quantitative support of my claim, Taras provides that, "Over the past 30 years the number of hours that Canadians have spent watching television per week has fluctuated 'within the narrow band' of between 21 and 23," and "More than one in five Canadians routinely watch TV while eating dinner, and close to half of all Canadians have a TV in their bedroom" (Taras, David. *Power and Betrayal in the Canadian Media* [Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 1999. Pp. 8]).

famine, and disasters from around the world seem as if they are previews to movies or documentaries on 'learning' channels. The world seems unreal on TV. Consequently, the impact of political policy, action, or debate seems abstract in TV's communication; or, rather news is boring compared to all the possible forms of electronic entertainment available, and so it must be made sensational in order to compete. This is a fact that must be considered in approaching the topic of political participation and the effect that media (in all its varieties) has had on it.

I. Introduction: Baudrillard

Baudrillard, as a cultural theorist, brings the medium of TV to the fore. He theorizes that objects are transformed into signs within consumer culture, with TV being a key propagator of this abstraction. This restructures social relations into those that are mediated through consumption. In calling attention to this form of consumerist cultural reality, Baudrillard draws critical attention to how television's 'virtual' mode of communication surpasses the 'real' (manifestations of actions, of objects, etc. in their particulars) through reducing them to (generalized) information, images, and data: to signs. Through this screen the world becomes enclosed, homogenous, and self-referential. The medium induces its signs (its 'purified' images and discourses) to appear, and be read, as independent of the outside world. Events like war, and objects, like bombs, are no longer experienced as real or are understood as such. Moreover, the formatting of TV encourages all signs to be understood by way of the logic of advertisements. In its promotion, the real in all its aspects becomes capable of being abstract, universal, exchangeable and consumable. TV, as the medium of consumer culture, is therefore working to contain the real as signs in order to make all relations manifest through consumption. The world is recast as simulations, as a model beyond the real, as hyperreal. The possibility of actions, events and objects succeeding TV's virtual grasp of information (i.e. the news) is negated as understandings of reality and knowledge are trapped within a spiral of unverified commentary, unfalsifiable images and contradictory interpretations. TV spreads the virtuality of signs, and Baudrillard insists that this medium of communication needs to be analyzed and critiqued as its virulence is infecting all of social relations and reality with the symptoms of hyperreality.

For Baudrillard, the Persian Gulf War exemplifies the hyperreality of TV. Unlike Chomsky who seeks honesty in the content of media, Baudrillard is adamant that TV throws all information and knowledge of events, such as the war, into question. The media's configuration negates the possibility of communicating the facts about the 'real', of representing truth. To analyze the message coming from the media about the war is to ignore the medium, which in advance through its mode of communication prevents any certainty of meaning. The prevalence of consumer culture logic in media engenders information to be relayed according to the code of advertisements. Knowledge of the war can then only be virtual, to be promotional and cleansed of intelligence. It can be judged only on the basis of credibility, where the distinction between truth and falsity is moot as belief and trust in the information takes precedence over assurance of the 'fact'. In comprehending the war, Baudrillard is therefore persistent that it is futile to study the media's message. It is the medium that must be understood and critiqued.

In explicating the shift in consumer culture's social relations and reality, Baudrillard's analysis focuses on the significance of TV as a medium of communication, which engendered the Gulf War to be a non-war. The war was not real; it was virtual. Claiming that the war is virtual is not to say that nothing occurred and that people were not affected as flesh and blood. Articulating the virtual is rather a claim about how signs, like that of the war, have been communicated so abstractly from where they originated as to change the ideological underpinnings which people use to make sense of events and knowledge. This abstraction also extends to their own relations with themselves and others. For many people the war was known only as (edited) TV images, as (scripted) sound bites, as T-shirts defaming Hussein, as 'pride for our troops'. This is the hyperreality of the sign. The war was virtual then because it was embedded in a system of reference where reality was replaced with representations. In theorizing through the virtual Baudrillard outlines a paradigm shift engendered by consumer culture that has usurped the ideological superstructure of truth. In his analysis of the Gulf, Baudrillard points further to the impacts that the logic of mass media culture has had on the possibilities for political relationships. By asserting that the Gulf War was a non-war, a simulation of what war once was, Baudrillard casts doubt on the viability of politics, as relations or the contestation of power; and articulates that the political has disappeared in

the abstraction of the virtual. The way the war was engaged signified the substitution of deterrence for action and imposition of a hyperreal model (universalized relations) for relations of exchange (relations as singular).⁴⁹ Accordingly, Baudrillard contends that it is the medium (of consumer culture, of TV, of communication by advertisements) that must be critiqued so as to attack the hegemony of the virtual and enable a space for meaning and the possibility of (political) action.

II. Situating the Analysis: The Consumption of the Sign

It is obvious that the content mostly conceals from us the real function of the medium. It presents itself as message, whereas its real message (compared to which the manifest discourse is perhaps only a connotation) is the profound structural change brought about in human relations in terms of scale, models, and habits. Put crudely, the 'message' of a railway is not the coal or passengers it transports, but a new vision of the world, a new state of conurbations, etc. The 'message' of TV is not the images it transmits, but the new modes of perception and relations imposed by it, the alteration of traditional family or group structures. Further still, in the case of TV and modern mass media, what is received, assimilated and 'consumed' is less a particular spectacle than potentially all spectacles.⁵⁰

According to Baudrillard to conceptualize the relationship between media and the possibilities for political participation it is not enough to problematize the knowledge media constructs and makes available. As in the case of the Gulf War, it was through the medium itself, and not its message, that the war was communicated as unreal and which disabled popular political practices. Baudrillard's articulation of the phenomena of the Gulf War turned the eye toward the culture that produced the conditions of possibility of virtual war. For Baudrillard, it was the field of consumer culture that aided the precession of the simulation over the real. This culture has abstracted, and reduced, all entities and ends to that of consumption. It exasperates the 'natural' link between signs and their referents. It has collapsed these assumed differences and boundaries to

⁴⁹ Exchange, for Baudrillard, rests on the singularity of objects and subjects where there is reciprocity and responsibility to the relationship. In terms of communication, he writes, "What characterizes the mass media is that they are opposed to mediation, intransitive, that they fabricate noncommunication – if one accepts the definition of communication as an exchange, as the reciprocal space of speech and response, and thus responsibility. In other words, if one defines it as anything other than the simple emission/reception of information" (Baudrillard, Jean. "The Masses: The Implosion of the Social in the Media," in *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings, 2nd Edition* [ed. Mark Poster. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001, 1988. Pp. 210-211]). Hereafter, 'ISM'.

⁵⁰ Baudrillard, Jean. "Mass Media Culture," in *Revenge of the Crystal: Selected Writings on the Modern Object and its Destiny: 1968-1983* [ed. and trans. Paul Foss and Julian Pefanis. London, UK: Pluto Press, 1999. Pp. 88]. Hereafter, 'MMC'.

facilitate a particular relationship between objects and subjects that is mediated through, and promoted by, capitalist consumption. In doing so, objects, relations, knowledge and so on, which were once held to be worthy in and of themselves, to be 'real', have had their value transferred merely to that of being consumable as 'product', 'status', 'identity' and so on. Further, consumer culture is mass media culture. Mass media culture communicates events as information, imploding their particulars and in the process rendering them meaningless. Everything in media is a sign that is consumable, and accordingly, all messages stemming from it are infected with the logic of advertisement. The medium induces the ingestion of events as information. The message *is* consumption.

TV, as the medium, communicates information as signs. This leaves its meaning uncertain. Information, in this sense, works according to the principle of credibility (a belief in fact), not truth (a certainty of fact). Because Baudrillard is interested in that which is the a priori of the message, that which configures its interpretation, it is not the content that informs his reading of media, or cases such as the Gulf War. Rather, he analyzes the context in which the media is embedded to situate the possible ways in which their message is structured to produce particular interpretations, knowledge and relations. Baudrillard regards electronic media, particularly, as the primary vessel of consumer culture that is complicit in the propagation of simulation, of the virtual over the real. Reading the world through the eyes of the sign of consumer culture is thus the theoretical framework that informs Baudrillard's analysis of the Gulf War. It is in the development of the paradigm that light is shed on Baudrillard as a media and political theorist.

Consumer culture posits consumption as the primary mode in which present-day life is to be experienced. It organizes the individual, the relations between subjects-objects, and the society itself by way of the 'generalized' sign. Against common conceptions of consumption, Baudrillard articulates that it is not about the satisfaction of needs; rather it is the organization of objects, passions, relationships, demands, and so on into a coherent discourse.⁵¹ He states, "If it has any meaning at all, consumption means

⁵¹ Baudrillard, Jean. *The System of Objects* [trans. James Benedict. London, UK: Verso, 1996, originally published in French, 1968. Pp. 199.] Hereafter, 'SOO'.

an activity consisting of systematic manipulation of signs" (SOO: 200). To (re)produce the world as signs, the logic of consumption abstracts and empties events, relations, objects of particularities in order to universalize their character. Baudrillard further explains,

To become an object of consumption, an object must first become a sign. That is to say: it must become external, in a sense, to a relationship that it now merely signifies. It is thus arbitrary – and not inconsistent with that concrete relationship: it derives its consistency, and hence its meaning, from an abstract and systematic relationship to all other sign-objects. Only in this context can it be 'personalized', can it become part of a series, and so on; only thus can it be consumed, never in its materiality, but in its difference (SOO: 200).

Products, ideas, material and immaterial objects are signs when they operate on the level of connotation (abstract and universal), not denotation (singular and concrete), and when they are consumed as such. Consuming signs should not be regarded as the realization of a 'naturalized' use-value, but as functionality in terms of status. The consumption of signs works to distinguish the consumer as different through the object consumed and promotes his/her integration into established societal relationships, categories and codes. For instance, a person forms an identity as an owner of a DVD player, of having available the latest technology, of participating in society as a consumer of popular culture, as opposed to relying on the outdated VCR that limits the experience (visual and auditory) of watching films. The self-referentiality of the system of signs, created in consumer culture, thus enables a person to buy into particular relations with some people, and conversely opposes him/her to others, that are in the end mediated through the object consumed.

The self-contained, or 'freed', sign is emblematic of consumer culture's logic. The abstraction of objects as signs removes any particularity of use and meaning (of a car being a car and nothing but a Ford). Signs being independent of their existence in the real, they are liberated from the responsibility of transcendence and in doing so they are also removed from the logic of truth and falsity. They are not expected to naturally (and inevitably) encapsulate an innate signified; rather, they are released onto an infinite field of connotation. Signs no longer have an exclusive meaning but are inclusive of a multiplicity of meanings. They are infected with the characteristics of the undecidable and are open to having their meaning transferable and exchangeable with other signs.

Signs being set in play on the level of status and connotations then are seen as signalling a loss of the real in the sense that there is no necessary (inevitable) relationship between signifier and signified.

'Freed' signs negate the ideology of truth and announce the reign of the virtual, of simulations. The staging of signs to allow for their consumption presupposes a different type of logic, a divergent form of meaning that is not grounded in truth, but operates in mass culture's hyperrealism. Accordingly, when signs are arbitrary,

...nothing has presence, nothing has a history – even though everything is laden with references... The *only thing* all these objects have is their uniqueness: they are abstract in their difference, which is their mode of referentiality, and enter into combination with one another precisely by virtue of that abstractness (SOO: 202).

Following this path, Baudrillard continues to theorize,

...the logic of consumption can be defined as the manipulation of signs. The symbolic values of creation, and the symbolic relations of interiority are absent here: it is pure exteriority. The object loses its objective finality and its function to become a term in a much wider combinatory or series of objects, in which its value is purely relational. In another sense, it loses its symbolic meaning, its millennial anthropomorphic status, and tends to disappear in a discourse of connotations, which are also relative to one another in the framework of a totalitarian cultural system, which is to say one capable of integrating all significations whatever their origin (MMC: 80).

Signs manifest external to context, out of time, and they are divorced from the logic of truth, which is only possible in a paradigm of the real. It is at this point that signs can be seen as simulation. Being externalized from their concreteness, from their particularities, signs are detached from the real. Simulations do not refer to a real, they are not a copy—they are signs whose existence is external to 'reality'. In their (anti-) essence, simulations deny the possibility of truth through surpassing the real, being hyperreal.

Simulations have not always appeared as independent of the real. Yet, Baudrillard maintains that, "Today abstraction is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror, or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a

hyperreal.”⁵² Baudrillard outlines simulation’s evolutionary divergence from the real in four phases. He states, “Such would be the successive phases of the image: it is the reflection of a profound reality; it masks and denatures a profound reality; it masks the *absence* of a profound reality; it has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum” (PS: 6). To take as examples, the first and second phase of the image could be expressed by the counterfeit, or the fake. It refers to an original and replicates it. The third order would be a robot, which is an equivalent to the original, yet abstracts its operational process. The order of simulation, finally, would be that of the clone. It is no longer equivalent, but stems from the model of the real (i.e. using DNA as the model of the human, rather than an actual individual). The boundary between true and false, between real and imaginary, implodes in this last phase of the image.⁵³ Their meaning is located in their seriality. Simulations are then to be seen as signs that are understood as self-referential and exchangeable with other signs.

Simulation is emblematic of consumer culture, or mass media culture. It is its model. It is the virtual nature of communication that produces a society of simulation. Accordingly,

It is all of metaphysics that is lost. No more mirror of being and appearances, of the real and its concept. No more imaginary coextensivity: it is genetic miniaturization that is the dimension of simulation. The real is produced from miniaturized cells, matrices, and memory banks, models of control – and it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times from these. It no longer needs to be rational, because it no longer measures itself against either an ideal or negative instance. It is no longer anything but operational. In fact, it is no longer really the real, because no imaginary envelops it anymore. It is the hyperreal... (PS: 2).

In order to advance the model, hyperreality as a mode of communication operates according to the logic of advertisements. As Baudrillard explains, “Through advertising mass society and consumer society continuously ratify themselves”;⁵⁴ and further, “If we

⁵² Baudrillard, Jean. “The Precession of Simulacra,” in *Simulacra and Simulation* [trans. Sheila Faria Glaser. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994, originally published in French, 1981. Pp. 1]. Hereafter, ‘PS’.

⁵³ These examples are borrowed from Horrocks, Chris and Zoran Jevtic. *Introducing Baudrillard* [ed. Richard Appignanesi. Cambridge, UK: Icon Books, Ltd., 1999, 1996. Pp. 109-110].

⁵⁴ Baudrillard, Jean. “The System of Objects,” (exert) in *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings, 2nd Edition* [trans. Jacques Mourrain, ed. Mark Poster. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001. Pp.13]. Hereafter ‘JB/SOO’.

consume the product as product, we consume its meaning through advertising” (JB/SOO: 13).

The logic of advertisements, therefore, precedes simulation through nullifying the boundary of sign and referent, real and imaginary, truth and falsity, as it circulates objects and information as infinitely exchangeable and consumable (PS: 6). This is dependent upon the ability to abstract the real into the sign, to reduce the world to the model, in other words, to be merely information. Baudrillard explains,

Advertising turns the object into an event. In fact, it constructs it as such by eliminating its objective characteristics. It constructs the object as a model, as a spectacular news item.... Journalists and publicists are *manipulators of myth*: they stage an object or event as fiction. They ‘liberally interpret’ it – at the very limit, they deliberately construct it (MMC: 93).

The collapse of the real (truth) and imaginary (false) is epitomized in advertisements. However, Baudrillard observes,

The truth is that advertising (and the other mass media) doesn’t fool us: *advertising is beyond the true and false*, just as fashion is beyond the ugly and the beautiful, and just as the modern object, in its sign function, is beyond the useful and the useless (MMC: 93).

This arbitrariness adulterates the certainty of meaning in the abstraction of signs. It opens all knowledge to continuous and constant interpretation. It engenders uncertainty in that meaning is not located in truth but in exchangeability, in infinite connotation. The logic of advertisements is thus the logic of consumer culture; that is, the abstraction and circulation of signs, the reduction and uncertainty of meaning. Information that is available in the media will not be able to report facts. It is incapable of communicating truth. It knows only the exteriority of signs. It communicates signs (objects, events, relations) as shells that it can fill with a variety of meaning. The possibility of truth is beyond the medium, and accordingly their content reflects this.

Due to the uncertainty of signs under the logic of advertisement (of mass media), the medium’s only source of evaluation is in terms of (intangible and unstable) credibility. Baudrillard puts forth,

Information long ago broke through the truth barrier and moved into the hyperspace where things are neither true nor false, since everything in the realm of information depends on instantaneous credibility. Or, to put it more accurately,

information is truer than true *since it is true in real time* – this is why it is fundamentally uncertain.⁵⁵

Baudrillard further explains,

You put out an item of information. So long as it has not been denied, it is plausible. And, barring some happy accident, it will never be denied in real time and so will always remain credible. Even if denied, it will no longer ever be absolutely false, since it has once been credible. Unlike truth, credibility has no limits: it cannot be refuted, because it is virtual (IMS: 85).

Real-time communication, like the adoption of the logic of advertisements within media, has therefore fundamentally changed the status and ability of images to locate and disseminate meaning and truth. Credibility is the mode of evaluation for the current media of communication, and this exemplifies the ambiguity of simulations. While credibility does not appeal to transcendental truth, it does carry with it an insight of consumer culture. Baudrillard writes, “This technological process of mass communication delivers a highly imperative sort of message: *the message of message consumption*, of fragmentation and spectacularisation, of misrecognition of the world and the valorisation of information as commodity, the exaltation of content as sign” (MMC: 89). The culture of mass media, of consumer culture, has restructured the medium of communication, in terminating the possibility of truth to be located in its messages. It promotes consumption as it consumes the possibility of meaning outside of its own logic (of advertisements). It is beyond truth; it is beyond the real. The questions, then, of mediated knowledge, for Baudrillard, have changed. He offers,

This is our dilemma, one that comes to us from the depths of simulation: what if the sign did not relate either to the object or to meaning, but to the promotion of the sign as sign? And what if information did not relate either to the event or the facts, but to the promotion of information itself as event? And more precisely today: what if television no longer related to anything except itself as message?⁵⁶

To understand the message of consumer culture is to understand the medium, for the medium communicates itself as the message. And according to Baudrillard, these questions are where analysis must turn toward in order to address contemporary culture

⁵⁵ Baudrillard, Jean. “Information at the Meteorological Stage”, in *Screened Out* [trans. Chris Turner. London, UK: Verso, 2002, originally published in French, 2000. Pp. 85]. Hereafter, ‘IMS’.

⁵⁶ Baudrillard, Jean. “TV Fantasies”, in *Screened Out* [trans. Chris Turner. London, UK: Verso, 2002, originally published in French, 2000. Pp. 188]. Hereafter, ‘TV’.

and communication. Therefore, that is what he does in his critique of the mediated Gulf War.

III. Baudrillard's Analysis

A. *Communicating the Gulf War*

*The real warmongers are those who live on the ideology of the veracity of this war, while the war itself wreaks its havoc at another level by trickery, hyperreality, simulacra, and by the entire mental strategy of deterrence which is played out in the facts and in the images, in the anticipation of the real by the virtual, of the event by virtual time, and in the inexorable confusion of the two. All those who understand nothing of this involuntarily reinforce this halo of bluff which surrounds us.*⁵⁷

*Even reality, the reality principle, is an article of faith. Question the reality of a war and you'll be condemned for betraying the moral law.*⁵⁸

Baudrillard has been repeatedly attacked for his perspective on the Gulf War.⁵⁹ He has been charged with neglecting the severity of violence that occurred, of diminishing its significance. Yet, Baudrillard is not unlike Chomsky in viewing atrocities in the Gulf War and he acknowledges the political and economic context that surrounded it. Baudrillard recognizes the unequal level of force and power that was weighed on the side of the Americans (GW: 24; 26). He points to the earlier alliance between America and Hussein during the Iran-Iraq war (GW: 38). Likewise, he denounces the unilateral actions of the American state in its attack on Iraq and for allowing the crushing of Shiite and Kurds uprisings at the war's conclusion (GW: 71; 78). While these condemnable acts appear to indicate that a real 'war' happened, Baudrillard still maintained that the Gulf War 'did not take place'. What Baudrillard is trying to explain is that the Gulf War was infected with the logic of consumer culture that reduced the war to a sign to be

⁵⁷ Baudrillard, Jean. *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* [trans. Paul Patton. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995, originally published in French, 1991. Pp. 67]. Hereafter, 'GW'.

⁵⁸ Baudrillard, Jean. "Exorcism in Politics or the Conspiracy of Imbeciles," in *Screened Out* [trans. Chris Turner. London: Verso, 2002, originally published in French, 2000. Pp. 204]. Hereafter, 'EP'.

⁵⁹ See: Norris, Christopher. "Baudrillard and the War that Never Happened" in *Uncritical Theory: Postmodernism, Intellectuals and the Gulf War* [London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1992: 11-31]. Norris exemplifies the harsh criticisms that Baudrillard received due to his polemic stance that the Gulf War didn't happen. Norris even included sections of Baudrillard's writing to indicate the 'intellectual and political bankruptcy' of this type of 'postmodern' theorizing ('Postscript': 196). I will take up these criticisms more directly in chapter 4 that addresses the different ontological and epistemological approaches that Chomsky and Baudrillard take, and in less direct ways in this chapter as I later discuss Baudrillard's understanding of the political and its relationship to media.

consumed. By being abstracted as a sign, the war existed virtually. It was understood with the logic of consumption that carries with it particular types of relations, knowledge, and events. The war's virtuality also means that principles of reality and of truth were absent. The war was fought without any transcendent grounding or aim.

While the war was not 'real', this is not to say that violence was not done. Baudrillard agrees that it was. However, he is adamant that the real violence of the Gulf War was in making war itself virtual. Baudrillard argues,

By dint of dreaming of pure war, of an orbital war purged of all local and political peripeteias, we have fallen into soft war, into the virtual impossibility of war ... Everything is therefore transposed into the virtual, and we are confronted with a virtual apocalypse, a hegemony ultimately much more dangerous than real apocalypse (GW: 27).

Saying that war was virtual does not change the fact that humanitarian tragedy occurred within Iraq and that the Americans were the predominant force behind it, yet it does necessitate the recognition that violence was not contained in these 'real' instances. It also spread through to the spectators of the war, the relations and knowledge beyond the battle. Baudrillard should not be seen as diverting attention away from the seriousness of the war then, but as advancing its significance past the typical analysis about the (dis)content of the media to media's inherent violation of the real. His analysis shows that the succession of the virtual over the real *is* violent, yet it was not Baudrillard's theorizing that brought about this change. This violence was in place when society started working according to the logic of mass media culture. It was there in the hyperreality of signs that operate as a model of the real. It was also in place in how the medium of TV enforces a disconnection between the sending of information and its reception. In consumer culture, there is no space for the real to exist. Images, information and discourse supplanted the significance of events and actions through the medium of TV.

Baudrillard's writing about the Gulf War serves as a case study since it exemplifies the virtuality of events under the logic of consumer culture. He is articulating the war as a simulation, as hyperreal. Also he is alluding to why analysis must be conducted at the level of the medium and why critique aimed at the message will not induce truth. For the purpose of clarification, Baudrillard's analysis will at this point

be (artificially) split into a discussion of TV as consumer culture's medium of communication and the message of the medium, with the latter being addressed as the message of the political. Both of these point to how Baudrillard constructs his argument regarding the world as virtual, as simulacra. In terms of the medium, Baudrillard's central point is that the war (as content) was meaningless. Uncertainty was the reigning ideology before, during and after the war. One was never sure of what was going on or why. The war was meaningless because it was known only as a sign and it was virtual by nature of its exteriority to the principle of reality and truth. This was owing to the war's dominant medium of communication: TV. This medium is organized according to the logic of advertisements (and of consumer culture). It promoted the war as sign. It made the war *immediately* virtual. TV aired the event of war in 'real-time'. This speed of transmission placed information-images in the evaluative category of credibility, which cared little for truth. The medium's instantaneous structure also exasperated certainty by communicating information via perpetual commentary. This increased its contradictory and speculative character. It disabled the possibility of accountability through erasing memory and nullifying knowledge in prolific and continuous streaming of information/images. Further, the medium's spectacular character structured the event as unknowable, undecideable, and uncertain. The information flowed in only one direction: away from the real into TV's hyperreal self-referentiality. The medium thus abstracted the event from the real, communicating it is a sign. There was no way for the war to be grasped as a war, because there was too much information and no one to believe. The information was deceptive. It diverted attention from the significance of the medium's virulent hyperrealism and the message of simulation's triumph.

Under consumer culture, the medium of TV appropriates the logic of advertisements. Its logic infiltrates all events and objects, as they become signs that are detached from any referent and circulated in virtual/reality. In taking on the characteristics of advertisements, there is a fundamental change in how news is understood. To learn about the world through the medium of advertisements engenders the event and the information about the event to be conflated, to be exchangeable with each other, to be basically regarded as the same. This has profound effects on the

knowledge and communication of events, such as the Gulf War. In detail, Baudrillard explains,

It is not just because the valedictory tone of advertising suggests that the story of the world is fundamentally unimportant, and that the only things worthy of consideration are consumer goods. This is secondary. Its real efficacy is more subtle: it prescribes through the systematic succession of messages an equivalence between story and news item, between event and spectacle, between news and advertising at the level of the sign. This is where the true effect of consumption lies, and not in the express discourse of advertising. It consists, thanks to the technical supports, the technical media of TV and radio, of cutting up events of the world into discontinuous, successive, and non-contradictory messages, into signs which can be juxtaposed and combined with other signs in the abstract realm of broadcasting. What we consume, then, is not a particular spectacle or image as such; it is the potential succession of all possible spectacles – and the certainty that this law of succession and division of programs will ensure that nothing will emerge from them which is not a spectacle or sign of one kind or another (MMC: 88).

Recalling the effect of consumer culture, the collapse of events, objects, and so on to that of the sign promotes the restructuring of relations to those of consumption. It becomes the primary mode of value, of knowledge, and of engagement with the world. With the Gulf War being communicated through the medium of TV and understood via the logic of advertisement, it became abstracted from the 'real' event. It became consumable as a sign. It took on the character of spectacle, as a collection of images and information. As such, the Gulf War was communicated with uncertainty; and, as Baudrillard reminds us, "Through we may not wish to acknowledge this, we have nonetheless to accept the evidence: the image and, with it, news [i'nformation] is not attached to any principle of truth or reality" (IE: 60). This is part of the reason that Baudrillard makes the claim that the Gulf War was not real. Its reality was altered within the medium, was transferred from being an event to being virtual information, and broadcasted as hyperreal. So, unlike previous wars, the Gulf War (as a media event) was put up for sale as it was made a product for consumption through the medium's abstraction of it to a sign.

Following the logic of the advertisement, TV aired the war with a promotional sensibility. The Gulf War promoted not only the operational capacity of the American military, but also the simulation of war, Western values, and in particular, of media itself (GW: 31). It functioned to spread consumer culture's logic of the sign. Considering the

medium's treatment of the war, Baudrillard hypothesizes, "On the available evidence (absence of images and profusion of commentary), we could suppose an immense promotional exercise like that one which once advertised a brand-name (GARAP) whose product never became known" (GW: 29). He further maintains,

...the war makes its way by promotion and speculation, including the use of hostages transformed into marketing ploys, and in the absence of any clarification of plans, balance sheets, losses or operations. No enterprise would survive such uncertainty, except precisely speculative risk management, otherwise known as the strategy of turning a profit from the worst, in other words, war (= Highly Profitable Senseless Project or HPSP). War itself has taken this speculative turn: it is highly profitable but uncertain (GW: 30).

The medium's promotion of Gulf War advanced the acceptance of the uncertainty of events and information, as "The war is also pure and speculative, to the extent that we do not see the real event that it could be or that it would signify" (GW: 29).

However, the reality of the war was less important, from the vantage point of the medium, than its spin offs. The outcome of the 'real' war was of little consequence for, as Baudrillard observes, "...from this point onwards the promotional advantages are fabulous. Defeated or not, Saddam is assured of an unforgettable and charismatic label. Victorious or not, American armaments will have acquired an unequalled technological label" (GW: 30). Since the media's communication placed promotion of the event as the epitome of success, the war's significance was extracted from the real and transplanted to the virtual. The meaning of war was launched beyond the real into the hyperreal. It was kept in orbit as a sign. Thus, in summarizing the logic at play, Baudrillard presents that, "The media promote the war, the war promotes the media, and advertising competes with the war...[Promotion] devours our substance... it allows us to turn the world and the violence of the world into a consumable substance. So, war or promotion?" (GW: 31).

Linked to the logic of advertisement and promotion, the Gulf War was heightened to virtuality as the medium sought temporal convergence of the event with its information. TV communicated the war with the speed of light. Baudrillard argues,

The speed of light protects the reality of things by guaranteeing that the images we have of them are contemporaneous. The plausibility of a causal universe would disappear with some appreciable change in this speed. All things would interfere in total disaster. This is the extent to which this speed is our referent, our God, and for us represents the absolute. If the speed of light becomes relative,

then no more transcendence, no more God to recognize his own, and the universe lapses into indeterminacy. This is happening today with electronic media, where information is beginning to circulate everywhere at the speed of light. There is no longer any absolute with which to measure the rest.⁶⁰

TV's rate of communication pushed the Gulf War into a realm where the time for intelligence was lost. Its speed left meaning behind. Baudrillard highlights two mutually enforcing methods in which the images and information of the Gulf War were communicated almost instantaneously. First, the images were aired in 'real-time', and secondly there was prolific commentary that was streamed continuously. Both of these manifested irrespective of the events (and knowledge) about the war. Both of these ensured that the information about the war could only be gauged in terms of credibility.

Baudrillard, in making it explicit that mass media culture's *raison d'être* is to produce signs for consumption, shows how the medium achieved this through putting to use its promotional logic to allow the consumption of the war to never stop. It aired it in real-time. The real (and truth), however, do not accommodate this speed and are unable to produce the required amount of facts. Not enough was known, not enough was verifiable in the real within this time period to produce truth. There were not enough events; not enough was spectacular. TV needed signs, whether true or imaginary. It had to have new(s)ness to be consumed. The real was made to acquiesce to the virtual. Instantaneous information trumped any possibility of truth in the events of the war. By having the audience confront the war 'live', the medium of TV transferred the event into a simulation, obscuring the lost significance of its reality. Baudrillard describes,

... 'real-time' information loses itself in a completely unreal space, finally furnishing the images of pure, useless, instantaneous television where its primordial function irrupts, namely that of filling a vacuum, blocking up the screen hole through which escapes the substance of events (GW: 31).

Real-time clears events of content and fills itself with images that are buffed with commentary. Within this medium there was not the space for reality concerning the events of the Gulf War to materialize; rather, it imploded the possibility in a proliferation of instantaneous information and images. Baudrillard thus states,

⁶⁰ Baudrillard, Jean. "Fatal Strategies," (exert) in *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings, 2nd Edition* [trans. Jacques Mourrain, ed. Mark Poster. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001. Pp.196]. Hereafter 'JB/FS'.

We have seen what an ultra-modern process of electrocution is like, a paralysis or lobotomy of an experimental enemy away from the field of battle with no possibility of reaction. But this is not a war, any more than 10, 000 tonnes of bombs per day is sufficient to make it a war. Any more than the direct transmission by CNN of real time information is sufficient to authenticate a war (GW: 61).

Keeping in step with the uncertainty provoked in the logic of advertisements, the consequence of 'real-time' communication was the further loss of reality to that of virtuality. Baudrillard describes,

Utopia of real time which renders the event simultaneous at all points on the globe. In fact, what we live in real time is not the event, but rather in larger than life (in other words, in the virtual size of the image) the spectacle of degradation of the event and its spectral evocation (the 'spiritualism of information': event, are you there? Gulf War, are you there?) in the commentary, gloss, and verbose *mise en scene* of talking heads which only underlines the impossibility of the image and the correlative unreality of the war (GW: 48).

And he continues,

...so war, when it has been turned into information, ceases to be a realistic war and becomes a virtual war, [it becomes] in some way symptomatic... everything which is turned into information becomes the object of endless speculation, the site of total uncertainty. We are left with the symptomatic reading on our screens of the effects of the war, of the effects of discourse about the war, or completely speculative strategic evaluations which are analogous to those evaluations of opinion provided by polls. In this manner, we have gone in a week from 20% to 50% and then to 30% destruction of Iraqi military potential. The figure fluctuates exactly like the fortunes of the stock market... Whom to believe? There is nothing to believe (GW: 41).

Baudrillard is trying to make clear that the images of the war were uncertain and indeterminate. He is exposing that the war's significance in the real was inverted in the spectacle of real-time communication, in media's speculative commentary, and in the proliferations of images. The war became merely information, and as Baudrillard articulates, "We live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning" (IMM: 79). In this sense the knowledge about the war was meaningless and unbelievable in TV's (virtual) reality.

Therefore, the war cannot be critiqued in terms of truth. Addressing this Baudrillard proposes, "The criteria of truth have been supplanted by the principle of credibility (which is also the principle of statistics and opinion polls), and this is the true

guiding principle of news" (IE: 54). Whereas the medium posits credibility of information on the basis of its proximity to the event, Baudrillard argues it to be the reverse since information that was given credibility at one moment, and later put under question, has at least once occupied the space of truth. This indicated that TV's real-time collapsed the ability to distinguish the poles of true and false knowledge; it nullified the possibility that these poles could be separated. Working in the paradigm of credibility, in this sense, the information regarding the war was meaningless. The speed of communication thus left the event of war indecipherable and quick to vacate the mind. And Baudrillard maintains,

By the force of the media, this war liberates an exponential mass of stupidity, not the particular stupidity of war, which is considerable, but the professional and functional stupidity of those who pontificate in perpetual commentary on the event: all the Bouvards and Pecuchets for hire, the would-be raiders of the lost image, the CNN types and all the master singers of strategy and information who make us experience the emptiness of television as never before (GW: 51).

TV emptied the event of meaning through abstraction. It emptied the war until it was only information.

Perhaps even more importantly than being incomprehensible, however, is the loss of remembrance and accountability that occurs in the flood of real-time commentary. Reflection upon events is prevented by the onslaught of the next-day's information. Baudrillard explains, "The amnesia about it is, in itself, a confirmation of the unreality of this war. Overexposed to the media, underexposed to memory. Built-in obsolescence, as with any consumer article... Forgetting is built into the event itself in the profusion of information and details" (IE: 63). He further articulates,

Fortunately, no one will hold this expert or general or that intellectual for hire to account for the idiocies or absurdities proffered the day before, since these will be erased by those of the following day. In this manner, everyone is amnestied by the ultra-rapid succession of phony events and phony discourses. The laundering of stupidity by the escalation of stupidity which reconstitutes a sort of total innocence, namely the innocence of washed and bleached brains, stupefied not by the violence but by the sinister insignificance of the images (GW: 51).

By offering information about the war as it took place, when information and the events were able to occur in the same temporal space, there was only the possibility for speculation, for commentary on the not-as-of-yet-confirmed. However, because this up-

to-the-minute information was the only possibility for constructing meaning about the war, the war was trapped within simulation. The commentary may have tried to replicate the events as they unfold, but in doing so, all ability to grasp a reality was lost.

By analyzing the medium in the context of mass media culture, Baudrillard displays how TV fundamentally opposes reality and truth. He argues that regardless of what content was made available through the medium, the message would be meaningless. By adhering to the logic of advertisements, by communicating through the voice of promotion, by using the criterion of credibility, TV irrevocably launched the Gulf War into the realm of the virtual. TV produced a non-war. Within these modes of communication information was not to be trusted. Baudrillard concludes,

Information has a profound function of deception. It matters little what it 'informs' us about, its 'coverage' of events matters little since it is precisely no more than a cover: its purpose is to produce consensus by flat encephalogram. The complement of the unconditional simulacrum in the field is to train everyone in the unconditional reception of broadcast simulacra. Abolish any intelligence of the event. The result is a suffocating atmosphere of deception and stupidity. And if people are vaguely aware of being caught up in this appeasement and this disillusion by images, they swallow the deception and remain fascinated by the evidence of the montage of this war with which we are inoculated everywhere: through the eyes, the senses and in discourse (GW: 68).

Consequently, rather than providing any meaning to the event of the Gulf War, the media's information diluted understanding. The images of the war were supposed to relay the truth of the event, yet through their lack of certainty they cemented the events' unreality, its hyperreality. They point to the war's plane of significance: the virtual.

In generalizing the overall affect of the medium, thus Baudrillard suggests,

Two intense images, two or perhaps three scenes which all concern disfigured forms or costumes which correspond to the masquerade of this war: the CNN journalists with their gas masks in the Jerusalem studios; the drugged and beaten prisoners repenting on the screen of Iraqi TV; and perhaps that seabird covered in oil and pointing its blind eyes towards the Gulf sky. It is a masquerade of information: branded faces delivered over to the prostitution of the image, the image of an unintelligible distress. No images of the field of battle, but images of the masks, or blind or defeated faces, images of falsification. It is not war taking place over there but the disfiguration of the world (GW: 40).

Baudrillard's theorizing of the images/information of the Gulf War makes it evident that the medium of TV's only effect is making all aspects of the world into a sign. It cannot

be a medium of knowledge, a medium of communication, at least not for the real or for truth. The medium of television operated solely as a means to incapacitate (to mesmerize) the audience, not to engage them; this leads Baudrillard to hypothesize "...perhaps, with everyone glued at home, TV plays out fully its role of social control by collective stupefaction: turning uselessly upon itself like a dervish, it affixes population all the better for deceiving them, as with a bad detective novel which we cannot believe could be so pointless" (GW: 52). Thus, in the Gulf War having been transmitted through real-time information, dolled up by promotion, veiled in speculative commentary, it was transformed into a virtual event that ended up meaningless, and seemingly 'pointless'.

B. The Mass Media and the Construction of the Political

The moralists of war, the holders of high wartime values should not be too discouraged: the war is no less atrocious for being only a simulacrum – the flesh suffers just the same, and the dead and former combatants are worth the same as in other wars. This objective is always fulfilled, just like that of the charting of territories and of disciplinary sociality. What no longer exists is the adversity of the adversaries, the reality of antagonistic causes, the ideological seriousness of war. And also the reality of victory or defeat, war being a process that triumphs well beyond these appearances. (PS: 38)

The political stake is dead, only simulacra of conflicts and carefully circumscribed stakes remain. (PS: 34)

Along with elucidating the non-reality and non-truth of the Gulf War that were produced through consumer culture's medium of communication, Baudrillard is exposing the mass media's implicit message, here spoken through the voice of war. The message is an adaptation of Clausewitz's traditional formula of war as the pursuit of politics by other means. This traditional understanding of politics focuses on facilitating and negotiating the conflictual power of individuals in order to mediate these relations. War, in this case, is the most extreme of political acts. However, this conception resides in the real, where relations are not functionally mediated through signs. The Gulf War was in the virtual. Accordingly, Baudrillard rearticulates this formula to currently be "*the absence of politics pursued by other means*" (GW: 30), that is a political void filled by way of non-war, a simulated war. In referencing Clausewitz, Baudrillard is pointing to foundational changes in how politics is pursued and practiced. The media coverage of the Gulf War enabled a particular conception of political participation to be articulated:

one that was to be virtual, practiced through deterrence, and that would put an end to relations of exchange (in the real) through universalizing consensual democracy.

For Baudrillard, the Gulf War demonstrated that a simulation could replace real war; that war (and the political) was capable of being virtual. The Gulf War exemplified the model (of war), in that its techniques were applied without need of enemies and without battlefields. It showed that causalities did not need to be a part of war, at least for the side that entered into it virtually. Deterrence was the principle practice of war; and it was a solitary relation. It manifested itself in the lack of exchange within the war. In promoting deterrence, the media validated strategies of war (and by extension, politics) that furthered the testing of the model, through the decoy. Accordingly, the tactics of war became those of blackmail and hostage taking, pursued by each side with different logics. Hussein held hostages in the real, while America and its media held them in the virtual. With this model and these modes of engagement, the Gulf War provided an example that war could be fought without political ideals. There was neither the desire for conquest nor for destruction, both traditional/real goals of war. America (supposed to be the 'hero') had only the missionary drive of converting everyone into the order of the same: global markets and the virtuality of democratic consensus. This form of democracy was the virtual model to be implemented to ensure that everywhere the logics of the world were the same. They would be based on Western values and Western modes of communication: the spreading of consumption through the system of the sign. Baudrillard stresses that this conception of the political is the logic of consumer culture. In alluding to these themes of the political, Baudrillard therefore weaves an argument that displays how the medium of communication contributed to presenting a picture of politics that was virtual (in testing the operational capacity of the model), was practiced through deterrence (without need of exchange with the other), and aimed at the superimposition of consensual democracy the world over. This message ultimately expresses the disappearance of the political.

The Gulf War was virtual as the ultimate end relayed during the Gulf War appeared to be that of testing a model. The model was the reorganization of the event in the real, with all its concrete particularities, into the smooth hyperreality of the signs. It abstracts the uncertainty of 'real' event and transfers it to the uncertainty of information.

The Gulf War, as a model of war and of politics, exemplified the modes of engagement for the New World Order: it would be clean; there would be few casualties; there would be no contestation (confrontation) with an enemy; only the implementation of a predetermined relationship and logic would be permitted (plans submitted with due timing); and, it would be universal as it enveloped the politico-economic world. (This was at least the perspective of the Western power(s)). Baudrillard thus suggests,

Saddam is a mercenary, the Americans are missionaries. But once the mercenary is beaten, the missionaries become *de facto* the mercenaries of the entire world. But the price for becoming a perfect mercenary is to be stripped of all political intelligence and all will. The Americans cannot escape it: if they want to be the police of the world and the New World Order, they must lose all political authority in favour of their operational capacity alone. They will become pure executants and everyone else pure extras in the consensual and policed New World Order (GW: 53-54).

Politics, as engagement with the adversary, was lost in TV's simulation and was replaced with that of policing – of making sure that everyone stayed within the model. (The model, of course, is the virtual, which is beyond the particularities of the real.) The Americans therefore practiced force in the Gulf War by testing their military capacity to the absence of political relations with Hussein. Baudrillard explains, “No time lost in discussion, no psychological risk in any duel with the other: it is a way of proving that time does not exist, that the other does not exist, and that all that matters is the model and mastery of the model” (GW: 55). Further, America was experimenting with war fought in the virtuality of technological power, not with military prowess in the battlefield. As Baudrillard explains,

The victory of the model is more important than victory on the ground. Military success consecrates the triumph of arms, but the programming success consecrates the defeat of time. War-processing, the transparency of the model in the unfolding of the war, the strategy of relentless execution of the program, the electrocution of all reaction and any live initiative, including their own: these are more important from the point of view of general deterrence (of friends and foes alike) than the final result on the ground. Clean war, white war, programmed war: more lethal than the war which sacrifices human lives (GW: 55-56).

In keeping the war clean, through testing the operativeness of the military, the war was communicated as if it were programmed. It was comparable to a bad movie where the narrative is formulaic, unexceptional, and its conclusion obvious from the start. And so,

the war played out as if it were anticipated in advance (GW: 35); "Never any acting out, or passage to action, but simply acting: roll cameras!" (GW: 47). The installation of (virtual) operational measures, of mastering the model of military supremacy, of unidirectional implementation of force over the reciprocity of the opponents, highlighted the loss of political engagement in the Gulf War, as programming and policing were functionally the predominant modes of exchange.

Consequently, deterrence functioned as the primary mode of military (political) engagement. Deterrence signified that the war would be practiced solitarily through the prevention of exchange. America did not deal with Hussein as an equal partner in war, on a level of interpersonal reciprocity, but their engagement was through unidirectional directives and acts (GW: 44-45). Advancing the strategy of deterrence were the tactics of hostage taking and blackmail. Baudrillard states, "Hostages and blackmail are the purest products of deterrence" (GW: 24), and as such, these acts are not products of war, but a non-war. They are a product of a war that existed in media images, and which do not require truth, but play within an abstract conception of war. Hostages imply the absence of actors and the inability of action. Blackmail replaces mutual exchange. These hyperreal strategies expose the spectacle of American power and technology, as those who engage in war without the need of an enemy and only need a field in which to test the vitality of war. Baudrillard explains that decoys signified that the war moved out of the real, and that actions were no longer possible. Their use indicated that strategies of war had become abstract signs of conflict, which were no longer capable of engagement and exchange with the other. Decoys are the strategies of deterrence within the model of clean war. They play at the illusion of exchange, but indeed they are unidirectional. In the same way that the Gulf War legitimated the use of decoys as a military strategy (in covering the non-event of war), the media too used the decoy of information to mask the absence of the real. The hyperreal stratagems of blackmail and hostages, as deterrence and decoys, pronounce the impossibility of a war in terms that used to characterize it. They reflect the media's structure of communicating information and images of the Gulf War, where Baudrillard further suggests "... all of us [are] information hostages on the world media stage" (GW: 24). The medium encouraged the war to be fought on the basis of these tactics, as they mirror their modes of communication. Information was

disseminated by (and from) a single site and continued without need of confirmation or reciprocity with the (hypothetical) receiver. There was no dualism between the emitter and the receiver, no time for communication, and no space for exchange. Without reciprocal exchange, without confrontation and contact with an other, politics, as known within the media, became an empty term.

The practice of deterrence and the use of decoys within the politics of war conformed to media's rendering of relationality as irrelevant. Relations between the sides in the Gulf War were an illusion. The war was fought without antagonism. It was engaged without communication. The politics, then too, were construed and legitimated as solitary. In calling attention to the loss of the relationality in the conflict, of the acknowledgement of an enemy that is irreducibly different, Baudrillard is pointing to the hyperreal logic of a war that does not necessitate an other. This was the principal divergence of this electronic war. It was a war game played virtually. Baudrillard surmises that, "Ultimately, the undecidability of the war is grounded in the disappearance of alterity, of primitive hostility, and of the enemy" (GW: 36). Saddam was not the other; he was not the enemy. Aptly, America never fought the terror of Saddam, but fought against its own image. Baudrillard, in explaining this single-sided war, argues that

The Americans can only imagine and combat an enemy in their own image. They are at once both missionaries and converts of their own way of life, which they triumphally project onto the world. They cannot imagine the Other, nor therefore personally make war upon it. What they make war upon is the alterity of the other, and what they want is to reduce that alterity, to convert it or failing that to annihilate it if it proves irreducible (the Indians). They cannot imagine that conversion and repentance, borne by their own good will, should have no echo in the other, and they are literally disturbed when they see Saddam playing with them and refusing to accede to their reasons (GW: 37).

Like the Americans' disregard of the symbolic announcement/entrance into war (their lack of an official declaration (GW: 26)), the notion of an enemy that was different from them was inconceivable. They believed in the universality of their values, their means and ends. For them, there was no alternative, no possibility of an outside to their logic.

This lack of an inimical relationship expounds the absence of relationality between Hussein and America. It points to the fact that the war occurred without

bargaining (GW: 40). It occurred without a duel, without exchange (GW: 54). Baudrillard explains,

For the Americans, the enemy does not exist as such. *Nothing personal*. Your war is of no interest to me, your resistance is of no interest to me. I will destroy you when I am ready... The Americans understand nothing in this whole psychodrama of bargaining, they are had every time until, with the wounded pride of the Westerner, they stiffen and impose their conditions. They understand nothing of this floating duel, this passage of arms in which, for a brief moment, the honour and dishonour of each is in play. They know only their virtue, and they are proud of their virtue. If the other wants to play, to trick and to challenge, they will virtuously employ their force... For them, the time of exchange does not exist (GW: 54).

The Gulf War accordingly was witnessed as a war without relations between the two players; it was fought without enemies and fought without war's purposes of domination or conquest (GW: 32). The concept of mutual antagonism and exchange in the realm of war (as in politics) was irrelevant in the construction of this solitary practice of testing (implementing) the model of war without sides. The media upheld this role of America as the police force of the New World Order, where direction came in the form of one-way commands to conform to the parameters of the model.

Controlling the rules of war led the American state to put into operation a form of politics that looked like the practice of missionaries. America was not so much interested in engaging the other (as is typical within political relationships) as in converting the other's logic to their own. Baudrillard states,

... this kind of preventative, deterrent and punitive war is a warning to everyone not to take extreme measures and inflict upon themselves what they inflict on others (the missionary complex): the rule of the game that says everyone must remain within the limits of their power and not make war by any means whatever. Power must remain virtual and exemplary, in other words, virtuous (GW: 56).

Baudrillard is articulating an exclusive and unilateral logic of war. America, in the pursuit of conversion, waged war with the presumptive illusion that both sides would have a similarity of tactics, and mutual ends: a clean war that sought the end of universalization of Western values. They assumed that divergent values and means were irrational and outside the realm of possibility. Accordingly, they fought the war not with an adversary, but self-referentially. They fought against and with an image of their self. This conception of engagement led to solitary political participation: only the US's

politics were rendered legitimate. Saddam's tactics were disregarded. They were dirty and underhanded. Politics, like the war, was waged without contestation; further it was inflicted (imposed) upon the other without exchange or without a relationship. There was no plane of communication for the sides to engage and persuade, as a practice grounded in a traditional conception of politics would have it. Rather, America, with its dependence on the information communicated through media manifested these differences as irreducible, with the American (virtual) system negating any other's challenge.

This understanding of politics, which can occur without regard for the other, which has as the priority its operationalism, is based on an abstract conception of political participation. It needs to be considered abstract because the rhetoric was espoused and circulated, but not practiced. The Americans imposed it, which is in fact a contradiction of the values that they were seeking to spread. It needs to be seen, therefore, that the American military intervention into Iraq was based on the wish to cover the geopolitical world with their model of the virtual, which includes particular political relationships. The Western (American) values of democracy and consensus were assumed to be universally beneficial and it was up to the Americans to liberate the state of Iraq in order for this system to flourish. The end of the political engagement between America and Iraq can be seen as the domestication of Islam. The injection of Western political traditions sought to neutralize the threat of Islam (as a particularity outside of the west), guaranteeing the universality of democracy and consensus. As Baudrillard asserts,

Our wars thus have less to do with the confrontation of warriors than with the domestication of the refractory forces on the planet, those uncontrollable elements as the police would say, to which belong not only Islam in its entirety but wild ethnic groups, minority languages, etc. All that is singular and irreducible must be reduced and absorbed. This is the law of democracy and the New World Order (GW: 86).

The media contributed in this aim of the nullification of Islam through changing the nature of communication and propagating uncertainty in meaning through its viral transmission of information. Thus, along with the model of democracy, which the Americans planned to extend globally, the medium of communication too was being

transposed onto the other. In spreading the virtue of democracy and consensus, the virtuality of information was similarly replicated.

In articulating the hyperreal logic that was at play in the Gulf War, Baudrillard suggests that the Western values of democracy and consensus cast their veil over the globe. In attempting to universalize these modes of engagement, all singularities were neutralized through absorption; all concrete differences were abstracted into virtual elements (sent into orbit to join the circulation of information) that were then erased with the force of the American military (GW: 84; 86). Baudrillard continues,

The Gulf War is the first consensual war, the first war conducted legally and globally with a view to putting an end to war and liquidating any confrontation likely to threaten the henceforward unified system of control. This was already the aim of the dualistic (East and West) deterrence; today we pass to the monopolistic stage under the aegis of American power. Logically, this democratic and consensual form should be able to dispense with war, but it will no doubt continue to have local and episodic need of it. The Gulf War is one of these transitive episodes, hesitating for this reason between hard and soft forms: virtual war or real war? But the balance is in the process of definitively inclining in one direction, and tomorrow there will be nothing but the virtual violence of consensus, the simultaneity in real time of the global consensus: this will happen tomorrow and it will be the beginning of a world with no tomorrow (GW: 84).

In ignoring, and then erasing, local expressions of relationships and modes of exchange, the Americans constructed a form of political participation that proceeded from the sovereignty of their model of politics. In negating exchange with the other (Hussein), in avoiding mutual relationship within the war, America put an end to politics (which was already disappearing for lack of the real). They replaced politics with an abstraction (consensus and democracy) that could be planted down in any context, irrespective of the desires of those within the location, as with Iraq. The Americans tested the model, concluded it is good, and persevered in distributing (enforcing) it throughout the world. Because this was done without relations, done on the basis of imposing abstract conceptions irreconcilably, politics was absent in the Gulf War. By extension, politics is absent in the New World Order, of which the Gulf War was its prologue.

In being a consensual war, political aims were nil in the Gulf. Politics has been concluded, as there was no longer any (desire or need for) contestation. All difference was gone; the sameness of (virtual) consensus was to prevail. Baudrillard summarizes,

Electronic war no longer has any political objective strictly speaking: it functions as a preventative electroshock against any future conflict. Just as in modern communication there is no longer any interlocutor, so in this electronic war there is no longer any enemy, there is only a refractory element which must be neutralised and consensualised. This is what the Americans seek to do, these missionary people bearing electroshocks which will shepherd everybody towards democracy. It is therefore pointless to question the political aims of this war: the only (transpolitical) aim is to align everybody with the global lowest common denominator, the democratic denominator (which, in its extension, approaches ever closer to the degree zero of politics). The lowest common multiplier being information in all its forms, which, as it extends towards infinity, also approaches ever closer to the degree zero of its content. In this sense, consensus as the degree zero of democracy and information as the degree zero of opinion are in total affinity: the New World Order will be both consensual and televisual (GW: 84-85).

For Baudrillard, consensual democracy is the void of politics. It is not based on contestation, which requires the other to be recognized as different. Rather, it is the removal of engagement with the world; "...it [is] our definitive retreat from the world..." (GW: 75). It is the end of politics in that it seeks to make everyone under its banner the same. Information mimics the reductive effect of democracy, as it too no longer communicates. It is the abstraction of the event to sign. Both, thus, exist in an orbit outside the real (the space where action, relations, difference occurs) and they operate with an assumption of a model that will be implemented regardless of fit and effect.

Considering that war is the extreme means of politics, the medium's morphing of the Gulf War into a sign had profound effects. In focusing on images and discourses of tactics, Baudrillard's argument is that politics disappeared. The reality of war was lost in the virtual model. Action was reduced to testing the operability of military capabilities and technique. Politics was further lost with the lack of enemies. Media, in this sense, presented politics as self-referential. America was fighting an illusory opponent, as Saddam was merely an American trained accomplice in the West's attack on the Middle East. Being fought without exchange, only the strategies of the decoy, as manifested in the war's hostages and blackmail, were able to conform to the mode of communication provided in the media. The Gulf War boasted the success of the medium in its implementation of the virtual, along with its practice of deterrence. The New World Order was, thus, without question consummated during the Gulf War. The

relationality of the Cold War was gone, and only the value of democracy (and capitalism along with it) survived. These abstract values of the West all assumed the (policed) force of universality. The difference, the alterity, that it confronted was only informational: it was meaningless and virtual. In not seeking to destroy, in not seeking to confront the other, the logic of the Gulf War was carried out with calculated coolness. The victory was felt with indifference, as what was the case at the beginning of the war, was left virtually the same at its finale. Baudrillard thus concludes that the logic of war that was no longer that of Clausewitz's formula: war was no longer politics pursued by other means. The Gulf War was a non-war because politics had disappeared in the virtual.

IV. Concluding Baudrillard

The real catastrophe of television has been how deeply it has failed to live up to its promise of providing information – its supposed modern function. We dreamed first of giving power – political power – to the imagination, but we dream less and less of this, if indeed at all. The fantasy then shifted on to the media and information. At times we dreamed (at least collectively, even if individually we continue to have no illusions) of finding some freedom there – an openness, a new public space. Such dreams were soon dashed: the media turned out to be much more conformist and servile than expected, at times more servile than the professional politicians.... We are going to end up looking for imagination in places further and further removed from power – from any form of power whatever... (TV: 190)

In his analysis of the Gulf War, Baudrillard articulates that the medium's message was that the world no longer needed to be practiced in terms of relationality, in terms of exchange with the other, in terms of their particularity in reality and truth. Media brought in the era of the virtual and, in doing so, called to an end to what was once known as war, and politics. The relations of the war were a simulation. They were made manifest without exchange, were fought without an enemy and without political aims. The war mimicked fiction; it appeared to have all happened before and its impact as a real event was rendered meaningless through the medium of TV. The model reigned supreme in its abstraction and in its technical operations. If one is to accept the message of the medium, everything has the potential to be a sign, including war. Everything can be consumed. Everything is trapped in the self-referential cycle of simulacra. Reality, truth, and actions are a farce. They are made null and void by hyperreality. Baudrillard therefore points to Gulf War as exemplary of mass media culture's ability to unilaterally impose the virtual, sealing the disappearance of the real, and the political along with it.

Simulation of consumer culture, as a way to understand the war and communication, enabled Baudrillard to provide an analysis of the relationship between media and possibilities for political participation that was different from traditional critiques of media messaging. It points to a change in theorizing that has resulted from a shift in society where universality has been put under question. It contradicts the analysis and critique that Chomsky made in his analysis of the Gulf War. The differences come in the form of their opposing underlying assumption of the nature of the world. Chomsky is a modernist, a rationalist. Baudrillard aims to refute this paradigm. However, both want media to communicate the political differently than it does. Both would prefer a society where political action is possible. The next chapter will try to elucidate Chomsky and Baudrillard's dissimilar ontologies and how they play out in their analysis of media. Further, questions of agency will be addressed to both, with the hope that their diverse analyses will make room for popular political subjectivity and the project of critique.

Chapter 4: Baudrillard and Chomsky: Mediated Knowledge and Possibilities for Political Participation

I. Introduction

This thesis has been grappling with the problem of media and their effect on possibilities for political participation. As the world has become increasingly global the media have taken on a larger role in disseminating information about what is going on, which contributes to creating a space where people have something in common. By assuming such a central position in the construction of knowledge, media have also been charged with encroaching on (traditionally conceived) public space, placing popular political action on ambiguous ground.⁶¹ In trying to understand the effect of mediated knowledge on political participation, three general questions have been haunting this work. These have been: what knowledge is available through the media? How do the media construct knowledge of the political? And, most importantly, what is the effect of mediated knowledge of the political on the possibilities of popular political participation?

In trying to tease apart these questions, the media and political theorists Noam Chomsky and Jean Baudrillard were turned to for possible answers. Five specific questions were asked of their work: what does mediated knowledge look like? What is media's message in regards to the political? What epistemology grounds their consideration of media and politics? What ontology informs their reading of mediated knowledge? And, what are the possibilities for political subjectivity and participation? Writings on the Gulf War have formed the central textual body to elucidate their theoretical perspectives.⁶² Accordingly, in the two preceding chapters, I have attempted to address the first three questions. I have outlined their general epistemologies⁶³, as they were available in their (theoretical-methodological) approach to the analysis of the mediated knowledge of the Gulf War. I have presented how each regarded the knowledge that was made available through the media and how this enabled the media to

⁶¹ See: Taras, David. *Power and Betrayal in the Canadian Media* [Toronto: Broadview Press, Ltd., 1999].

⁶² It should be noted that this thesis has not aimed at understanding either theorist in a holistic manner and the intent of looking primarily at their respective writings on the Gulf War was to directly compare their analysis of the same event and to limit the focus to media and political practices.

⁶³ By epistemology, I am referring to the methodological and analytical approaches to 'knowing' the world. It also implies the nature of truth, and how it can be accessed (or not). This chapter will further the discussion of truth.

posit a particular conception of the political. In describing Chomsky and Baudrillard's theoretical approaches, conclusions about media, and how they affect conceptions of political participation, it became obvious that these are very different theorists. The organization of the previous two chapters tried to reflect this. They were attempts to map out Chomsky and Baudrillard's divergent epistemologies, without imposing on one of them an organizational structure that was more aptly suited for the other. In that sense, I more directly addressed the question of ideological content in the mass media in the chapter on Chomsky. I discussed misrepresentations of the Gulf War and proceeded to outline his methodological framework. In regards to Baudrillard, his more literary style engendered an approach that highlighted his analytical framework in order to situate an ideological shift in culture and reveal the influence of the medium in this shift, without much focus being given to specific images of the Gulf War. The chapters that individually discussed Chomsky and Baudrillard were thus ordered to allow the theorists' own voices to come through by delineating their particularities. In this chapter though, I regain my own voice in pursuing the questions of Baudrillard's and Chomsky's ontologies and what space their analyses provides for political subjectivity. This chapter is my critique. However, first I offer a quick summary of what has been discussed concerning Chomsky and Baudrillard thus far.

A. Recalling the Gulf War: Message and Medium

Chomsky was chosen in this study for his popularity in developing the propaganda model that attacks mass media's complicity with the class interests of the state and corporations. In investigating the representations of the Gulf War, Chomsky described them as another instance of a propaganda campaign. The agenda setting press refrained from their role as facilitators of democracy by obscuring and omitting critical historical, economic, political and social facts that would have provided context regarding the (inevitable) use of state force. As well, the media did not create (or allow) a space of debate for the general population over the necessity of war. As reflected in the mass media's positioning of the war, the political was constructed as state sovereignty that was epitomized in the use of force. Thus mediated knowledge, according to Chomsky, produced an exclusive conception of possibilities for political participation that was contained in the actions of the elite and passivity of the masses.

Chomsky bases his conclusion on the methodology of the propaganda model that interrogates the message of mass media. This analytic approach is rooted in more traditional understandings of the world. His epistemology is reliant on the assumption that facts (and reality) can be experienced, and objectively reported, even though subjectivity, like elite interest and privilege, does mire popular representations of politics in the mass media. In elucidating Chomsky's analysis, I highlighted his critique of the content found in mainstream (print) media and then contrasted it with that which he brings to the fore through the investigation of the alternative news sources. I described his epistemology and critique as dependent on a methodology that was intertextual (in its comparison of the texts) and paradigmatic (in exchanging elite ideology with empirical facts). While Chomsky is certainly not simple in describing and critiquing the mass media, his epistemology can be considered much more common-sensical.⁶⁴ Chomsky is not challenging or shifting the focus of analysis at its foundations. Like the world generally outside of academia, he is grounded in modernist principles. He retains a belief in a factual (independent) reality; he bases his comments within accessible language as a mode of 'translating elite rhetoric into English'; and he accepts traditional categories of truth, even when they have the potential to be disguised within mass media. For all these reasons, with the addition of his immense dedication to issues of social and political justice, Chomsky has been lauded as one of the most influential and outspoken critics from the Left in his attack on US foreign policy and media subservience to this power.

Baudrillard, on the other hand, is a much more elusive theorist. He writes in prose that is riddled with polemics and which jumps between analogies taken from fact and fiction. He has been attacked by the traditional Left for his ambiguity and cynical political position and boosted by popular media as a 'postmodern guru' even though his critiques are partly aimed at the postmodernists and definitely at the media. Regardless of whether it is loved or hated, Baudrillard's work on media has called attention to itself; and, it is emblematic of a particular type of theorizing that justifies his inclusion into this

⁶⁴ I am using the term 'common-sense' to reflect Chomsky's own assertion that the analysis of mass media and ideology that he makes could be done by anyone who has the interest and time. He states, "Everything I have written on these topics could have been written by someone else... Critical analysis in the ideological arena seems to me to be a fairly straightforward matter..." Chomsky, Noam. *Language and Responsibility* [based on conversations with Mitsou Ronat. Trans. John Viertel. New York: Pantheon Books, 1979, originally published in French 1977. Pp. 3]. Hereafter, 'LR'.

study of media and political participation. In exploring Baudrillard's analysis I took a much different approach than with Chomsky. Baudrillard is attempting to overhaul critical analysis of media. He is theorizing a paradigm shift away from a 'naturalized' and taken-for-granted truth and reality. To emphasize this I described his theorization of consumer culture and simulation. I focused on Baudrillard's articulation of the transformation of events, objects, and so on into abstracted signs that then organize, and mediate, relationships through consumption. Further, mass media was seen as central in propagating this social system of reference. The medium induces simulations by emptying signs of their concrete particularities and promoting their exchangeability within a framework of consumption. These simulations operate as a model, divorced from the real, and consequently, are incapable of communicating (under the ideology of) undisputable facts.

Baudrillard's analytical approach was explained as focusing on the medium, which simultaneously refuted the predominance given to the media's content. His argument was that mass media culture's structuring of information had fundamentally changed the way in which events were organized and understood and that regardless of what message they present, it will not operate according to truth. Baudrillard described how the medium, particularly the (electronic) TV, had been shaped by consumer culture and so turns all events into signs to be consumed. This is epitomized in the meaninglessness of (electronic) information that functions with the logic of advertisements, being promotional, aired instantaneously, and judged on the basis of credibility. Baudrillard analyzed the Gulf War for its significance of being predominantly a TV war, and as such, a non-war. It was virtual, testing the operationality of the model (of war), and negated mutualism of battle through its practice of deterrence. The war pointed to the message of the medium: the absence of politics. In conforming to the abstraction of signs in the medium (of TV, of consumer culture), the particularities of the real were erased in the virtual, and relations of exchange ended in the solitariness of a one-sided war. Politics was reduced to the implementation and management of the same: consensual (virtual) democracy. Thus, Baudrillard's articulation of the Gulf War ultimately argued the disappearance of the political, as it was lost in mediation of knowledge.

As Baudrillard and Chomsky have now been considered more or less in terms of their epistemology and their theorizing of media's effects on conceptions of the political two questions remain: those of ontology and political agency. This chapter will seek to address these. I will start by juxtaposing simulation with propaganda in order to elucidate their divergent ontologies. I will argue that Chomsky holds to a modernist ontology that is materialist and rationalist. Conversely, Baudrillard can be categorized more under the rubric of postmodernism, which refutes universalism both in terms of reality and truth. These understandings of the world organize how the two articulate political subjectivity and agency. I will suggest that neither has as a strong point the positioning of possibilities for political participation. Chomsky's analysis sees people as veiled in elite ideology and ignorant (of this fact). Baudrillard sees people as indifferent. Both are negations of agency in mediated political culture. Following this critique, I will suggest, however, that synthesizing Baudrillard's and Chomsky's analysis can enable a better understanding of the layered reality of society that can inform a political project of critique against mediated knowledge. I will conclude with possibilities for further studies to address political participation where critique, grounded in a non-fixed foundational (political) space of contestation, could challenge the media to open space for political communication and action.

II. Ontological Assumptions: Simulation and Propaganda

In discussing the Gulf War, Baudrillard and Chomsky directed their critiques at the mass media. Both agreed that in the coverage of the war something was being masked. Their analysis aimed at explicating this deception; both elucidated ideology.⁶⁵ Chomsky was mapping out the ideological message that was particular to the dominant media, whereas Baudrillard was sketching principal ideological changes that had ripped throughout society, encompassed especially in mass media. Chomsky argued that the mass media was presenting the particular ideology of the elite, while purporting to be objective. The facts about the world were skewed in the content of news. Truth about the reality of the war was known, but was being covered up. Baudrillard, on the other

⁶⁵ While recognizing that 'ideology' is a highly nuanced concept, I am using it in the more common sense way; which is defined in the dictionary as 'a system of ideas or way of thinking' (COD: 1998). However, it is recognized that this does also have class connotations, particularly in Chomsky's analysis. This will be acknowledged accordingly.

hand, saw the cover-up in the (ideological) disappearance of truth and reality. The media rest within an ideological foundation of society that fundamentally shifts how communication is understood and practiced. The medium of mass media obscures the logic of consumer culture that depended on transformation of the real into the sign. In pursuing their different critiques, Baudrillard and Chomsky's epistemologies prompted different sites of analysis and different conclusions. Chomsky looked at the message presented by the mass media and saw propaganda. Baudrillard looked to the medium's structuring of information and saw simulation.

Baudrillard's and Chomsky's individual epistemologies and perceptions of the ideology within the mass media are predicated on different ontological assumptions.⁶⁶ Chomsky's articulation of propaganda finds resonance in the Enlightenment principles of materialism and rationalism. This ontology suggests that Chomsky's analysis presumes a reality external to the mind (materialism)⁶⁷ and that humans all have an innate ability to reason (rationalism)⁶⁸. Both of these assumptions are in play in Chomsky's epistemology that is empirical, in that knowledge is gained through sense observation, and that truth is accessible to all through using their deductive (or common logical) powers. In other words, Chomsky speaks of knowable facts that are based in a universal reality. Chomsky therefore discusses the illusion (of truth and reality) created by propaganda. Baudrillard's ontology is harder to pinpoint by what it is for and can be better understood in what it opposes. He has attacked structuralism, Marxism, semiology, psychoanalysis, sociology, and feminism; yet, he can be considered a moralist in that he pursues a particular organization of life that is grounded in a sense of good and bad.⁶⁹ Effectively, Baudrillard's ontology refutes the conception of the nature of being and reality that is based on an objective material world. Facts are not apparent in themselves, but are

⁶⁶ By ontology, I mean the ways in which the nature of being is understood. It also contains assumptions about reality.

⁶⁷ This understanding of 'materialism' is taken from *A Dictionary of Cultural and Critical Theory* [ed. Michael Payne. Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1996. Pp. 336-340. Entry by M.A.R. Habib].

⁶⁸ This understanding of 'rationalism' is taken from the *Dictionary of Philosophy* [ed. Dagobert D. Runes. Littlefield: Adams Quality Paperbacks, 1983. Pp. 280].

⁶⁹ This outline of Baudrillard's theoretical criticism is borrowed from *Introducing Baudrillard*. The moralism that Baudrillard proposes rests in the concept of 'symbolic exchange,' which would be based in an exchange that is irreducible, objects that are singular and not abstract, and that would hold the participants in relations of open-ended obligation and responsibility to each other [Horrock and Jetvic. *Introducing Baudrillard*, Cambridge, UK: Icon Books, 1997. Pp. 32-39]. Hereafter, 'IB'.

shaped through discourses. He is 'postmodern'⁷⁰ in the sense that he does not believe in universalism and grand narratives that are grounded in transcendental claims of nature and truth. Baudrillard could be considered ontologically relativistic in that he highlights the fluidity of reality that is dependent upon cultural constructs and history. This is all a little ambiguous though because Baudrillard's theoretical assumptions have constantly changed throughout his writing. However, I will suggest that primarily Baudrillard's ontology is anti-universalistic and skeptical. In other words, reality is not stable and independent truth is impossible. Both of these ontological claims are apparent in Baudrillard's articulation of simulation. In rethinking Chomsky's and Baudrillard's respective notions of propaganda and simulations, I will weave an argument about ontology and epistemology as they relate to the possibilities for truth and reality. I will elucidate these concepts to better situate how political projects, such as critique, can be launched in an era of mediated knowledge.

Chomsky's analysis of media is rooted in a project of anarcho-syndicalism.⁷¹ He critiques the media in the pursuit of democracy that is under the control of the people of the society. The mass media, within contemporary capitalist society, do not facilitate this freedom of the people. Under the aegis of the state (along with fellow corporations), the mass media present a particular conception of the world that instills the values of the elite to ensure that their privilege is maintained. This manipulation of truth and reality Chomsky calls propaganda. It is propaganda in the sense that the information within mass media does not reflect what is actually going on in the world, it refrains from presenting facts that go against elite ideology, and it controls public discourse. Mass

⁷⁰ I am calling Baudrillard's work 'postmodern', but he himself, does not ascribe the label to it (IB: 171).

⁷¹ Anarcho-syndicalism refers to a branch of anarchism that believes in a non-hierarchical way of acting, thinking and relating to other people, which also privileges small communal living centred around community and work (John Maher and Judy Groves. *Chomsky for Beginners* [Cambridge, UK: Icon Books, Ltd., 1996. Pp. 135]. Hereafter, 'CB'). Chomsky further describes, "Now a federated, decentralised system of free associations, incorporating economic as well as other social institutions, would be what I refer to as anarcho-syndicalism; and it seems to me that this is the appropriate form of social organisation for an advanced technological society, in which human beings do *not* have to be forced into the position of tools, of cogs in the machine. There is no longer any social necessity for human beings to be treated as mechanical elements in the productive process; that can be overcome and we must overcome it by a society of freedom and free association, in which the creative urge that I consider intrinsic to human nature, will in fact be able to realise itself in what way it will" (Chomsky, Noam and Michel Foucault. "Human Nature: Justice versus Power," in *Reflexive Water: The Basic Concerns of Mankind* [ed. Fons Elders. London, UK: Souvenir Press (Educational and Academic) Ltd., 1974. Pp. 169-170]. Hereafter, 'HN').

media, then, are able to create and maintain a picture of the world that contradicts truth and reality, as they exist outside the medium. Chomsky argues,

Perhaps this is an obvious point, but the democratic postulate is that the media are independent and committed to discovering and reporting the truth, and that they do not merely reflect the world as powerful groups wish it to be perceived... If, however, the powerful are able to fix the premises of discourse, to decide what the general populace is allowed to see, hear, and think about, and to 'manage' public opinion by regular propaganda campaigns, the standard view of how the system works is at serious odds with reality.⁷²

In analyzing the Gulf War, Chomsky made it evident that the content of the mass media did diverge from empirical facts. He demonstrated that propaganda was at work, as discourse in the mass media disseminated the perspectives and values of the elite, in this case, those of the American state. The media were biased to a particular ideology showing why so much political, economic, and historical context was missing in the news leading up to and during the Gulf War. Chomsky's elucidation of the schism between content and context depends on the externality of reality and truth.

The articulation of propaganda reflects Chomsky's assumptions of materialism and rationalism.⁷³ Chomsky believes that the basis for knowledge is outside human subjectivity. True knowledge stems from objective witnessing, based on the principles of scientific method that privilege sensory experience as recorded by disinterested observers, at least in the context of news reporting. Accordingly, truth is self-evident, as facts are permanent and observable, existing in a tangible and external reality.⁷⁴ The tenet of a transparency of facts can be seen as Chomsky summarizes the US motivation for military escalation in Iraq. He asserts, "Whether a Third World leader is a thug or an angel is irrelevant. If he's his own angel, then he has to go, too. That's the way I would read the evidence..."; revealing the assumptions of truth, he continues, "This is a very

⁷² Herman, Edward S. and Noam Chomsky. *Manufacturing Consent: the Political Economy of the Mass Media* [New York: Pantheon Books, 1988. Pp. I]. Hereafter, 'MC'.

⁷³ I want to acknowledge that the ontology that I attribute to Chomsky is taken strictly from his writings on mass media and American foreign policy, and could best be described as an 'operational ontology'. I further understand that Chomsky has richer descriptions of truth and reality in his work on linguistics. However, the aim of this thesis is to understand and compare different analysis of mass media and as Chomsky does not recognize an easy crossover between his political work and his linguistic work (LR: 3), I too will not make that leap. Further, Chomsky makes it explicit that the type of analysis that he performs regarding media and ideology does not require sophisticated training, which suggests to this reader that reference to his academic pursuits in linguistic is not needed to understand this other aspect of his work.

⁷⁴ Truth, it must be remembered, is not necessarily pursued by mass media because of their other (political and economic) interests.

conservative interpretation, just as I assume the facts are as they appear to be on the surface".⁷⁵ It is surface that contains truth, not the subsequent mode of interpretation. In truth being palpable, Chomsky positions propaganda to be an active manipulation of an empirical reality. It is the imposition of a particular ideology onto the facts through presenting the world according to one perspective that is represented as objective. Truth, as understood by Chomsky, then reflects a basic (observable) reality that is free of (subjective) human interpretation.

Propaganda underscores Chomsky's acceptance of a duality of social reality and knowledge: that which is empirically founded and that which is ideological. As already suggested, Chomsky assumes that truth and reality are knowable (empirically); they exist independently of human thought and action. Conversely, ideology manifests itself in an 'interested' interpretation of the empirical world. Chomsky is relying on the claim that disinterest (otherwise known as objectivity) in the knowledge-event is what allows for access to the truth of the situation. This is rational inquiry free of subjectivity. This conflict between truth/objectivity and ideology/subjectivity can be found in Chomsky's assertion that corporate media are serving elite interest (ideology), while ignoring the facts (truth). Hence, Chomsky asserts,

Of course everybody with their eyes open can see that the United States is one of the major violators of the principle that aggression is wrong, so that's not an issue. As to borders, same thing... It's almost unfair to call this hypocrisy because it's so transparent.⁷⁶

As implied in this statement, it is not that truth is hard to 'see', as it is an external fact that is accessible to all capable of objectivity; however, this 'disinterest' is not necessarily a characteristic of corporate media. Chomsky bifurcates knowledge through its proximity to power, observing that "After all, that's [the mass media's] job: to serve power, not tell the truth".⁷⁷ He explains,

...[the mass media] serve to mobilize support for the special interests that dominate the state and private activity, and that their choices, emphases, and

⁷⁵Chomsky, Noam. "The Global Protection Racket: Reflections on the Gulf War," in *Chronicles of Dissent: Noam Chomsky Interviewed by David Barsamian* [Vancouver: New Star Books, 1992. Pp. 229]. Hereafter, 'GPR'.

⁷⁶Chomsky, Noam. "World Orders: Old and New," in *Chronicles of Dissent: Noam Chomsky Interviewed by David Barsamian* [Vancouver: New Star Books, 1992. Pp. 204]. Hereafter, 'WO'.

⁷⁷Chomsky, Noam. "Prelude to the Gulf War," in *Chronicles of Dissent: Noam Chomsky Interviewed by David Barsamian* [Vancouver: New Star Books, 1992. Pp. 198]. Hereafter, 'PGW'.

omissions can often be understood best... by analyzing them in such terms (MC: xi).

In comparing these two statements - the readily available knowledge of US aggression and the media's servitude to private interest - there is evidence of Chomsky's rational and material lineage. He attests that truthful facts are external (found both empirically and textually) and accessible to all that are committed to rational inquiry and analysis in the service of disinterested public knowledge: as he implies, 'Truth' is free to 'everybody with their eyes open'.

However, the problem in democratic societies, societies that are capitalistic, is that objectivity is replaced by subjectivity in the form of service to private interest. In studying the mass media, Chomsky describes that ideology resides in the classed interest of the ruling elites to have all conceptual analysis of empirical knowledge encompassed within its own perspective that privileges capitalist economic relations, individualism, and deference of expertise to authority. This presentation of truth-reality fosters the type of 'directed' democracy that Chomsky describes- the one that turns the majority of citizens into spectators of the political. While Chomsky does not problematize 'truth' as a concept (or expectation), he is arguing that it is not always known. By controlling the means of communication, Chomsky is asserting that the elite propagate their values and ontology as natural and common sense, while subordinating those that conflict with it as unfounded and outside the realm of possibility. Ideology is an element in class conflict, where there is the need to structure reality according the interests of one group to the disadvantage of the other. Thus, the ability to tell the truth (to report empirical fact) tends to be outside of the realm of possibility for corporate producers of knowledge because they subscribe to the capitalist values of individual accumulation and private interest over the public good of truth.

The reporting of truth, however, is open in other locations for those that are removed from the controls of state power. These people are presumably disinterested, where interest refers to the desires of the American state to have its foreign policy known in a particular way. Chomsky states, "Overseas, simple truths could be perceived outside of the major power center, where deviation from established truths is too dangerous".⁷⁸

⁷⁸Chomsky, Noam. *Detering Democracy* [New York: Hill and Wang, 1992. Pp. 187]. Hereafter, 'DD'.

Reporters and such are able to observe (and presumably experience) the truth, from an uncontested empirical manifestation. This manifestation includes the textual, alongside the material, as journalism requires both avenues of sources. Access to this information is logically how it is possible for journalism in one nation, in one medium, et cetera to be capable of reporting the 'crucial facts'. The facts are not subject to interpretation, but are somehow self-evident. According to this line of argument, truth is knowable, and by extension journalism is a practice of merely reflecting the facts from its manifestation, but this is not sought or reported in mass media. It is the class bias that distorts the communication of truth from its observable empirical manifestation to its end in the audience's consumption. Chomsky, thus, is assuming that there is a surface truth that can be witnessed by all, though not necessarily shared with all. It would appear that Chomsky sees that any pressure and influence by the elite is all that is needed to prevent facts, or at least the wrong facts, from surfacing in the mass media.

Chomsky's articulation of an empirical reality that emits truth and the possibility of propaganda is embedded in the assumption of universal rationality. It is the claim that there is a truth that can be known if witnessed (materially and textually). This premise is based on the belief that all people are rational, stemming from shared cognitive patterns that enable everyone to interpret the event, and world, similarly. Chomsky states,

In the analysis of social and political issues it is sufficient to face the facts and to be willing to follow a rational line of argument. Only Cartesian common sense, which is quite evenly distributed, is needed... if by that you understand the willingness to look at the facts with an open mind, to put simple assumptions to the test, and to pursue an argument to its conclusion (LR: 5).

Chomsky is assuming that this rationality is abstracted from the individual and where simple logical deductions are capable of manifesting itself in each individual in a similar way. However, in being abstracted as a 'universal', this conception of impartiality ('facing the facts') makes no allowances for unique subjectivity, different socialized values, or ethnic, social, political, economic location, along with a host of other differentiations amongst people of the world. Connected with the understanding that facts are transparent (even though one has to look outside the mass media to find them), Chomsky evades the harder analytical questions of why it is that the world is not understood the same. To suggest that propaganda is the dominant factor in the different

perspectives and interpretations of the world is too simple an answer. Other factors shape a person's understandings of the world, which exist both internally and externally. It is not a matter that one will see the world solely in the way that the powerful will describe. Questions of value and the good life need to also be addressed then that do not reduce the differences to dichotomies of right-left, masses-elite, or enlightened-ignorant.

Chomsky's appeal to common-sense truth is also insensitive to the construction of universal rationality as historically based. Universal 'truth' has been dependent on the notion of objectivity, which I suggest grounds Chomsky's assessment of propaganda. As well, it assumes that interest is specific to particular groups where there is the possibility of some being disinterested. This is not the case. Everyone is interested, but not in the same ways or for the same reasons. For example, Chomsky has his own interests in creating an anarcho-syndicalist world, which many people who even have similar values as Chomsky would not choose to pursue. While Chomsky may be able to accurately state that mass media reports in the interest of capitalist state, which is termed 'propaganda', he is blind to the fact that claims of 'objectivity' and 'disinterest' in reporting truth has been the privilege of very specific bodies. Donna Haraway provides a critique of this thinking about the objective 'witness' within science (the matrix of truth-rationality). Recalling science historically, she begins, "'His' subjectivity is his objectivity. His narratives have a magical power--they lose all trace of their history as stories, as products of partisan projects, as contestable representations, or as constructed documents in their potent capacity to define the facts".⁷⁹ 'His objectivity', while not referring specifically to Chomsky, is making explicit the gendered history of the practice and participants of science. Haraway continues, "Only through ... naked writing could the facts shine through, unclouded by the flourishes of any human author. Both the facts and the witnesses inhabit the privileged zones of 'objective' reality through a powerful writing technology" (MW: 26). Furthering the exclusionary grounding of the assumption of objectivity, she explains,

Enhancing their agency through their masculine virtue exercised in carefully regulated 'public' spaces, modest men were self-invisible, transparent, so that their reports would not be polluted by the body... Colored, sexed, and labouring

⁷⁹ All references taken from *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan©_Meets_OncoMouse™: Feminism and Technoscience* [New York: Routledge, 1997. Pp. 24]. Hereafter, 'MW'.

persons still have to do a lot of work to become similarly transparent to count as objective, modest witnesses to the world rather than to their 'bias' or 'special interest' (MW: 32).

This universalism of rationality, encapsulated in the transparent notion of objectivity, has elsewhere been deconstructed and critiqued ad nauseam.⁸⁰ To restate this critique against universal rationality: the appeal to universalism subsumes difference, masks subjectivity, and is inherently imperialistic. I want to be clear, though, that it is not in Chomsky's description of mass media's positioning of knowledge regarding American foreign policy where offence is found. Rather, it is in the anchoring of the facts to an obvious truth that merely depends on an 'open', 'common sense' and 'rational' mind that is problematic. It is a reduction of the possibilities of knowledges that ignores that all claims of truth are an exercise of power.⁸¹ By appealing to a decontextualized conception of rationality, the maintenance of universality also lacks rigor in analysis since one perspective (if unfettered from bodily and emotional trappings) is capable of fact, since the 'One' of rationality can speak for all.⁸² All those unable to reach the same facts, the same conclusions, the same truth, are excluded and tend to be charged with innate inabilities to rationalize. While Chomsky does not directly make these claims, as he is critiquing the biased power of media and the state that silences marginalized voices, they are implicit in his assumption of objectivity, where the mass media are not reporting the 'facts' and the American population does not know the facts. Therefore, because Chomsky's political rhetoric quickly turns polemical with phrases such as 'eyes open', 'obvious', 'enlightenment', and so on, he unnecessarily limits what is possible to speak about and who is able to speak.

This critique of Chomsky's ontological assumptions of truth, objectivity, and a universal reality may seem rather harsh in light of his reputation in attacking the

⁸⁰ Feminists, postcolonial theorists, and others have charged this assumption of universal rationality as imperial, patriarchal and so on. For example, see Haraway, Donna. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* [New York: Routledge, 1991:183-202]; Hill Collins, Patricia. *Black Feminist Thought, 2nd Edition* [New York: Routledge, 2000, 1990]; and Said, Edward W. *Orientalism* [New York: Random House, 1978].

⁸¹ Foucault, Michel. "What is Critique?" in *The Politics of Truth* [New York: Semiotext(e). Pp. 66].

⁸² The 'one' of rationality also tends to reflect a methodology that uses a particular paradigm regardless of the context, which Foucault suggested limits the ability to see difference and discontinuity of empirical singularities. See Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge* [trans. A.M Sheridan Smith. London, UK: Routledge, 2001, 1972, originally published in French, 1969].

American state's injustices and inequalities. His dedication to social causes and commitment to anarcho-syndicalism's anti-authoritarianism would suggest that he would disagree that he holds the belief in an exclusive privileged knower. However, by constructing a (hierarchical) dualism of knowledge, between truth and propaganda, Chomsky is falling into a history that marks particular bodies and ways of thinking as rational and objective, and others as not. The critique launched against the dominant class as interested is as subjective a claim as those that Chomsky terms propaganda, even if the means and ends are different. He is of course using the concept of propaganda to enable more freedom of expression in the press, which could possibly engender more inclusive political participation, yet he does not reflect back on the assumptions that hold up his values. One has to be careful of the ground from which critique is built. Truth and reality that depend on a naturalized and assumed universalism make the author of these less conscious of the fact that essentializing the world, in making it appear as 'commonsense' or its concept as 'taken for granted', is also a privilege, that historically (and presently) is of the few. While 'the few' have not necessarily included critics such as Chomsky, the analytical move to close dialogue with assertions of truth restricts what can be discussed, what questions are valid, and excludes those outside of these set parameters. So while Chomsky is trying to force the recognition of bias, of the elite class's interest in mass media's representations, he is not challenging the exclusivity of the notion of universalism (of objectivity, of reality) that infects all knowledge claims of truth, both those that favour the status quo and those that critique it.⁸³

Baudrillard's stance on the nature of truth and reality is fundamentally opposed to that of Chomsky. In articulating simulation, Baudrillard is challenging the belief that the world is structured in accordance with a universal reality and an accessible truth. He argues, rather, that truth and reality have disappeared. In pointing out that consumer culture no longer relies on a natural link between sign and referent (real world truth), Baudrillard is arguing that contemporary culture is predicated on the arbitrariness of the sign. Signs are based on the abstraction of the real to the extreme that they are emptied of all their concrete attributes. Signs function on the level of connotation (and of status)

⁸³ I am not saying that there is no way of having more accurate truth or that there is no reality that is shared amongst participants in the world. There is, but if inclusivity is an aim, these concepts need to come under scrutiny. I will return to this in more depth later in the chapter.

where meaning boils to the surface and is siphoned off. This facilitates the sign's ability to be set within a seriality, to be exchanged, and ultimately, to be consumed. The logic of the sign, for Baudrillard, does not rest on a solid ground. It is opposed to universalism in the sense that it cannot represent an absolute truth. The surface of the sign smoothes the depth of the particularities of realness and the transcendence of truth. Truth and reality are negated in consumer culture's virtualism. All signs are in reference with other signs, not with nature, use-values, or other essentialized constructs. The virtual promotes undecideability in pursuing consumption, which makes the meaning of the sign implode. This is the immanence and skepticism of theorizing through the virtual.

The logic of the virtual has made obsolete the logic of the real; however, Baudrillard suggests, it is the desire to represent the real that inaugurated the virtual. Consumer culture has left nothing to the imagination, to the symbolic. In making everything capable of producing meaning infinitely (connotation), Baudrillard is arguing that the transparency of the sign dissolves the realness of the real (particularities). Baudrillard states, "It is no longer the obscenity of the hidden, the repressed, the obscure, but that of the visible, the all-too-visible, the more-visible-than-visible; it is the obscenity of that which no longer contains a secret and is entirely soluble in information and communication".⁸⁴ The sign erases the singularity of the referent in the real. It implodes the transcendence of truth in making everything transparent, making everything available (to consume). Nothing has been left unspoken, concealed, as can be seen with the (public) interest with (the private-ness of) sex, death, and violence: all those things that previously were left silent (secret) now speak endlessly. Everything real is available in the virtual, and is made even more real than the real. It is made hyperreal. This is including the desire for actions. Baudrillard observes,

It seems that this obsession with the passage to action today governs all our behaviour: obsession with every real, with every real event, with every real violence, with every pleasure which is too real. Against this obsession with the real we have created a gigantic apparatus of simulation which allows us to pass to the act 'in vitro' (this is true even of procreation). We prefer the exile of the

⁸⁴ Baudrillard, Jean. *The Ecstasy of Communication* [trans. Bernard and Caroline Schutze, ed. Sylvere Lotringer. New York: Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents Series, 1988, originally published in French. Pp. 22]. Hereafter, 'EC'.

virtual, of which television is the universal mirror, to the catastrophe of the real.⁸⁵

The medium has drawn out all objects from obscurity. It has brought everything of the real, of imagination, of fantasy to the screen (for consumption). However, it is in bringing everything to the surface that truth, as fixed meaning, is impossible. On the surface, everything is opened for interpretation, and on the surface no interpretation can stick.

The skepticism and immanence of Baudrillard's ontology work on the level of interpretation's uncertainty. Interpretation is the simulation of the real and information is the simulation of truth. Meaning, accompanied by its counter-meaning, simultaneously circulates within the proliferation of interpretation. Its contradictory nature is symptomatic of the undecideability of signs (objects, events, relations, etc). Within consumer culture's abstraction, conclusive ground, such as the real and truth, cannot be found. Baudrillard explains, "Today every event is virtually without consequences, it is open to all possible interpretations, none of which can fix meaning: the equiprobability of every cause and of every consequence – a multiple and aleatory ascription".⁸⁶ In negating an absolute reality or a truth that can be pinpointed, interpretation expounds the uncertainty of simulation. It opens the door to skepticism. This allows Baudrillard to comment,

Is any given bombing in Italy the work of leftist extremists, or extreme-right provocation, or a centrist mise-en-scene to discredit all extreme terrorists and to shore up its own failing power or again, is it a police-inspired scenario and a form of blackmail to public security? All of this is simultaneously true, and the search for proof, indeed the objectivity of the facts does not put an end to this vertigo of interpretation. That is, we are in a logic of simulation, which no longer has anything to do with a logic of facts and an order of reason. Simulation is characterized by a *precession of the model*, of all the models based on the merest fact- the models come first, their circulation, orbital like that of the bomb, constitutes the genuine magnetic field of the event.⁸⁷

⁸⁵Baudrillard, Jean. *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* [trans. Paul Patton. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995, originally published in French, 1991. Pp. 28]. Hereafter, 'GW'.

⁸⁶Baudrillard, Jean. "Fatal Strategies," (exert) in *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings, 2nd Edition* [trans. Jacques Murrain, ed. Mark Poster. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001. Pp. 196]. Hereafter, 'JB/FS'.

⁸⁷Baudrillard, Jean. "The Precession of Simulacra," in *Simulacra and Simulation* [trans. Sheila Faria Glaser. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994, originally published in French, 1981. Pp. 16]. Hereafter, 'PS'.

In the sign (information, images, etc.) being merely a model of the event (with no presumption of pure fact), the virtual is without certainty and interpretations are without obligation of representing the truth; consequently, any interpretation can be posed with some degree of credibility, or they can at least speculate.

The vacant model is the (anti-)ideological reference point of mass media society. The model has no truth in and of itself. It is filled with the infinite potentials of the consumer. The model is not transcendent; it is operational. Its function is not to represent but to simulate. By comparing the notion of representation as it pertains to the real and to the virtual, Baudrillard exposes the crux of meaning to be the status of the sign. He explains,

All Western faith and good faith become engaged in this wager on representation: that a sign could refer to the depth of meaning, that a sign could be exchanged for meaning and that something could guarantee this exchange—God of course. But what if God himself can be simulated, that is to say can be reduced to the signs that constitutes faith? Then the whole system becomes weightless, it is no longer itself anything but a gigantic simulacrum—not unreal, but a simulacrum, that is to say never exchanged for the real, but exchanged for itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference. Such is simulation, insofar as it is opposed to representation. Representation stems from the principle of the equivalence of the sign and of the real (even if this equivalence is utopian, it is a fundamental axiom). Simulation, on the contrary, stems from the utopia of the principle of equivalence, *from the radical negation of the sign as value*, from the sign as the reversion and death sentence of every reference. Whereas representation attempts to absorb simulation by interpreting it as a false representation, simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation itself as a simulacrum (PS: 6).

The sign cannot represent; that is, it does not stand in for a real, or an unreal, it refers to itself as sign. It operates only as a model in the virtual, freed of both realness and truth.

Within the order to simulacra (the virtual), the distinction of true and false becomes blurred. They are no longer distinguishable. Simulations/signs can be judged neither in terms of truth nor falsity. Information, as a sign within media, is beyond the logic of the real and truth. It can be judged only according to credibility. Signs therefore carry no absolute meaning. The sign's message is the medium as message. It is the end of the ideology of universal truth. Baudrillard attests,

...the medium is the message not only signifies the end of the message, but also the end of the medium. There are no more media in the literal sense of the word

(I'm speaking particularly of electronic mass media)—that is, of a mediating power between one reality and another, between one state of the real and another. Neither in content, nor in form. Strictly, this is what implosion signifies. The absorption of one pole into another, the short-circuiting between poles of every differential system of meaning, the erasure of distinct terms and oppositions, including that of the medium and the real—thus the impossibility of any mediation, of any dialectical intervention between two or from one to the other. Circularity of all media effects. Hence the impossibility of meaning in the literal sense of a unilateral vector that goes from one pole to another. One must envisage this critical but original situation at its very limit: it is the only one left us. It is useless to dream of revolution through content, useless to dream of a revelation through form, because the medium and the real are now in a single nebula whose truth is indecipherable.⁸⁸

The medium of mass media has spread the message of simulation. There is no meaning in content. Baudrillard is arguing that simulation challenges the conventional model of reality through exorcising the particulars of the real and truth into the virtual. The medium of communication orders signs according to the logic of advertisements and makes information *immediately* available, collapsing the binaries of real/imaginary and true/false. The proliferation of images, as opposed to events, marked the absence of (f)acts in the virtual. Truth is lost in the details.

In holding an ontology that is opposed to universals and that is skeptical, Baudrillard is attacking those that believe in the stability, the innateness, of the real and truth. He suggests that to keep critique confined within the ideology of the real is to perpetuate the succession of the virtual over the real (in not noticing that signs are not operating in ways in which they once were believed to operate) and to further divest the loss of action in hyperreality. This was the case with critique of the mass media's representations of the Gulf War. By having argued that simulation was the mode in which the Gulf War must be understood, Baudrillard denounces those that read this event from the perspective of the real, who simply point to the abuse of power on the part of the United States' government. He is countering the critique by theorists, such as Chomsky, who condemned the war through reference to the misrepresentations of the facts. The virtual has no room for the transcendence of truth or propaganda. Baudrillard's analysis

⁸⁸Baudrillard, Jean. "The Implosion of Meaning in the Media," in *Simulacra and Simulation* [trans. Sheila Faria Glaser. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994, originally published in French, 1981: Pp. 82-83]. Hereafter, 'IMM'.

argues that to critique the message, to the exclusion of the messenger, negates the significance of the medium itself. He asserts,

The Gulf War merely accentuated the disastrous impression of our having been drawn so far into simulation that the question of truth and reality cannot even be posed, of our having been drawn so far into the 'liberation' of the medium and the image that the question of freedom cannot even be posed. But can news and the media really be put on trial now? Absolutely not, for the simple reason that the media themselves hold the key to the judicial enquiry. There can be no contesting their innocence since 'disinformation' is always imputed to an accident of news-gathering [information]; the guiding principle itself is never questioned.⁸⁹

Lamenting the real of the war coverage contributes to positioning information (that which is reported, commented, speculated) as paramount, as more important than the 'real' event (that which is occurring in the material world). It furthered the notion that the medium of television could be honest and that only the content was untruthful. However, all meaning is already tainted and cast as a simulacrum of the event (of the real) within the medium. Not attacking the medium (of the war) was to presume a truth, when only the contradiction of images and their interpretation were aired in the mass media. Baudrillard continues,

There is no interrogation into the event itself or its reality; or into the fraudulence of this war, the programmed and always delayed amplification by information, not to mention the improbable orgy of material, the systematic manipulation of data, the artificial dramatisation... It we do not have practical intelligence about the war (and none among us had), at least let us have a sceptical intelligence towards it, without renouncing the pathetic feeling of its absurdity (GW: 58).

Baudrillard is arguing that these critics are missing the novelty of the Gulf War, by only seeing and condemning the event that was offered in the content of mass media. The Gulf War, like all simulations, did not operate in correspondence with the ideology of reality or truth. It was an event in the virtual. It was a simulation and through its means of communication it existed only as interpretation, not as representation. To ignore the foundational changes that have accompanied consumer culture is to be unable to understand the (un)real significance of the Gulf War, as hyperreality's victim.

Baudrillard's assessment of the war is emblematic of an ontology that is anti-universal and skeptical. Baudrillard asserts that the virtual has done away with the real

⁸⁹Baudrillard, Jean. *The Illusion of the End* [trans. Chris Turner. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1994, originally published in French, 1992. Pp. 60]. Hereafter, 'IE'.

and with truth. Baudrillard claims, "The closer we supposedly approach the real or the truth, the further we draw away from them both, since neither one nor the other exists" (GW: 49). He also argues,

Everything which constitutes an event today is done against the universal, against that abstract universality... If we will not understand this, then we will be caught up in an endless and pointless wrangle between a universal thought assured of its power and good conscience and an ever greater number of implacable singularities.⁹⁰

He thus advises (in relation to simulations like the war),

Resist the probability of any image or information whatever. Be more virtual than events themselves, do not seek to re-establish the truth, we do not have the means, but do not be duped, and to that end re-immerses the war and all information in the virtuality from whence they come. Turn deterrence back against itself. Be meteorologically sensitive to stupidity (GW: 67).

Baudrillard's ontology can help to make the critic sensitive to 'stupidity', in that he is breaking out of the common mode of theorizing that defaults to categories of the universal, without regarding events in their particularities. Universalism, as was suggested in the critique of Chomsky's ontological assumption of rationality, is exclusive. It presumes a nature that covers up historical and cultural difference and privilege. Having a truth that is not essentialized is a strength of Baudrillard's assumptions and analysis of the virtual.

What is problematic in Baudrillard's analysis of the virtual character of mass media is the absolute dismissal of the real. The real does not operate with some sort of transcendence, which Baudrillard rightly suggests. However, to place the virtual outside of reality is a misnomer. Reality is created and maintained by people, not through a construct such as the virtual. As Ursula Franklin observes,

One of my comments had been that human beings, their communities and histories, as well as the biosphere and its complexity do still exist. Fascination with new technologies can change the focus on our perceptions of what is actual and real. Sometimes I have to remind myself that after all one does not bump into a website when walking the dog, though one may meet the neighbours and talk about the potholes in the street.⁹¹

⁹⁰Baudrillard, Jean. "The Global and the Universal," in *Screened Out* [trans. Chris Turner. London, UK: Verso, 2002, originally published in French, 2000. Pp. 158]. Hereafter, 'GU'.

⁹¹Franklin, Ursula M. *The Real World of Technology, Revised Edition* [Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1999, 1990. Pp. 157].

Baudrillard is similarly critiquing the abstraction of consumer culture in transforming a particular into a (universal) sign, yet he performs the same abstraction in giving weight only to the virtual as the system of reference of mass media society. If the virtual is a way to theorize current communication, if it is targeting primarily electronic mass media, it needs to be stated that people do exist outside the virtual, whether it be when they interact with those physically in their proximity, or when they create, or simply when the TV is turned off. Further, it is obscure within Baudrillard's various writings what has caused the virtual to (irreversibly) exceed the real, to understand what is the a priori of the sign that had made the definitive break from the lived world. Is it the theorizing that pointed to the lack of universal in the middle half of the 20th century that de-essentialized the relationship between signified and signifier? Is it consumer culture? Is it global capitalism? Is it the electronic medium of TV? The answer is uncertain. It may be a fault of mine to want to seek an origin to this break, but if interpretation is the mode of untruth in the virtual, perhaps, the unreality of Baudrillard's tautology needs to be brought to the fore with my own skepticism. Consumer culture produces the condition of possibility for the sign. The sign produces the condition of possibility for consumer culture. Mass media is created and creates both. I am not a logician, but this equation does not make sense. It is circular and assumes the virtual to be self-contained and omnipotent. It gives a social construct autonomy from human agents.

Baudrillard, of course, is hyperbolizing the effects of mass media in saying there is no more reality. He is playing with tropes to take the logic of media to its extreme. Yet, if people are unequally affected by the logic (virtual or real) it should be taken more seriously. Just as a critique of universal truth exaggerates Chomsky's assumptions of rationality and materiality, it does indicate that the ontological foundations of the concepts used must be stated with care. Baudrillard is not seeking to establish a political project that he would head. He is polemical in his attempt to make people approach the analysis of media, and the world, differently, to see that the ideological support for the real has weakened. However, Baudrillard's language is alienating. People wrongly dismiss him as irrelevant because he obscures the thesis in prose. This may only be a problem for some of us anally retentive, and figuratively-challenged, people. But I think

that there is a legitimate issue with Baudrillard's own dismissive style. In saying that the virtual has overtaken the real, he is nullifying differences that are lived and experienced whether it be in the real or in the virtual. As with Chomsky assuming a universal truth, Baudrillard is displaying his privilege in being able to brush off materiality. He is speaking with a body that does not matter, in terms of feeling the friction of discrimination. Or maybe he does, yet I think that the former would be more the case just in the sense that very few historically have been permitted the luxury to engage in polemics. In finding an ontological ground in which to critique mass media, a realness to reality needs to be included.

In thinking about the ontological assumptions that inform Chomsky's and Baudrillard's analysis of the mass media I have focused on truth and reality. I have suggested that Chomsky is a materialist and rationalist in that he believes in empirical reality and the possibility of universal truth. I have termed Baudrillard's ontology as anti-universalistic and skeptical. I have critiqued Chomsky's notion of universalism and objectivity through Haraway's description of the exclusive history of the scientific witness, which has tended to be the privilege of those who have a body that can be rendered invisible (i.e. not a sexed, coloured, labouring body). Baudrillard's notion of the succession of the virtual over the real, I have also pointed out to be espoused from a place of privilege. Privilege does not necessarily discredit theory; however, in pursuing a critique of mass media that aims at increasing the possibilities for political participation I do not want to subscribe to an ontological grounding that is exclusive. Therefore, for my purposes I propose a mixing of Chomsky and Baudrillard's ontological premises. The assumption that would inform an accessible critique of mass media is one that has an anti-essential grounding of truth and a belief in a shared reality, where images and information are important as they have unequal repercussions. So there would be no universality, but reality and truth supported by the contestation of people's immanent actions and relations.⁹² This is the place to begin to fight (critique) for opening possibilities of political participation against the effect of mass media, both as medium and message, and the apathy of its mediated knowledge. But before turning to the

⁹² I am following a line of (loosely-defined) poststructuralist thinking about political practice that would rest not on nature and universalism, but on contestation (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001) and the immanence of people's actions (Hardt and Negri, 2000).

synthesis of their critiques of mass media, I want to dig a little deeper into Baudrillard and Chomsky's understandings of political subjectivity. I want to delineate a bit more how ontology presupposes ideas of agency and political action.

III. Political Subjectivity and Participation: Indoctrination versus Indifference

Implied in Chomsky and Baudrillard's ontological assumptions are notions of agency, or subjectivity, along with what the political should look like.⁹³ In suggesting that both theorists have problematic areas in terms of truth (Chomsky) and reality (Baudrillard), I similarly see obstacles in their conceptions of subjectivity and agency. Propaganda assumes that a large majority of people are capable of being mystified by the powers that be. Employment of this construct denies subjectivity. It situates power outside of people's ability to understand that media have purposeful messages and that the content reflects a particular standpoint. However, Chomsky roots the discussion of propaganda in a faith of the reason of 'common people' to form and participate in the decisions that affect their lives, which is a form of agency. He believes in the virtue of democracy as being 'of and for the people'. Baudrillard, on the other hand, sees democracy as another abstract sign that finds little resonance in the virtual (since he cannot talk of the real). Simulation produces indifference. It is not that people do not understand what is going on or that they do not have the means to decipher the message of media, rather, they do not care to. They want the spectacle of the virtual, not the message of the real. Baudrillard's construction of people being indifferent suggests subjectivity, yet positions people as lacking agency. It suggests that the more serious issue for people is their (individual) entertainment.

In their analysis of mass media, Chomsky and Baudrillard each see the political subjectivity of the majority to be suspect, yet they see this stemming from different sources. Again this reflects upon their individual ontology and epistemology. Indoctrination (the companion of propaganda) and indifference are conceptualized through lenses of analysis concerning mediated knowledge. Chomsky is looking at the senders of information. He is decoding the message that is consciously constructed in mass media representations. He is analyzing how economic and political privilege is able

⁹³ While I use 'agency' and 'subjectivity' somewhat interchangeably I do recognize that they have different nuances. By 'agency' I am referring to the ability to be an agent and pursue a course of action that has an intended effect, whereas by 'subjectivity' I mean more a subject's self-determination.

to structure the information available in the mass media- the media that the majority of people would turn to for information about the world around them, and which they cannot directly experience. Conversely, Baudrillard looks not at who is producing the message or how it is constructed through the powerful. He analyzes the cultural climate and how communication has changed within it. He tries to understand how the medium affects all receptions of the message. Baudrillard is considering the audience and using his subjective reading of the information to elucidate the medium's positioning of information. This illuminates why he glosses over the economic and political influences on the availability of the information and why the message (the general content) is irrelevant. Each person will individually read the message, but the characteristics of the medium do have the effect of making information meaningless in the sense that there is not only one way to interpret it. In discussing political subjectivity and agency, I will incorporate how these different focuses on the sender and receiver work to position the effects of mediated knowledge.

Baudrillard links simulation to the masses' indifference. Baudrillard sees the political project of democracy as another simulation. It has not existed, nor will it exist. Democracy was part of the era of universals that has disappeared in the virtual. He states, "It is as though everyone were involved in scuppering what remains of democracy, doubtless to give the retrospective illusion that it once existed. Many things today have no other existence than this staging of their disappearance".⁹⁴ Baudrillard asserts that the masses have the intuition that democracy has never included giving agency and power to people to decide their own fates. The advocates of democracy want people to conform to a singular practice of politics, one that is based on productive rationalism. This is what underpins the attempt to send the right message to the population, to mix the information in the proper way. While Chomsky regards this as propaganda and sees it as crucial to understanding political indoctrination and apathy, Baudrillard dismisses the power of the message. He argues, rather, that the population is indifferent to what power may be trying to tell them. The masses do not absorb the message; they reflect it. Baudrillard explains,

⁹⁴Baudrillard, Jean. "Exorcism in Politics or the Conspiracy of Imbeciles," in *Screened Out* [trans. Chris Turner. London: Verso, 2002, originally published in French, 2000. Pp. 208]. Hereafter, 'EP'.

Whatever its political, pedagogical, cultural content, the plan is always to get some meaning across, to keep the masses *within reason*; an imperative to produce meaning that takes the form of the constantly repeated imperative to moralise information: to better inform, to better socialise, to raise the cultural level of the masses, etc. Nonsense: the masses scandalously resist this imperative of rational communication. They are given meaning: they want spectacle. No effort has been able to convert them to the seriousness of the content, nor even to the seriousness of the code. Messages are given to them, they only want some sign, they idolise the play of signs and stereotypes, they idolise any content so long as it resolves itself into a spectacular sequence. What they reject is the 'dialectic' of meaning. Nor is anything served by alleging that they are mystified. This is always a hypocritical hypothesis which protects the intellectual complaisance of the producers of meaning: the masses spontaneously aspire to the natural light of reason.⁹⁵

Stating that the masses are not mystified indicates subjectivity on the part of the audience in being self-determining in terms of understanding the message that is relayed through the mass media. It acknowledges that people are intelligent enough to engage with signs that are communicated to them, but also points out that people are unwilling to be forced into the message that is sent to them. The receivers/audience are the ones who are in control of their political participation and the effect of meaning.

The powerful do not control the ability to have content interpreted according to their intended message. As Baudrillard describes, the masses are indifferent. People do not care about what they are told to care about. They want the 'spectacle', as Baudrillard states, not the content. Critics who interpret the masses as mystified are the ones that are investing power into the content, into information; however, the audience are not necessarily affected in the way that they are theorized to be. Baudrillard is responding to and criticizing the lack of subjectivity ascribed to the audience by those that claim 'mystification'. He attests,

Not a single query about the mystery of this indifference. One same reason is always invoked: the manipulation of the masses by power, their mystification by football. In any case, this indifference *ought* not to be, hence it has nothing to tell us. In other words, the 'silent majority' is even stripped of its indifference, it has no right even that this be recognised and imputed to it, even this apathy must have been imposed on it by power. What contempt behind this interpretation! Mystified, the masses are not allowed their own behaviour (SM: 12-13).

⁹⁵ Baudrillard, Jean. *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities or, The End of the Social* [trans. Paul Foss, John Johnston and Paul Patton. New York: Semiotext(e), 1983. Pp. 9-10]. Hereafter, 'SM'.

In identifying indifference, Baudrillard is challenging the privileged position given to politics proper. He is challenging the hierarchical dualism that is imposed on cultural practices that label certain behaviours as frivolous or entertainment and others as moral or serious. People are not necessarily swayed by rhetoric, but demand the dazzle of the spectacle. Situating this in terms of the Gulf War, Baudrillard explains,

The public ultimately consents to be frightened, and to be gently terrorised by the bacteriological scenarios, on the basis of a kind of affective patriotism, even while it preserves a fairly profound indifference to the war. But it censors this indifference, on the grounds that we must not cut ourselves off from the world scene, that we must be mobilized at least as extras in order to rescue war: we have no other passion with which to replace it. It is the same with political participation under normal circumstances: this is largely second hand, taking place against a backdrop of spontaneous indifference (GW: 50-51).

Baudrillard therefore is pointing out that it is not a matter of omnipotent power being held by some on the one hand with the masses following in whatever direction they are told. Rather the masses are active in determining their knowledge and their participation.

In articulating indifference Baudrillard evidently sees subjectivity in the audience of mass media, yet their agency is questionable. He argues that privileging certain practices as those that everyone must be invested in is the voice of the rationalism, whether it is guised in the rhetoric of the left or of the right. It is arrogant. He condemns those who will not see the masses for who they are and who impose on them a value system that is not necessarily their own. Baudrillard is challenging that "...power manipulates nothing, the masses are neither mislead nor mystified" (SM: 14). However, Baudrillard leaves the concept of political agency dangling. Politics has disappeared in the virtual, he argues. However, political decisions are being made regardless of what is happening in the virtual and regardless of people's indifference. The notion of agency within indifference needs to be thought through a bit more. Baudrillard asserts that the masses do not care for meaning, especially that coming from power; they want information to be spectacular. Baudrillard also argues that it is wrong to negate the masses' subjectivity through the condescending interpretation of 'mystification'. However, it is just as demeaning to 'the masses' to say that they possess no seriousness outside the desire for the spectacle. Baudrillard is suggesting that the spectacle of simulation has replaced all other ends and that this virtualism is inescapable. What kind

of contempt is involved in that type of interpretation? Further, the sign becomes equally autonomous in Baudrillard's articulation of indifference. This ignores that there must be some agent behind the creation of the spectacular sign, someone who designed the 'advertisement' (of war and all other simulacrum). This positing puts the possibility of agency outside of human capabilities.

In thinking about signs and other cultural creations, it is people, as agents, who construct their worlds (in practices and in language). To dismiss the silent majority as indifferent is to radically reduce the diversity of responses and actions that exist within society, many of which are political. People are constantly engaging in the world around them. While their actions may not be easily categorized in established conceptions of social and political action, which Baudrillard asserts, people are nonetheless active in their lives and of those around them, even when this action includes indifference to the ways others want them to be. People, of all sorts, then are seeking more than just entertainment, even if they are also seeking the spectacle.⁹⁶ They have knowledge and act as agents in implementing that knowledge. They are caring for themselves, their relations, their community, and their future. The continuance of backyard barbeques, co-operatives, donations to charities, yelling at the TV, and the occasional voting all confirm that people have a sense of personal and communal commitment, if not responsibility, even if this enactment may look suspect to the outside viewer.⁹⁷ Of course it is also not the case that political practice only comes in one form, and the anarchy of the virtual, which Baudrillard describes, has not yet encompassed the real. Political structures and political actions continue and weight is given to those who are engaged in these processes. So while some people may be politically indifferent, it is not good enough to simply state that they are not active or that actions in the political do not matter, or indeed

⁹⁶ In saying that the majority of people are indifferent, Baudrillard is also discounting the large amount of people who continue to pursue conventional political and social action, such as those seen in social movements, cultural movements, and political movements, not to mention all the individual practices that challenge (and support) the status quo. Even such things as consumer prudence and awareness need to be seen as economic (and political) action. Further, it is not a contradiction that a person will watch TV and movies for their spectacular nature, while also being active in political organizing. The one activity does not negate the other.

⁹⁷ I am not saying that these are all political actions or that these are aimed at challenging the political and social system, but they are all ways that people construct their world in order to be reasonably happy and have a unfettered consciousness. Personally, I would suggest more emphasis should be placed on the political, however, I am not ready to discount people's practices as inactive and altogether indifferent.

that the political has disappeared. The political and economic cannot be disregarded for the cultural (with the case being the same in reverse). While Baudrillard would like to see different modes of engagement, such as those that are not based on abstraction/universalism but on particularities/singularities and where relations are embedded in responsibility (as articulated through symbolic exchange), he is dismissing the importance of relations and actions that exist in society, which do involve the political. And accordingly, if people are largely indifferent to their political participation, which I do not see Baudrillard as being wrong about, there must be something more behind it than pure spectacle. There must be something that contributes to this disinterest.

Chomsky's attention to indoctrination helps shed some light on the values that prevail in making people indifferent. Chomsky argues that people, in general, have been socialized to be indifferent, to not care about the world and to take on the values that benefit the few at the expense of the many.⁹⁸ The concepts of indoctrination and propaganda need to be separated from each other though.⁹⁹ As I have already suggested, Chomsky's notion of propaganda rests on the dualism of truth and illusion/ideology. This split is used to explain people being misinformed and uninvolved in the political. In articulating propaganda, Chomsky appears to be describing a causal relationship, where the elite can construct the content of the mass media that the audience will receive without interpretation. Baudrillard critiques this positioning of subjectivity that appeals to the unreason of the masses and their mystification by power. Like Baudrillard, I do not agree that the audience is mystified, though we may be uninformed. There is a subtle difference in these terms, which Baudrillard picks up on. Mystification implies that some

⁹⁸ Chomsky addresses this subject in many places. See particularly, Chomsky, Noam. "Consent Without Consent," in *Perspectives on Power: Reflections on Human Nature and the Social Order* [Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1997. Pp. 222-246]. Hereafter, 'CC'.

⁹⁹ In the Canadian Oxford Dictionary (1998) indoctrinate is defined as '1. to teach (a person or group) systematically or for a long period to accept (esp. partisan or tendentious) ideas uncritically 2. teach and instruct' and propaganda is defined as '1a. an organized program of publicity, selected information, etc., used to propagate a doctrine, practice, etc. b. usu. *derogatory* the information, doctrines, etc., propagated in this way, esp. regarded as misleading or dishonest'. In trying to differentiate these terms, emphasis is placed on the notion of 'uncritical' (indoctrination) and 'selected' and 'misleading' (propaganda). Power is understood differently in these concepts, where propaganda places power in the hands of the creator/sender of information to the exclusion of the audience/receiver, whereas, there is not necessarily the same implication in indoctrination. While there is overlap with the terms, I am trying to suggest the indoctrination can more easily be separated from notions of truth and implies more the socialization into a group.

are able to see the light and others are not. This goes back to the idea that there is a universal truth and an objective reality open to all. Subjectivity is not the inverse of objectivity; it is not relative. Rather, it is the notion that the subject is self-determining. Contrasting propaganda, indoctrination can be thought of more in terms of being uncritical (not mystified) of social constructs and values that organize a system of meaning. Indoctrination is the unquestioning of what is given the label of common sense.

While Baudrillard's concept of indifference points to the subjectivity of the audience (in being able to determine meaning(lessness) for themselves) the concept of indifference does not necessarily induce agency. It is unknown if actions were to proceed from the individual that they would have the intended effect. Chomsky, in pursuing the project of democracy, places agency as imperative to the effectiveness of political participation. He acknowledges that passivity is the message being sent within mediated knowledge. Conceptualizing indoctrination into mediated knowledge elucidates the influence that content can have, regardless of its truthfulness in the real or in the virtual; for if one is to read or see or hear something enough times, part of it may stick (even if it is only the meaninglessness of information). Similarly, it is perhaps all the better, for those who make decisions, that people are indifferent. If agency is important alongside subjectivity, indoctrination can help form a critique against mediated knowledge that produces the political as exclusive and inaccessible.

In aiming for democratic practices, Chomsky underscores the agency of all members of a political society. He sees it as the possibility for the public 'to participate in some meaningful way in the management of their own affairs and [where] the means of information are open and free'.¹⁰⁰ The first half of this proposition is the typical definition of democracy; however, it is the second part that forms Chomsky's critique against knowledge within mediated societies. Media have taken on the primary role of indoctrination. Yet, because there is not economic and political equality the indoctrination of diverse values has not been free and open. The media, particularly in the televisual age, have been able to be the dominant propagators of social values, and these have been those of the wealthy and powerful. The predominant belief indoctrinated

¹⁰⁰ Chomsky, Noam. *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda* [New York: Seven Stories Press, 1991, 2nd edition 2002. Pp. 9]. Hereafter, 'SAP'.

has been that of individualism. This works to diminish agency through placing some individuals as important and active (the elite) and others as less important and passive (everyone else). For the powerful, indoctrination of particular beliefs is necessary to perpetuate their position. Chomsky argues,

People have to be atomized and segregated and alone. They're not supposed to organize, because then they might be something beyond spectators of action. They might actually be participants if many people with limited resources could get together to enter the political arena. That's really threatening (SAP: 23).

The public relations industry and the mass media have been crucial in promoting a lack of agency for the majority of the population. Chomsky continues,

The public relations industry puts a lot of effort and money into this... There are substantial commitments to try to undermine independent thought, to break down any conception of solidarity, of the interests that unite people in achieving their goals. You want to break all of that down and end up with an atomized society in which nobody thinks of anything except their own individual gain, maybe a little bit of charity on the side, a thousand points of light, but certainly nothing like fighting for a common goal. That stuff has been very effective (GPR: 244).

He further describes,

The idea of meaningful work is not an option. The idea of respect of the community doesn't mean anything because there aren't any communities. You are alone. You are alone, you are gaining commodities, you're a passive worker, you follow orders, there's no community, there's no such thing as satisfying work, certainly there's no such thing as any control over your work, they don't even know what that mean (GPR: 244).

Because there is not an open and free media, other beliefs, such as control over work, community, solidarity, are not easily indoctrinated. It does not matter whether this belief in atomization is wrong or right, truthful or false, what is important is the lack of alternative sources of information, or even mediated knowledge that is accessible and inclusive. People need to be able to communicate their beliefs with others and to form dialogue about what the organization of society would look like. A diversity of values needs to be able to be presented to allow for popular agency and subjectivity in determining one's own values and practices. For agency to bloom out of an indifferent subjectivity, sources need to be found to infiltrate into the system of reference for people. Communication has to be open - economically, politically, and culturally - to enable other modes of thought a chance to compete with the dominant ideology of

individualism. This is what can be learned when placing Chomsky's notion of indoctrination and Baudrillard's conception of indifference into conversation.

IV. Concluding Baudrillard and Chomsky: Synthesizing the Message and the Medium

In thinking about possibilities for political participation within a society of mediated knowledge, Chomsky and Baudrillard offer two diverse articulations. While not an obvious or an easy match, synthesizing Baudrillard and Chomsky can enable a much richer analysis and critique of mass media and possibilities for political practices.¹⁰¹ Chomsky's analysis provides a starting ground in which to talk about bias in media representations. He reflects a certain reality that is in play, one where people are looking for serious ways in which to have an open (and honest) media. Accordingly, Chomsky is using the analysis of the mass media as a vehicle to discuss American foreign policy. Baudrillard is also asking us to look at media seriously, but his language does not facilitate a critique that is accessible to most. His rhetoric, like his critique requires time and patience to start talking about the foundation of media, about the message of the medium. In discussing how ontology has affected Baudrillard's and Chomsky's epistemology and the possibilities for political participation different aspects of each have been highlighted and others critiqued. In considering Chomsky and Baudrillard's analysis, I have suggested that an ontological ground of critique should consist of a shared reality that is based on de-essentialized, or contestable, truth. This

¹⁰¹ I want at this point to remind why I have chosen not to include secondary critiques of Baudrillard and Chomsky. As Chomsky and Baudrillard are working within very different disciplines and with such different perspectives, critiques launched at each theorist tend to be limited in the considerations of their work. Baudrillard tends to be critiqued by political critics and analysts from the Left, who do not consider his media analysis seriously as he is dismissed for his politics. Chomsky is rarely critiqued in terms of his media analysis (and is largely overlooked within media studies), and tends to be only praised for his political commitments by social activists. But to provide one example of the way that Chomsky and Baudrillard are approached by a media analysts, Paul Nesbitt-Larking in *Politics, Society, and the Media* (2001), dismisses Chomsky's propaganda model as it "posits the existence of an elite conspiracy to keep the masses diverted, as well as the notion that the largely undifferentiated masses are unable to stem this tide of misinformation into their consciousness" (Pp. 283). In terms of Baudrillard (who receives substantially larger consideration), Nesbitt-Larking suggests that "Jean Baudrillard is arguably the most important theoretician of the postmodern era" (Pp. 238) and while acknowledging Baudrillard's contributions to the field of media studies simply reducing his political position to relativism, which has a questionable epistemology that sees media as all powerful and people as passive (Pp. 240-241). Nesbitt-Larking does share some of my criticisms, but in such quick dismissal of the connection between Chomsky and Baudrillard's media and political work, the critique is weighted too much to one discipline. The argument that I am pursuing takes seriously both their media and political work in order to best understand how critique is and can be constructed within a media saturated political society.

conclusion is based on building inclusive conceptions of reality and truth, where nothing is left as a 'given' or 'nature', but where objects and subjects do matter within a space and time that is experienced and shared with others. In terms of the potential for political practices, Baudrillard suggests that the audience's subjectivity lies in their indifference. However, to have agency (or the ability to act) within a context of indifference, Chomsky's notion of indoctrination sheds light on how the media have an economic and political privilege that increases their ability to instil the values of individualism and popular passivity. In linking subjectivity and agency through the concepts of indifference and indoctrination, all participants can be seen as active in the construction of knowledge yet the ability to act is threatened by economic, political, and cultural imbalances of power. In articulating these ontological considerations, I do not want to create a political project per se, but I do want to open a dialogue about how critique, as these two theorists approach it, can be directed at mediated knowledge.

In pointing to Chomsky's and Baudrillard's strengths and weakness in their analysis of mass media I have been setting up a framework in which to initiate a cross-conceptualization. A model of analysis that approaches mediated knowledge through the medium and the message entails thinking through the lenses of culture, politics, and economics. It is a way to think about the context in which communication is produced, disseminated and received, and how this affects the medium and messages of mass media. Accordingly, it involves thinking about the senders of information, their intent, and the receivers of the information and their interpretations. It includes viewing power in all sites of communication. Structure meets agent.

Chomsky's analysis is particularly strong in terms of political and economic aspects of the mass media. He is describing the structural level of the message, in terms of those that craft it and the context in which they are embedded. He is concerned with elite motivations. He focuses particularly on political and economic factors that remain unstated. Also in critiquing ideological content he is arguing that there are alternative accounts to the representations and news available in the mass media. In discussing indoctrination the power of social values is brought to the fore. He similarly criticizes current practices of democracy to stress that it must be fought for as a space where all people have political agency. In calling for an open media he is censuring the mass

media for their weakness in creating, facilitating and maintaining dialogue and inclusive debate. In essence, Chomsky's analysis describes a reality that is shared through the mass media and he is offering a language of critique to make possible the creation of a space for dialogue that includes a diversity of voices that contribute to knowledge about how life can and will be organized. All of these articulations are faithful to Chomsky's project, though I posit them without an insistence on objective or universal truth.¹⁰²

Baudrillard pays closer attention to the cultural context in which the mass media is embedded. Through critiquing the abstraction that electronic media have introduced into knowledge and social relations, he is theorizing the effects of consumer culture as the prevalent system of reference. The medium is seen as a particular message in and of itself that positions the reception of the content in a certain way. Accordingly, Baudrillard is concerned that the medium infects all communication with a sense of unreality where no message can be perceived as more meaningful than another. He points to the fact that truth and reality can no longer be anchored in naturalized universals. As well, Baudrillard denies the absolute power of the creators of information by stressing that the audience has the means to understand media, that the sender cannot solely indicate (or control) what interpretations are going to be made, and that the audience is indifferent. In thinking about the relationship between the medium, the positioning of information in media, and the reception of information, Baudrillard maps the communication of knowledge and relations that are situated within a culture of mediation and uncertainty. Understanding the significance of the hyperreal character of communication does not relegate all critique to the virtual, as the real exists too. But seeing the real as important does not negate the foundational shift in ideology where the solid ground of truth softens.

Mixing the conclusions made by Chomsky and Baudrillard together urges one to see the medium and message as simultaneously, and reciprocally, enmeshed in economic, political, and cultural relations, knowledges and practices. This is what a critique of mass

¹⁰² In this regard I am following Donna Haraway's articulation of situated knowledge that suggests that the best truth comes from a multitude and diversity of 'partial visions'. As she states, "The moral is simple: only partial perspective promises objective vision... Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object," in "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective", in *Simian, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* [New York: Routledge, 1991. Pp. 190].

media must consist of.¹⁰³ In trying to create the condition of popular political participation, understanding mediated knowledge means initiating analysis with the recognizing of an imbalance of economic, political and cultural power. These imbalances affect the messages of mass media through allowing particular voices to control the content serving their ideological perspective. Accordingly, one needs to remember that mass media are dominated by multinational corporations, which have intimate relations with the state. The values of the ownership of the mass media are reflected in representations of the news that serve the interests of those that contribute to the maintenance of the structure of the press itself. So, the mass media's sources (both capital and content), such as that coming from the state, will attempt to have their perspective communicated as common sense and as 'objective,' even if from a particular perspective. In thinking back to the Gulf War, the state and corporate bias was seen in the media's failure to examine the context in which the economic and political actions and perspectives of the state developed. The message was that the American state was justified in its ideologies and actions in Iraq. By limiting other voices in the mass media the ruling group (in terms of political, economic and cultural capital) was able to control the positioning of information that contributes to the indoctrination of particular values, in this case, the use of force over negotiations.

Equally important in analysis of mass media is the cultural context. Considering culture highlights what value systems are in play within a given time and space. It also calls to attention the particularities of history, ideological evolutions, and social relations and practices. Currently, our society is one of consumption. The predominance of advertisements within all media of communication is evidence of the significance of consumer culture. Advertisements influence both the economic structure of mass media in creating capital, but the prevalence of advertisements within the medium of news also affects how information is understood. Advertisements place all information on a somewhat unstable ground where one is unsure even what is being sold to them and for

¹⁰³ The analysis of media from a multitude of dimensions, including the sender and receiver, is not unfamiliar in media studies (See for example, Nesbitt-Larking, 2001. Pp. 19). However, my project has also exercised the critique of ontology and epistemology as it intersects communication and politics, which is not necessarily part of any single discipline. Therefore, this interdisciplinary approach has been a central aspect in considering Baudrillard and Chomsky's critiques of mass media and possibilities for political participation.

whose benefit. This structure of the medium affects how the audience receives the information that is directed at them. Considering culture context also means understanding the audience as agent, just as the producers of messages are agents. Culture highlights that there are numerous relations and practices that are contradictory and paradoxical. It points out that the message of mass media will not be understood homogeneously and that analysis needs to acknowledge the play of interpretation. Considering cultural messages similarly includes the message of the medium in thinking about how communication is practiced and with what effect. Again going back to the Gulf War, the cultural context contributes to understanding the absurdity, pride, condemnation and inevitability that were felt in regards to the use of force. The audience was not a whole in its interpretation of the war. The information of the war was held as suspect by many who looked to alternative sources of news and saw the hypocrisy of the American state. Others were indifferent to the war and experienced it as another program on television. Others still were excited and wanted to contribute in fighting an enemy (regardless of who they were and why they were opposed to them). Situating the mass media (in their messages and in their message as a medium) would mean then that mediated knowledge would be considered in terms of agency on the part of the producer and receiver of information. It would mean that social values and practices would inform the analysis and critique.

As mass media presently have a predominant control over popular discourse, both in terms of content/message and structure/medium (positioning the audience and of information), neither Chomsky nor Baudrillard should be read as negating the other. They each offer insights into apathy, for those who are in the real of politics and for those who find politics unreal. We can see that media causes a disconnect from politics in two ways: through content, by not providing context, and through structure, by changing the rules of communication to those of advertisements and abstraction. That both aspects of knowledge in the mass media simultaneously exist points to the multiplicity of reality and truth. Both Baudrillard and Chomsky are partially right in their analyses. We are apathetic because the content of media is so biased, we are apathetic because we know that the medium is dishonest. But we are not necessarily ignorant and we are not necessarily indifferent. We may be overwhelmed about where to go and how to

communicate with others about what to do. This is why an analysis of the message and the medium is needed to critique mediate knowledge. What I have pieced together is not a conclusive analytical model for investigating and critiquing mediate knowledge. It is a starting point. It is a calling to have analysis that is not singularly focused on any one aspect to the exclusion of another. Not every project need study all of these areas; however, the structures and practices (economic; cultural, political) need to be acknowledged as factors that contribute to the influence of mass media's message and medium. Nuances, contradictions, and paradoxes need to be seen in as inherent in the complexities of mass media.

In exploring Chomsky's and Baudrillard's analyses of mass media and the possibilities of political participation, all these multiple aspects came to the surface. The central critique of mass mediated knowledge that seems needful currently, then, must focus on the role of abstraction both in terms of message and medium. Chomsky critiqued the abstraction of representations of the Gulf War that were taken out of their particular historical, political, and economic context. The mass media presented themselves as objective in its coverage, which is an abstraction from the values that they subjectively hold and disseminate. Baudrillard saw all content as abstract based on the nature of the medium. The medium abstracts events and turns them into information. Mediated knowledge, however, does not need to be abstract, even though it is not experienced first hand. Mass media should be held accountable for their subjectivity. They need to be held accountable to those that they represent, and they need to be transparent in their bias and accessible to different views. None of these critiques against mass media is original, but they are reminders that possibilities for political participation rest in our ability to critique and voice our knowledge so as to join a contestatory choir with others.

V. Conclusion

This thesis has been a personal exercise in trying to figure out what it is about knowledge that is gained through mass media that contributes to possibilities for political participation. I thought that Chomsky and Baudrillard would provide different understandings of this. They did. They opened doors of analysis from various locations that result in divergent interpretations. Analyzing them illuminates that ontological assumptions need to be foregrounded to make sense of individuals' critiques and to

enable the inclusion and exchange of diverse perspectives. More than anything, though, I came to realize the extremes that theorists can go to in articulating the problematic communication of mass media. I also recognized that communication between extremes is where fruition lies in analysis. Critique too needs to be able to communicate between the poles of knowledge and experience. If political participation is a value that is held then seeing from a multiplicity of realities and truth is necessary.

In many ways, this thesis seems like an unfinished project. It has been an investigation into a cultural history of diverse analytical approaches, which extend beyond merely mediated knowledge. It lays a foundation to begin my own critique of mass media and their effects on the possibilities for political participation. Theorists, theories, and an event that I do not really remember limited me. However, I see this as a place from which to move forward. I think that political practices need to be considered in terms of mediated knowledge, but this knowledge should not be restricted to the news. It needs to encompass other media, such as novels and movies, but also other spaces, like coffee shops and grocery stores. If the public is to be understood, it is the public spaces, knowledges and experiences that must be explored. Not everything should be learned from the written text or from the authorities of others. Agency and critique necessitate the voice of the unfamiliar to be heard. While I do not know if my voice is going to be heard over the static of mass media, I think with insights from Baudrillard and Chomsky it will increase from a solitary whisper at least to a conversational tone.

Epilogue: Communicating the Political

The argument that I have been presenting through the course of this thesis has been that Baudrillard and Chomsky have different, but necessary, critiques that can contribute to the analysis of mass media. At this point, however, I would like to open up this argument to suggest a complementary way that this thesis can be read and sketch where a further study can travel. A question that I have been concerned with the past couple of years is how we can articulate a conception of a 'commons' that would rethink political practices and lead to a different way of engaging in social relations, which is less oppressive and that fosters an active and inclusive political space. This project rests predominantly in the theoretical space created by Michel Foucault's notion of power and critique,¹⁰⁴ follows through to Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's update of the Gramscian notion of hegemony,¹⁰⁵ and finds its way back to the Aristotelian polis.¹⁰⁶ The matrix of these theories suggest that the political is composed of games of truth (Foucault), that the prevailing hegemony is the success and stability of a particular articulation that is mutable (Laclau and Mouffe), and that the foundation of the political is the creation of a dialogue in which the participants have the opportunity to persuade others and to do differently (Aristotle, Arendt). When the thesis concerning Baudrillard and Chomsky's analysis of mass media is considered within this framework, their critiques are seen as particular articulations within a conversation about the affects of communication that attempt to posit a different conception of the political. Viewing Chomsky and Baudrillard's work this way thus contributes to the political project of articulating a commons, which is sensitive to communication as it is produced and consumed.

¹⁰⁴ See Foucault, Michel. *The Politics of Truth* [ed. Sylvere Lotringer and Lysa Hochroth. New York: Semiotext(e), 1997], "The Subject and Power," in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* [ed. Hubert Dreyfus and P. Rabinow. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983. Pp. 208-226], and "The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom," in *Michel Foucault: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth* [ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: The New Press, 1997. Pp. 303-320].

¹⁰⁵ See Laclau, Ernesto and Chantal Mouffe. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics, 2nd Edition* [London, UK: Verso, 2001, 1985].

¹⁰⁶ See Aristotle. *The Politics* [ed. Stephen Everson. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996]; and Arendt, Hannah. "What is Freedom?" in *Between Past and Future* [New York: Penguin, 1993. Pp. 143-172].

In critiquing Chomsky and Baudrillard I have been attuned to their notions of truth. This registry is founded on Foucault's elaboration of politics as games of truth.¹⁰⁷ Games of truth inform this thesis in two ways. First, by highlighting the 'gaming' aspect of truth, politics becomes a set of rules that produces particular truths and restricts others; but it also insists that these rules are always formed in relationships, which are open to change.¹⁰⁸ Accordingly, Chomsky and Baudrillard's work are read as critiquing the range of truths that are contained within mass media, as well as an analysis of the rules that engender these particular truths. Secondly, games of truth direct attention to their dependence on a network of power and knowledge. Claims of truth operate as assertions that stabilize and fix knowledge within particular relations of power. Foucault explains, "...for knowledge to function as knowledge it must exercise a power. Within other discourses of knowledge in relation to discourses of possible knowledge, each statement considered true exerts a certain power and it creates, at the same time, a possibility" (WC: 66). This 'possibility' is the activation of critique that proposes different truths and/or different way of doing things (WC: 31-32). Foucault insists,

It is therefore not a matter of describing what knowledge is and what power is and how one would repress the other or how the other would abuse the one, but rather, a nexus of knowledge-power has to be described so that we can grasp what constitutes the acceptability of a system, be it the mental health system, the penal system, delinquency, sexuality, etc (WC: 52-53).

My thesis has been an extension of this type of analysis into the realm of mass media. Chomsky and Baudrillard's work serve as investigations of the power-knowledge matrix of the mass media. They assist in the analysis of knowledge by discerning what the limits of discourse are in the media, describing what the discourse consists of, and through positing alternative 'truths'. Power is described through their explications of mass media as a mode of communication that attempts to fix meaning and through considerations of how the audience interprets media. Critique is present in Chomsky and Baudrillard's separate assertions that reality, as it exists in the mass media, can be

¹⁰⁷ It should be noted that 'truth' is used without connotations of nature or essence, which would assume a universal understanding of truth. Rather, truth is used to describe the singularity of a certain knowledge-power relationship. See Foucault, Michel. "What is Critique?" in *The Politics of Truth* [ed. Sylvère Lotringer and Lysa Hochroth. New York: Semiotext(e), 1997. Pp. 55]. Hereafter, 'WC'.

¹⁰⁸ Foucault, Michel. "The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom," in *Michel Foucault: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth* [ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: The New Press, 1997. Pp. 297].

otherwise. However, to follow through with Foucault's argument, I also suggest that truth, as was claimed by Chomsky and virtually by Baudrillard, is power moves that have the potential to silence some voices and amplify others.

Expanding this idea of truth and power, Laclau and Mouffe call for a rethinking of the political in order to invigorate the Left. They argue that this politic be based on hegemonic articulations of the political within an antagonistic social field. Hegemony, as they employ it, is the ability to posit that which is contingent as a totality.¹⁰⁹ This moves the foundations and subjectivities of politics from an (inaccurately described) essentialized realm to that of discursive practices (HSS: xi). It also places as paramount the articulation of the political as a means to conceptualize, designate, and unify the social field in a particular way, which always relies on contestatory relationships with others (HSS: xi).¹¹⁰ They explain,

It is because there are no more assured foundations arising out of a transcendent order, because there is no longer a centre which binds together power, law and knowledge, that it becomes possible and necessary to unify certain political spaces through hegemonic articulations. But these articulations will always be partial and subject to being contested, as there is no longer a supreme guarantor (HSS: 187).

Thought of in this way, Chomsky and Baudrillard's critiques of mass media can be engaged as articulations that aim to both attack and create a new hegemony. In positing an alternative account of reality (social and political), than that available by and through the mass media, Baudrillard and Chomsky are participating in a dialogue that seeks to affect and move the current discourse concerning how the world operates. Further, these articulations contribute to a two-fold understanding of (the politics of) communication. First, Chomsky and Baudrillard help conceptualize how communication works and how as medium and message it can be (and is) manipulated to serve specific hegemonic articulations. Secondly, they exemplify two antagonistic voices of critique that are

¹⁰⁹ Laclau, Ernesto and Chantal Mouffe. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics, 2nd Edition* [London, UK: Verso, 2001, 1985. Pp. x-xi]. Hereafter, 'HSS'.

¹¹⁰ As this might be a bit abstract, I will apply this reasoning to our current context. The popular political hegemony has been presented as the 'end of ideology', where individual capitalist accumulation, passive political participation, and neo-liberal democracy reign. This conception of the present is a hegemonic articulation of the political that designates particular relations as appropriate (e.g. consumers, Liberals, New Democrats, etc.) and unifies the social field (capitalists and archaic non-capitalists). But this is not an essential truth of politics; as such, it is contestable, for example by writers like Chomsky and even Baudrillard, and it is vulnerable to replacement by an alternative hegemonic articulation.

competing to describe the world. Baudrillard and Chomsky's works, then, reveal a multiplicity of styles, contents, and audiences that need to be considered and utilized in formulating and communicating an articulation, which seeks to be hegemonic.

Building upon these arguments, an interpretation of Chomsky and Baudrillard that I am now suggesting needs to be considered as an ancient (Aristotelian) concept of politics that holds as necessary agonistic dialogue. Politics tends to concern itself with the management of power, and its inverse, freedom. The modes in which to negotiate power and freedom have changed, but the ancient notion, according to Aristotle, was that the polis is founded on deliberation.¹¹¹ When politics resides in acts of deliberation, rhetoric as the ability to persuade features prominently.¹¹² Rhetoric is seen as useful because speaker's arguments tend toward truth and justice (TR: 7). While not necessarily spoken from the mouth of Aristotle, inclusion of the greatest amount of voices in deliberations, voices that will determine how we are to negotiate and organize our existence together - the constitutions of the political - engenders nothing but a better life for all. It is from such a multitude of subjectivities that a strong political articulation, such as a commons, will proceed.

It is in thinking about games of truth, hegemonic articulations, and politics as deliberation and persuasion I suggest that the conversation between Baudrillard and Chomsky, which has occurred within the pages of this thesis, has involved acts of the political. Political action rests on and occurs in the exchange of ideas and in finding ways to cross over differences in order to seek a world where we can all respectively live. In analyzing mass media, via Baudrillard and Chomsky, political theorizing and practice can learn from practices and theorizing of communication. Thus, understanding mass media contributes to better articulations and richer modes of communicating the political, and for my purposes, the project of conceptualizing a commons. Their writings facilitate efforts to affect, and change, discourses concerning how it is that communication works, how the political is currently constructed, and how communication and politics ought to

¹¹¹ See Aristotle. *The Politics* [ed. Stephen Everson. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Pp. 13, Book I, 2]. Aristotle assumes that humans are political animals based on their ability to speak, which allows for the voicing of what is just and unjust, expedient and inexpedient, etc, all which are aspects involved in determining and creating a 'self-sufficing' - political - community (ibid.). This is only a very crude description of Aristotle's conception of politics.

¹¹² Aristotle. *Treatise on Rhetoric* [trans. Theodore Buckley. London, UK: George Bell and Sons, 1903. Pp. 24]. Hereafter, 'TR'.

be done. Because Baudrillard and Chomsky appropriate various analytical frameworks and appeal to diverse audiences, they have much to offer in theorizing the politics of communication. They open spaces for dialogue.

I would like to end with the proposition that two arguments have been implicit within this thesis. The dominant one concerns itself with the analysis of mass media as offered by Chomsky and Baudrillard, which tries to make sense of the world as mediated. The second, which I am now arguing, is that a project of critique can learn from theories of communication to better posit the political. Chomsky and Baudrillard assist in this greater project through providing lessons in communication. By understanding their different analyses, particular games of truth are accessed that inform and better deliver the message of critique. With their knowledge, the problem of articulating a 'commons' begins with the creation of a language that has an ontology and epistemology which foster an active and inclusive politics to deal with the hard questions of how we will manage and negotiate life together. Thus in seeking movement from this (somewhat completed) project to another, an articulation to follow is a critique that places as necessary an active politics, or a 'common', where things can be done differently with others.

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Appendix

Here, in the tradition of (politicized) punk rock, I am including a list of music that provided the beat in which this thesis was created and which have been influential in my intellectual and psychological development. In some cases the bands reflect the sentiments of the chapter, but mainly it was what I was into at the time or had recently purchased. This is a limited and non-representative selection. Note: I had no record player in my room, so I was limited to only high-tech compact discs.

Chomsky

Blonde Redhead. *Melody of Certain Damaged Lemons* [© 2000, Touch and Go Records, Inc.].

The Faint. *Blank-Wave Arcade* [© 1999, Saddle Creek].

Heart. *The Essential Heart* [© 2002, Sony Music Entertainment]. (Particularly Disc Two)

Hot Hot Heat. *Make Up the Breakdown* [© 2002, Sub Pop Records].

The (International) Noise Conspiracy. *A New Morning, Changing Weather* [© 2001, Burning Heart Records] and

Survival Sickness [© 2000, Burning Heart Records].

Jawbreaker. *Dear You* [© 1995, Geffen Records].

The Murder City Devils. *Thelma* [© 2001, Sub Pop Records].

*Operation Makeout. *Hang Loose* [© 2002, Mint Records].

*The Weakerthans. *Left and Leaving* [© 2000, G-7 Welcoming Committee].

Baudrillard

Belle and Sebastian. *Tiger Milk* [© 1996, Electric Honey].

Black Sabbath. *We Sold Our Soul for Rock 'N' Roll* [© 1976, Warner Bros. Records Inc.].

The Clash. *London Calling* [© 1999, Sony Music Entertainment].

Figurine. *Heartfelt* [© 2001, March Records].

*Joy Division. *The Complete BBC Recordings* [© 1979, BBC].

Life Without Buildings. *Any Other City* [© 2000, Tugboat Records].

Magnetic Fields. *Holiday* [© 1993, Merge Records].

*Modest Mouse. *The Moon and Antarctica* [© 2000, Sony Music Entertainment Inc.].

*Postal Service. *Give Up* [© 2002, Sub Pop Records].

Yo La Tengo. *Painful* [© 1993, Matador Records Inc.].

In Combination

Blur. *Parklife* [© 1994, EMI].

*Death Cab for Cutie. *You Can Play these Songs with Chords* [© 2000, Barsuk Records].

*Fugazi. *The Argument* [© 2001, Dischord Records].

Gary Numan. *Premier Hits* [© 1996, Beggars Banquet Records].

*New Order. *Substance* [© 1987, Factory Communications Limited].

*Pet Shop Boys. *Discography: The Complete Singles Collection* [© 1991, EMI Records].

*The Smiths. *Hatful of Hollow* [© 1984, Sire Records Company].

* This CD played way too many times for any normal auditorally functioning human.

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Mass Mediated Knowledge and Possibilities for Political Participation: Reading Chomsky, Baudrillard, and the Gulf War

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