



## THE THIRD CHOICE

The lesson that we learn from Nietzsche is that there is no authentic and essential reality beyond language. As it is going to be demonstrated later in this essay, language is the structure that fundamentally constitutes human perception and civilization as we know it today. All of our ontological categories come from the grammar of language, and there is no human thinking beyond this representational structure. Thus, the world with all its social, political and economical aspects can be read, analyzed and deconstructed like a text, because human mind is structured like the grammar of a text. Consequently, our political systems and ethical values are also subject to the readings, "misreadings, partial readings, imposed readings, and imagined readings" as described by Haraway. They also "are originally and finally never simply there... as the world is originally fallen apart." In this essay, I am going to ask how our political systems that are partial, imposed, imaginary and nonexistent beyond language can be thought of in this ontological hysteria, and what could be the possible ways of thus closing the barrier between theoretical philosophy and practical reel-politics.

### *How is language a construct?*

Michel Foucault, in his work *The Order of Things*, analyses how the language first emerged and what is its function today. As described by Foucault referring to the ancient texts, the primal humans first created root words that were reflective articulations of the sounds that they heard in nature. The number of these root words were very limited and there existed a narrow spectrum of significations. For example, the root of the English word "thunder" came from a root that mimicked the sound of thunder with the help of the movement between the tongue, the teeth and the lips. Within thousands of years of time, however, these root words interacted with other roots, added and subtracted from each other, and thus evolved into new words and networks of meaning. Through this process, infinitely many interactions took place, and consequently, there was no meaningful connection left between the roots and the words that they evolved into. Ancient texts had a similar process: the primary texts were interpreted in other texts so many times that in the end, the interpretations transcended the primaries. Language ceased to be a reflection of the nature, but became a representation of it. Thus, the connection between the signifier and the signified was broken once and for all. Language, as of today, is an arbitrary construct. All human interaction and civilization are founded upon an exchange of phonetic sounds and letters that are fictional postulates. What structures and controls the humans' internal perception and external actions is of arbitrary nature.

### *How to formulate human perception analogous to language?*

Symbolic order, as defined by psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, is a model of thinking about how individuals perceive and act. Further developing Freudian superego, Lacan portrays symbolic order as something that is brought to the child by the father's image, not only containing the laws, the values and the course of action that the father impose, but also as something that fundamentally structures the child's consciousness. Symbolic order is analogous to language. When we are learning a language for the first time, we are all the time conscious about the grammar rules and the exceptions that form this language. When we are fluent in this language, however, we do not consider any of these rules as we structure our sentences. Then they are, almost as a reflex, created incidentally and without much thinking. Symbolic order, that is to say the way we live and think about our lives and social / political relationships, works exactly in this manner: we follow certain patterns that function analogous to grammar rules. Abiding by the traffic lights, shaking hands, and greeting each other with a "hi, how are you?" for the sake of interaction may seem as "collective madness" to someone who is alienated from these acts, as this occurs on the level of arbitrary signification. However, they are fluently executed by a person native to this culture without much

thinking, similar to grammar rules. This is why when we go to a foreign country that has a radically different culture than ours, we don't only lose our ability to talk, but we also lose the sense of how to act (walking, eating, greeting etc.).

### *The issue of symbolic ideology*

From a perspective of power, the way symbolic order (and thus language) functions is vital. The term "the big Other" is coined by Lacan in order to define all the concrete forms that the symbolic order takes. The big Other can be thought of as the God of all religions in the way that it observes and holds responsible an individual at all times, or it can take the form of ideologies such as Marxism, liberalism and fascism, as they structure the perception of individuals on how to read the "text" that the world presents. Because I would like to speculate on our present social and political condition in this essay, I am not going to lose time on the ways that the symbolic order functions in religions and totalitarian governments, but focus on the ways that symbolic ideology presents itself in the 21st century liberal capitalist consensus.

Slavoj Žižek, in his work *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, considers how to tackle with the issue of ideology in the so-called post-ideological times. Ideology used to take form of totalitarian governments in the 20th century who openly imposed a certain political doctrine. In 21st century, however, politicians don't presuppose grand narratives such as "the wheel of the historical process towards communism" or "the purification of the German race". Today, ideology functions in much subtler ways that correspond to Lacanian symbolic order. Žižek proposes that symbolic ideology used to function according to the Marxian formula "they don't know what they are doing". However, currently the suitable expression for it evolved to "they know what they are doing, but they are still doing it." For example, in the feudal times, the subjects used to fetishize the symbolic authority of the kings: according to Hegel, the king confirmed his own position because of the existence of his subjects. The subjects, however believed that the king's identity as a ruler was a priori and essential, and thus they fetishized his position. In the capitalist times, the fetishization of the individuals once and for all has ended. The objects, however, replaced this position. Today, money and commodities are fetishized, not because of their use value, but because of the postulate value that they gain during the process of exchange. Thus, this formula for the symbolic ideology fits the current situation: they know that 100 Euros is just a piece of paper, yet they still fetishize it. The money and commodities are not given an a priori theoretical value. Yet, their sublime value is gained during the process of exchange. The formula for symbolic ideology is valid for all the phases of liberal capitalist social and political life: The people know that the politicians lie, yet they still vote for them; politicians know that the people know that they lie, yet they still comfortably continue to play the game; they know that the Starbucks harms the coffee workers more than they help, yet buying it makes them feel good; they know that a tshirt that costs 100 Euros is not much different than a 10 Euros replica, yet they still buy it because it makes them feel like wearing a 100 Euros worth tshirt. Contemporary ideology functions along the lines of commodity fetishism, in a tension between knowledge and its 'yet'.

### *Ideology, power and freedom*

The liberal capitalist system presents itself as the haven of freedom and opportunity, as an antithesis to the old Eastern Bloc socialist countries which represent centralized power and government. However, this is not a fair comparison. One of the best analyses of the forms that power takes in contemporary times has been made by Michel Foucault, who expressed in his article *The Subject and Power* that "to govern is to structure all possible field of action of an individual" and this governmental power can only be exerted upon free individuals. Therefore, we cannot talk about an exertion of power and governmental pressure in totalitarian regimes, because they already physically restrict people's free choices. When an individual doesn't have a "possible field of action,"

the ways to govern it are not relevant discussion points in for the problems of our day. Although the older totalitarian regimes must be refused and not repeated, the interesting problem for philosophers today is how people are governed when, in fact, they have free choice and a possible field of action. Modern repressive authorities make use of the instruments of media, advertisement and pseudo-democratic representational elections, so that the masses freely choose with their votes what is bad for them, and sustain an economical system that exploits their labour and natural resources. Thus, the claim that we live in a post-ideological world where the best of all possible systems is implemented and not due to change is refuted. It's exactly in the contemporary Western democracies where the people are able to act relatively free, the ideology and its means to repress are stronger than ever.

### *The dilemma of the ideological transcendental subject*

The lesson of structuralism and poststructuralism concludes that the connection between the signifier and the signified is broken, and thus ideology is a social construct of arbitrary nature. However, it's critical to note that ideology is not solely false consciousness, but a false consciousness that is also an equivalent of our reality. There is no experience and no consciousness beyond ideology. It's true that the representation by signs is of arbitrary nature, yet it's a world of signs all that we have. Lacan formulated symbolic order as a part of the triad "symbolic, imaginary. and the real". The real corresponds to Kantian noumena, to which human perception has no contact and which cannot be represented, and thus which is nonexistent in the level of language. Foucault claims that one is not born a subject / individual, but subjected / individualized through the institutions of power. This is why the term 'subject' in English signifies both an individual and 'a subject to a higher authority'. The transcendental subject is thus an ideological subject who is always under the effect of power relations, and the a priori categories function in tune with grammar and symbolic order. From this, we can turn back to our objective in the introduction, and see through barriers between the theoretical philosophy and reel-politics.

### *Conclusion*

In this essay, I proposed that the language is of arbitrary nature, and it's the symbolic order that is structured analogous to this language that establishes all of our social relations and political institutions. Then I continued with describing how contemporary ideology functions in tune with the symbolic order, and claimed that it is especially in the current liberal capitalist system, ideological repression is relevant more than ever. Lastly, I came to the point where I claimed that it's only the false consciousness of ideology that forms our perception of the world, and it's in this arbitrary place where all our experience exists. Given the situation, the question regarding political action that lies in front of us offers two choices: the perverse belief in the symbolic order and a certain ideology that creates blunt militants with no theory, and an ironical distance from all the political field that causes inertia and functions only to support the repressive powers of the status quo. Are we supposed to trust "the misreadings, partial readings, imposed readings, and imagined readings" and draw a course of action from there, or should we stand and watch how it unfolds itself without any intervention? Is there a third choice? I believe that it's an urgent duty of philosophy to solve this dilemma, and once again meet with the reel-politics.