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## The (im)possibility of communication

### *ABSTRACT*

This paper addresses the question of communication from a perspective opened up by Derrida's reading of Joyce's *Ulysses* in terms of the relationship between the notion of the 'yes' or iterability, the signature of (and counter-signature to) a text and two types of laughter. It is shown that the same aporia that confronts the reader of *Ulysses*, namely that a counter-signature to the text is possible as a novel event and is simultaneously not possible as such, faces participants in communication: communication is and is not possible. The work of Hardt and Negri is further used to add another dimension to this aporia, this time focusing on the paradox of living in a so-called 'age of communication', while certain events of resistance to the agencies of global hegemony are incommunicable.

A quotation from Jacques Derrida's *Ulysses* gramophone: Hear say Yes in Joyce (1991:576), captures, succinctly, the condition of the (im)possibility of communication, that is, that which makes both communication and miscommunication possible:

In order for the yes of affirmation, assent, consent, alliance of engagement, signature or gift to have the value it has, it must carry the repetition within itself. It must a priori and immediately confirm its promise and promise its confirmation. This essential repetition lets itself be haunted by an intrinsic threat, by an internal telephone that acts like a parasite, like its mimetic, mechanical double, its incessant parody.

In a word, this ambivalent 'condition' is iterability, which carries the promise of, and the threat to communication or mutual understanding in itself. Every signifier, to be a signifier, has to be repeatable, iterable – to be meaningful (to have a 'signified'), it has to be decodable, that is, repeatable. An absolutely unique, singular, unrepeatable signifier is a contradiction in terms, because no one would be able to interpret or 'repeat' it. (Wittgenstein made the same point when he said that there is no such thing as a 'private language'.) What does this have to do with Derrida's remarks about the 'yes' and repetition? Simply that the iterability of 'yes' is, as John Caputo (1997:188) points out, analysed in a paradigmatic manner by Derrida – an analysis that is instructive regarding all instances of repetition, and therefore of communication. Nor should it be surprising. Caputo (1997:188) proceeds by reminding his readers that the 'yes' at issue here, if indeed it is a 'yes', entails repetition:

To say yes is to be ready to say yes again...If I say 'yes' today and then excuse myself tomorrow, then my 'yes' will not have been a 'yes'...When I say 'yes', I promise to remember.

Not that this implied promise is invulnerable. On the contrary – when Derrida speaks of the 'intrinsic threat' that 'haunts' the repetition of the 'yes', he is alluding to the inescapable possibility, coinciding with the iterability of the 'yes', that its repetition may become merely automatic, mechanical, like the 'mechanical' repetition or application of the law by a judge in cases bearing a certain resemblance to one another, instead of, salutarily, a temporary 'suspension' of the law in order to 're-invent' it for the sake of instantiating 'justice' in every new case before the court (Caputo 1997:136-137). Unless the 'yes' of 'affirmation' is repeated in a similar fashion, by re-inventing it, as it were, re-affirming it in every historically new, contextually different situation, it would lose its value. This – the 'pre-programming' (re-) iteration of the 'yes' – is what Derrida (1991:576) calls 'the gramophone effect':

The *yes* can only speak *itself* if it promises itself its own memory... The affirmation of the *yes* is the affirmation of memory. *Yes* must preserve itself, and thus reiterate itself, archive its voice in order to give it once again to be heard and understood... *Yes* gramophones itself and, *a priori*, telegramophones itself.

What Derrida articulates here is not simply the role played by the 'yes' – explicit as well as implicit – as the (dual) condition of the possibility of communication *and* miscommunication, understanding *and* misunderstanding, affirmation and negation/cancellation. He simultaneously detects in it the ground of the possibility of communication of a different order, of telecommunication or telephony of a technologically developed kind. Just as the repeatability of the 'yes' threatens it from within with the possibility of an unthinking, 'mechanical' repetition, so one can read in his formulation a caveat regarding the increasing (literally) mechanical 'repeatability' of the 'yes' and its equivalents (Derrida 1991:576):

The desire for memory and the mourning of the word *yes* set in motion the anamnestic machine. And its hypermnestic overacceleration. The machine reproduces the quick... it doubles it with its automaton.

In the first place, what Derrida refers to here (the 'desire for memory') is what gives rise to those colossal acts of anamnesis or remembering on the part of Hegel, on the one hand, and Joyce, on the other. Hegel's philosophy is a gigantic attempt to 'circumnavigate' or 'circumscribe' the entire history of human knowledge, preserving it, as well as anticipating what is to come in the form of dialectical logic or thought. Joyce's *Ulysses* (not to mention *Finnegan's wake*) accomplishes the same circular feat of recollective-anticipatory 'homecoming', this time by way of activating the signifying potential of language to the nth degree of multivocality, so that, in a certain sense, the possibility of a 'yes' as a novel rejoinder or interpretation is annihilated in advance – hence the mourning of the 'yes'. That is, every interpretive response triggers an echo in these texts, mocking it with its preprogrammed twin: it has always already been said in anticipation. But Derrida also intimates that the way is thus paved for the mechanical, automatic reproduction of the living ('quick') 'yes'. In his commentary on this, Caputo (1997:188) observes that:

If the technological repetition, if the 'reproduction' is 'faithful' enough, I cannot tell whether the voice is living or long since dead, a living 'yes' or an automaton. So *yes* must [be] said, must be constantly repeated, in the face of this threat or internal menace.

Repetition or the 'yes' also functions, of course, in the interpretation or understanding – what Derrida calls a 'counter-signature' – of literary texts that are marked, in turn,

by a specific 'signature'. The latter does not belong to the 'author' of the text in a narrowly psychological sense (although the writer of a text is certainly to be 'encountered' in the text in so far as she or he is 'responsible' for arranging the signifiers in a specific order), but is a matter of the singular concatenation of the signifiers that comprise it (Caputo 1997:189). Hence, Joyce's *Ulysses* bears its own unique signature, which calls for a counter-signature or repetition in the form of an interpretation. In the case of *Ulysses*, it confronts one with an aporia or a 'double bind' (in which humanity has been 'caught since Babel and Homer') stated as follows by Derrida (1991:580):

...on the one hand, we must write, we must sign, we must bring about new events with untranslatable marks – and this is the frantic call, the distress of a signature that is asking for a *yes* from the other, the pleading injunction for a counter-signature; but on the other hand, the singular novelty of every other *yes*, of every other signature, finds itself already phonogrammed in the Joycean corpus.

Just as a kind of paralysis would occur on the part of someone confronted by the restricted economy<sup>1</sup> of a technologically hyperprogrammed 'yes' or automated repetition that has been technologically designed to anticipate every possible salutation, so a 'hypermnestic' text like *Ulysses* paralyzes commentators, critics or interpreters because of the fact that every possible interpretation seems to encounter its counterpart there, in the hyperbolic, over-invested interiority of the text, which appears to have circumnavigated or circumscribed the globe populated by every possible counter-signature<sup>2</sup>. But, if this is true of the 'inside', where '...nothing new can take you by surprise...you also have the feeling that something might eventually happen to you from an unforeseeable [sic] outside. And you have guests' (Derrida, 1991:581). The 'outside' in question is a general economy of excess, and the 'guests' in question include 'non-Joycean' scholars such as Derrida himself, from whom, precisely, 'new events' or counter-signatures may be forthcoming. A 'yes' that has *not* been pre-programmed is, in other words, *also* always possible.

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<sup>1</sup> Derrida (1978) identifies, on the one hand, a 'restricted economy' (of what one might call 'insemination') where every investment is made for the sake of a return – e.g. in the form of the Hegelian dialectic, where sublation ensures the simultaneous preservation, cancellation and elevation or upliftment of every preceding historical development. On the other hand, there is a 'general economy' of dissemination, of excess, amnesia, loss and of the gift – in other words, where there is no reserve and no expected or predicted returns, and where meaning is always already ruined, subject to entropy and exposed to the unexpected.

<sup>2</sup> Caputo (1997:185) reminds one of the similarity – pointed to by Derrida (e.g. in Caputo 1997:25) – between Joyce and Hegel in this respect, in so far as both have tried to attain 'absolute knowledge' through their respective 'acts of memory'.

Derrida connects two types of laughter that he detects in Joyce's *Ulysses* with the 'yes' of repetition and the question of signatures. First, one may detect a 'reactive, even a negative, yes-laughter...resonate' (Derrida 1991:587). The triumphant, defiant tonality of this laughter suggests a certain pleasure that is derived from the hypermnesic omniscience embodied in this text, from its omnipotence in the face of the futile attempts to challenge its mastery. This reactive laughter is a restricted economy, a laughter of debt, of indebtedness to Joyce's text, for every act of interpretation finds itself already indebted to Joyce's investments, outwitted by the textural trappings woven by his hypertext. But Derrida also discerns a yes-laughter with a different tonality in *Ulysses*, a '...yes-laughter of a gift without debt, the light almost amnesic, affirmation, of a gift or an abandoned event...' (p.589). This gift-laughter intimates that, alongside the laughter of indebtedness, investment and return, there is the general economy of excess, of entropy, of the gift without return, of the unforeseeable event or unexpected arrival of the other – so unexpected that not even the most algorithmically calibrated technological instruments or megaprogrammes of control ever devised could leap into the not-yet of the unknown future to greet it with a knowing, anticipating 'yes', which would duplicate its tonality in advance with hypertechnological precision. This reminds one, requires one '...to try to think the singularity of the event, and therefore the uniqueness of the signature...' (Derrida, 1991:589). Only if one's 'yes' is *really* a 'yes' will humans be able to honour the singular or the particular alongside the universal in language and thought, in this way inaugurating the counter-signing event of interpretation or communication even as one runs the risk of losing it in the preprogramming web of hyper-signification and -information.

One could therefore say, analogous to Derrida's distinction between two types of laughter encountered in Joyce's *Ulysses*, that the same distinction applies to communication. The first type of laughter – sardonic, contemptuous; the laughter of debt, of indebtedness and investment – communicates to the interlocutor as to the reader-critic the implication that this hyper-mnesic, omni-programmed and absolutely circumnavigating message (text) has always already anticipated any and all possible responses and interpretations, leaving the interlocutor or critic impotent before its overawing countenance. The second type of laughter has a different tonality, that of the 'gift' without reserve, which leaves open and invites 'unanticipated' responses in the spirit of Heraclitus's well-known, paradoxical aphorism, 'Expect the unexpected'. What the latter suggests is that even the most over-invested message or text, regardless of its signifying textual capacity to have pre-empted every possible interpretive response, is subject to historically new contexts within which the totality of its own sign-structure will ineluctably encounter 'other' responses precisely because this structure cannot be limited to a set of meanings absolutely and conclusively circumscribed, circumnavigated like Odysseus' circular journey of homecoming. This way of understanding the aporia with which Joyce confronts the literary critic, I would therefore argue, provides a way of understanding the aporia

of communication. On the one hand, one's interlocutor has always already adopted the stance of the first kind of laughter, predicated on the belief that nothing you could say would surprise him or her. They always 'know' what to expect, are always one step ahead of you, making the conversation more like a monologue than a dialogue. But, on the other hand, they cannot avoid the possibility that you may say something completely unexpected, even if you have to shock them in the process. To this extent, their communicative stance unavoidably corresponds to the second type of laughter, of the 'gift' without reserve. The upshot of this analysis is that it is impossible to choose between these two possibilities, because the one always haunts the other like its shadow, always enabling and disabling it simultaneously. Communication is *and* is not possible – it is (im)possible.

And if anyone should assume that at any moment in this exchange the speaker is in touch with his or her own mind, thoughts or intentions, Derrida would have news for them: every speaker is at any given time just as much in the position of interpreter of their own intentions as an interlocutor, hence the expression 'to know one's own mind'. One knows it *and* one does not; you always have to renegotiate the task of articulating your thoughts and intentions, quite apart from questions of sincerity<sup>3</sup>. Which explains why one often has to 'correct' oneself when something just doesn't 'come out correctly' when it is said. This pertains to the question of otherness – not only with regard to the interlocutor as 'other', but to otherness within oneself, which may be articulated in different ways<sup>4</sup>. It may be done, for example, in terms of the Lacanian Other (Lee, 1990:36;59-60), the discourse of which constitutes the unconscious, by which one is always already disempowered (castrated) through the sheer entry into language (the repository of cultural norms) by the subject. But whether one avails oneself of the discourse of deconstruction, of psychoanalysis, or even of Gadamerian hermeneutics<sup>5</sup>, it is the case that one is always, ineluctably, confronted by the ostensible paradox that

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<sup>3</sup> *This is not the place to go into this aspect of Derrida's famous exchange with Searle on the matter of, among other things, sincerity in communication. Christopher Norris (1989:177-185) has provided an excellent critical summary and discussion of this encounter.*

<sup>4</sup> *Elsewhere (Olivier 2002a) I have elaborated on the question of otherness and its implications for communication by way of an examination of Wim Wenders's cinematic thematization of communication in postmodern culture in his film, Himmel über Berlin (Wings of desire).*

<sup>5</sup> *One could easily overlook the fact that Gadamer's (1982:273;350;358) famous (and ostensibly over-optimistic) figure of the 'fusion of horizons' presupposes separate horizons to begin with.*

the very possibility of communication is predicated on otherness<sup>6</sup> – on mutual otherness – and the aporia consists (as I have tried to show above via Derrida’s notion of the signature, the ‘yes’ and two tonalities of laughter) in otherness being the condition of the possibility of communicating and, simultaneously, of failing to do so. The fetishistic technophiliacs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century should remember this – none of the most sophisticated, hi-tech gadgets, which direct their glitzy appeal to the perpetually-constructed desire of the ‘consumer’ (which is therefore simultaneously the ‘consumed’), can *guarantee* communication. They are mere prosthetic devices promising what they cannot deliver, and are even more subject – given their dependence on functionally fallible technology – to the aporia of communication than everyday, face-to-face communication, with its built-in, countervailing tendencies to overcome *as well as* reinforce the barriers dividing individuals.<sup>7</sup>

Even if one wished to eschew the intricacies of deconstructive, quasi-transcendental analysis, this rings true at a concrete, lifeworld-level. There would be no wish to communicate if individuals were not divided by otherness, if more than one, ostensibly monadic ‘consciousness’ did not confront each other in an effort to understand one another (which is not to deny the Hegelian insight into the concomitant desire for power over the other, which triggers the master/slave dialectic – something taken into account by Habermas (Brand, 1990:15) with his distinction between communicative and strategic or instrumental action). If all of humanity were but moments of self-validating awareness in one all-encompassing mind, communication would be a misnomer. The effort to communicate implies otherness, foreignness and alienation, but also, simultaneously, the possibility of overcoming that alienation, of discovering, via the unavoidable interpretation or decoding of signifiers or symbols, that understanding, possibly even agreement, is momentarily attainable – albeit without enduring. On the contrary, understanding is always haunted by the spectre of misunderstanding, disagreement and conflict, just as misunderstanding is always accompanied by the elusive, evanescent genie of understanding.

Another way of saying this is that the aporia of communication consists of the simultaneous generation and entropy of meaning and understanding, in so far as every act of decoding a set of signifiers amounts to appropriation of meaning at the cost of

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<sup>6</sup> This is true of Heidegger’s (1978:148) *Dasein* too, despite his claim that *Dasein* is co-originally *Mitsein*, or being-with-others. Such an existential condition does not obviate the requirement to enter into a linguistic relation with the other. See in this regard Andrea Hurst’s (2003) illuminating comparative investigation of the conditions of a ‘human’ way of life (for ‘normal’ as well as for disabled *Dasein*), focusing on the early Heidegger and on Helen Keller.

<sup>7</sup> See in this regard Caputo (1997:107-113) for a lucid discussion of Derrida’s doubts concerning the related notion of ‘community’, and his reasons for preferring ‘hospitality’.

the repression of other, potential meanings. This is what Derrida (1998:65) has in mind where he critiques Lacan's assertion, that 'the letter always arrives at its destination' – the claim that, sooner or later, any set of signifiers that circulates in the space of the symbolic realm is appropriated by a subject receptive to its meaning as if it were meant just for him or her. Derrida's corrective claim is that it does *and* it does not: the moment you 'get it', you also 'lose it', given the inevitable repression of the symbolic or signifying richness 'contained' in any 'letter' at the moment of interpretive, decoding appropriation. What's more – this is ineluctably the case with all instances of interpretation, without which no communication is possible.<sup>8</sup>

All of this may come as an unpleasant and unconscionable surprise to the positivistic technophiliacs of a technocentric world that revels blindly in the achievements of the so-called 'communications industries'. Nevertheless, it is erroneous to conflate communication and information. Hardt and Negri's (2001:280) positing of the equivalence between 'postmodernization' and 'informatization' is therefore accurate in the emphasis it places on information, or, more specifically, optimal 'informatization' as a distinctive feature determining the superior position of the most 'developed' countries in the present global hierarchy of economic power (Hardt & Negri, 2001:284-289). The extent to which nations or societies have participated in and controlled each of the historically successive economic revolutions – the agricultural, the industrial and, most recently, the informational – has determined their position in the economic hierarchy of the world (Hardt & Negri, 2001:288).

Effectively this means that, at every stage of economic development, the earlier stage(s), instead of disappearing, become(s) subjected to and structurally modified by the later one(s). Agriculture has not disappeared since the advent of the industrial revolution – it has been industrialized (or commercialized). Neither agriculture nor industry has ceased to exist since the advent of the information-revolution – both have been and

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<sup>8</sup> One of the ironies of the discourse of information, communication industries and 'knowledge production' is that it creates the impression that there is knowledge and communication independent of the interpreting, signifying, decoding and – in an older idiom – 'knowing' human subject. Fact is that all that there is in what I would prefer to call a quasi-independent sense (that is, as a result of these activities on the part of humans) is information, or, in a structuralist and post-structuralist sense, language – what Lacan calls the symbolic realm (or the discourse of the Other), which pre-exists the subject. Before its interpretive appropriation by other human beings, it does not become communicable knowledge. And even as such – as 'knowledge' articulated in terms of signifiers along the intersecting syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes – it is subject to the simultaneous erosion and generation of meaning, which mark every instance of communication and interpretation. This is not to deny that other beings are, as far as one can judge, capable of decoding 'signals' on the part of members of their species, as well as in their environment, and of acting upon them. But how they 'understand' or 'decode' these signals is a matter of anthropomorphic conjecture.



are being systematically subjected to informatization. Cars that were built by assembly-line workers in 1930s Detroit are now assembled by computerized robots in multinational subsidiaries in (economically) second-tier countries like Brazil (Hardt & Negri, 2001:287).

Those countries leading the information revolution tend to export older technologies such as zinc smelters (with or without the means for informatization) to economically subordinated countries like South Africa – a sign, simultaneously, of the latter's economic dependence *and* aspirations, which are not unaccompanied by political consequences, either. Hence, the postcolonial phenomenon, that in 'liberated' 3<sup>rd</sup> World countries foreign political domination has been succeeded by domestic political domination (Hardt & Negri, 2001:133) of the impoverished multitude by oligarchic elites who operate hand in glove with foreign economic domination via investment in industrial and informational development. The result has been that those countries or regions lacking the economic infrastructure for clawing their way up the economic ladder to pervasive informatization have been marginalized by increasingly globalized economic power. Sub-Saharan Africans are not excluded from the informational economies of the world because they are starving; they are starving because of Africa's effective marginalization regarding the process of global informatization (Hardt & Negri, 2001:288).

But, lest those 'First World' countries, which are basking in the artificial glow emanating from the screens of high-tech computers populating their social and economic space, indulge too unreflectively in premature, self-congratulatory celebrations of the effectivity of their poly-communicational 'successes', they should take note of the threat to communication at the heart of all these informational networks in more than one sense, the first of which has been articulated in terms of what Derrida terms the 'gramophone effect'. A similar threat may be formulated as follows:

It is often said that we live in the 'information age', when the world has become a 'global village', where it has shrunk because of the relative ease of 'communicating' with one another over vast distances and of traversing these distances in a relatively short time (cf. for example Olivier 2002a, and Harvey 1990:147 and further for an extended treatment of this and related issues). Communication has become ridiculously easy, or so it would seem.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps the truth is rather that it has become ridiculous to claim that communication has improved because of communications technology. It is only when information and communication are conflated that one can reach that erroneous conclusion. Over and above the inescapability of personal interpretation in the face of the iterable signifier and the concomitant aporia of the simultaneous generation *and*

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. in this regard my essay on *Kieslowski's Three colours Blue, White and Red (2002)*, especially the part on *Red*, which focuses on the theme of the conditions of genuine communication between individuals.

loss of meaning, elaborated on earlier, there is what Hardt and Negri (2001:54) call '...one of the central and most urgent political paradoxes of our time: in our much celebrated age of communication, *struggles have become all but incommunicable.*' Here, then, is another threat to communication, but in a different sense to that uncovered by Derrida's analysis of the 'yes'. What Hardt and Negri have in mind becomes more apparent where they continue (Hardt & Negri, 2001:56):

All these struggles, which pose really new elements, appear from the beginning to be already old and outdated – precisely because they cannot communicate, because their languages cannot be translated. The struggles do not communicate despite their being hypermediatized, on television, the Internet, and every other imaginable medium. Once again we are confronted by the paradox of incommunicability.

The 'struggles' that Hardt and Negri refer to are directed against what they perceive as the 'global order of Empire' which, succinctly put, comprises the current, nascent transnational political order, intertwined with capital in its latest phase of globalization, a phase where the traditional distinctions between the socio-economic sphere and those of culture and politics have all but disappeared. These struggles, whether in the guise of the Tiananmen Square confrontation, the strikes in Seoul and Paris or the riots in Los Angeles, '...are at once economic, political and cultural...they are biopolitical struggles, struggles over the form of life. They are constituent struggles, creating new public spaces and new forms of community' (Hardt & Negri, 2001:56). Hardt and Negri offer some explanations for the baffling incommunicability of the struggles, such as the difficulty of recognizing a 'common enemy against which the struggles are directed' (Hardt & Negri, 2001:56), and – more importantly – '...that there is no common language of struggles that could "translate" the particular language of each into a cosmopolitan language'. Perhaps, they suggest, a new kind of communication is required – 'a communication of singularities' (Hardt & Negri, 2001:57).

It seems to me that this last point goes to the heart of the paradox concerning the worldwide struggles against a new global hegemony, namely that in the 'age of communication' there are events that resist communicability. What one witnesses here surely goes beyond even what Lyotard (1988:9) terms a 'differend', which occurs when a dispute between two or more parties is adjudicated in terms of the idiom or discursive rules of only one of the parties (and therefore results in injustice). This would imply that one is dealing with existing ideolects or discourses, while, in this case of highly localized 'struggles' against an elusive 'common enemy', only the latter has a developed (pun intended) discursive structure. The 'struggles' in question are inchoate, singular, as yet ineffable. They represent a 'radical' differend or difference, on a global scale, between what Derrida (1978:251-277) calls a 'restricted economy' in which every investment is made for the sake of a return - here, in exemplary fashion, of advanced capitalism -

and the 'general economy', characterized by excess, waste and uncontrollable entropy, of an unforeseeable, utopian, vitalistic, multitudinous future, impossible to communicate even with the facility and flexibility provided by the most sophisticated 'communication networks' in the history of civilization.

Like any 'restricted economy' – for example Hegel's dialectic of history where, through sublation every stage of development is preserved, cancelled and 'lifted up' or elevated in every later stage – the processes of 'capitalist globalization' cannot afford to allow any event to escape from their all-consuming assimilative drive. Hence (Hartdt & Negri, 2001:59):

Even when these struggles become sites effectively closed to communication, they are at the same time the maniacal focus of the critical attention of Empire. They are the educational lessons in the classroom of administration and the chambers of government – lessons that demand repressive instruments. The primary lesson is that such events cannot be repeated if the processes of capitalist globalization are to continue. These struggles, however, have their own weight, their own specific intensity, and moreover they are immanent to the procedures and developments of imperial power. They invest and sustain the processes of globalization themselves. Imperial power whispers the names of the struggles in order to charm them into passivity, to construct a mystified image of them, but most important to discover which processes of globalization are possible and which are not. In this contradictory and paradoxical way the imperial processes of globalization assume these events, recognizing them as both limits and opportunities to recalibrate Empire's own instruments.

It seems uncanny that one of the popular cinematic products of the multinationals, which comprise the vanguard of global capital, should provide a paradigmatic, metonymic model that functions like an extended hyper-icon in relation to the encompassing politico-economic system as a whole. This is precisely what occurs in *Matrix Reloaded*, where Neo confronts the Architect, designer of the 'matrix' or programme that keeps unsuspecting humans captive while manipulating their 'perceptions' of the world with a view to inducing (illusory but efficacious) satisfaction of their 'needs'. The Architect informs Neo that he exists (as did all his predecessors) in order to test the system; not to destroy it, but to enable its improvement if not its perfection. Metonymically this intra-diegetic scene-sequence, and, in its turn the film as a whole, function in a manner that communicates their complicity with the system, or perhaps rather the political-economic process of global capitalism today. What is within the film-narrative resistance by the neo-messianic figure of Neo, as well as Trinity, Morpheus and others against the endlessly replicating representatives of the 'matrix', represents, at an extra-diegetic level, the various 'struggles' against 'Empire', and just as the degree of effectiveness of Neo's resistance corresponds to an increase in the matrix's level of performativity,

so the struggles in global space correspond to the ongoing optimization of the global system's effectivity.

The supreme irony, of course, is that the film, *Matrix Reloaded*, just as its predecessor, *The Matrix*, is itself part of the hegemonic world system – a part that provides or, at the level of audience reception, ‘communicates’ the intense thrill of vicarious, illusory victory over an oppressive adversary. ‘Empire’ thrives on the successful (mis)communication of such images of liberation, because it effectively undermines ‘real’ challenges to the ‘matrix’ within which members of the audience live. In summary, films like *The Matrix* and their sequels are ‘castrating’ in the psychoanalytical sense of disempowerment by the representatives, including metonymic artefacts and discourses of societal normativity. As such, they communicate and miscommunicate at the same time, although what they ‘communicate’ only becomes apparent in the course of critical analysis.<sup>10</sup>

And yet, as the preceding analysis suggests, not all of the signifying potential of the struggles alluded to by Hardt and Negri is assimilated by and into the restricted economy of global capital. If one is indeed witnessing singular events here which, as yet, lack an idiom of their own, entropy or – in psychoanalytical language – ‘foreclosure’<sup>11</sup> is ineluctable. Just as, in the case of interpreting Joyce’s *Ulysses*, both the restricted economy of interpretive debt (to Joyce) and the general economy of gift (to the open community of interpreters) are incurred and received respectively, so, in the sporadic, intermittent struggles against a global system served by its own, integrated global communications networks, both the restricted economy of investment, assimilation and improved performativity/informativity as well as the general economy of waste, entropy and foreclosure are activated or encountered. In everyday communication one succeeds and fails; the same may be said of the interpretation of texts – even hyperprogrammed ones such as Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Byatt’s *Possession* and *Babel Tower* or Eco’s *Foucault’s pendulum*. Finally, nor are the information and communication networks of the ‘connected’ world exempt from this aporia. They, too, succeed only, in their own terms, to the extent that they fail in their capacity to grasp or communicate the differential, adversarial struggles within their own informational space, even as the system of which the ‘communicational’ networks form an integral part continually strives to neutralize these struggles in various ways.

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<sup>10</sup> Such critical analysis calls for, and should be inseparable from, critical practice, of course. See in this regard Hurst & Olivier 1997.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Foreclosure’, unlike ‘repression’, refers to that which has been rejected by the psychic apparatus, and which therefore cannot return, like a symptom that pathologically signals the ‘workings’ of repressed materials. The foreclosed can only function as that which is the inexplicable, impossible source of resistance to any system of rationalization or colonization. Cf. Benvenuto & Kennedy 1986:148-153, as well as Olivier 1998:137-139.

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