With Mirrors for Shields: Cultivating *Mimesis* to Articulate
Communication and Security Studies
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Introduction

It's an honor to join you this evening. I had the pleasure of knowing Aubrey Fisher as a

Master's student here at Utah. He offered his students a model of earthy and rigorous

professionalism, and we were better for it. He was irreplaceable, and I'm grateful to everyone

who has supported this lecture series so that we can honor both Aub's memory and also the

future of the department. Those themes of influence and modeling create a bridge to the topic of

my lecture this evening. I am indeed interested in surveying and developing the intersections

between Communication Studies and Security Studies. However, rather than present you with

some abstract meta-perspective, I will try to work inductively by focusing on a particular image

which evokes the shared interests of these fields, and their possibilities for further articulation.

That image is *mimesis*.

Mimesis: History and Overview

It seems best to consider mimesis not as a single concept, or even a single theoretical tradition. Instead, it is better thought of as an extended family of concepts, and a dispersed network of conversations. These conversations are devoted to considering the nature and implications of human activities characterized by *imitation, adaptation, representation*, and *mimicry*.[1] That is, discussions of mimesis are concerned with the manifold forms and practices (e.g., creative play) through which humans depict objects, events, persons and conditions in their environment, and then interact with those depictions to produce various outcomes of assimilation and transformation. These discussions are particularly concerned with the qualities of mimetic relationship that develop between knowing subjects and known objects (e.g., originality vs. repetition; distinctiveness vs. conflation; raw materials vs. finished products, etc.). They are also concerned with the consequences for cultural ethics and politics that arise from our identification with worldly objects, and our modeling of their features. Mimesis is a powerful concept because it evokes core concerns of Western philosophy and modern social theory concerning the nature of subjectivity and the means by which inter-subjective relations are established. It is utilized to explore the distinction between self-conscious beings and animated entities, and the role of symbolic mediation in generating both power and knowledge. As a result, it is something like an onto-epistemological *horizon* to which many human projects orient in pursuing their interests. It hovers, for example, over the history of Western art and literature as a condition of possibility enabling questions of correspondence between illusion and reality, and work and world, to fuel related cultural controversy. The historical development of mimesis has thus been a source of enduring distinctions made in cultural life, including those between the sensual and the rational, the liminal and the everyday, actuality and imagination, authenticity and contrivance, autonomy and dependency, master and disciple, genius and hack, and (as we shall discuss) the quick and

the dead. It is, in other words, nothing less than our inherited intellectual custodian of the relationship between the master cultural tropes of identity and difference.

We may triangulate the intellectual history of mimesis by sketching five distinctive bodies of work that are commonly viewed as central to its development.

Plato

Famously, Plato is responsible for giving imitation a bad name. That is, in seeking to "dislodge myth, poetry, and rhetoric from their positions of authority and establish in their place the sovereignty of philosophy,"[2] Plato gathered the existing meanings of mimesis to create "a far-reaching technical concept that defined the representational arts as such."[3] In books 2, 3, and 10 of *The Republic,* Plato proposed a skeptical ontological hierarchy which established original, essential, and abstract forms as the standard by which specific, material manifestations could be judged as either conformity or deviation. For Plato, perfect and ultimately inaccessible Being was always superior to ignorant, parasitic, and superfluous forms of human Doing. Plato subsequently distinguished tolerable forms of "good" mimesis (*icons*), such as speech, which could be properly subordinated to the models that they copied. "Bad" forms (e.g., *phantasms* such as writing, painting, and tragedy), alternately, created false resemblances, and contributed to excessive emotion and even violence among the body politic. Activities such as poetry (whose narrators sometimes voiced the characters it depicted) thus performed increasingly derivative levels of imitation, and were considered marginal and degenerative.

Aristotle

Aristotle is responsible for partially redeeming mimesis as an innate human faculty that facilitated (rather than inhibited) necessary learning about the world. For Aristotle, works of art were held not to *dupe* audiences, but to *produce* distinctive forms in their own right.[4]

Historically, this move expanded the range of *objects* involved in mimesis to characterize both the *target* and the *product* of imitative practice. Mimetic forms encouraged audiences to embrace *verisimilitude* – that is, to "recognize features from their own experience of the world within the work of art that cause the representation to *seem* valid and acceptable."[5] Rather than diminishing its models, Aristotle reasoned, mimesis could usefully *improve* upon them – for example, by clarifying their immediate features so that enduring and universal qualities of their types might be better understood. Aristotle's limited advocacy of mimesis tied its evaluation to its potential for good form – that is, the use of conventions associated with medium and genre which were appropriate to an artist's chosen materials and purposes. Additionally, Aristotle endorsed the potential for mimetic forms to induce emotional effects in their audience that, instead of diminishing the civic capacity for governance, might conform to legitimate rationality. He thereby endorsed forms of realism that were grounded in the beneficial evocation of cultural norms, and that cultivated discipline and refinement in emotional experience.

Adorno, Horkheimer, and Benjamin

These Frankfurt School scholars were responsible for deepening critical awareness of the political and ethical dimensions of mimesis – especially its relationship to larger trends of modernity. In particular, they historicized mimesis as an ancient practice of *mimicry* by which primitive humans were able to engage and merge with the variously beautiful, chaotic, and dangerous features of their natural world. As a result of practicing mimesis, our ancestors were able to achieve protean, ecstatic, and animistic forms of communion with Nature that generated wisdom contributing to their survival. Their "magical" enchantment and incorporation of fearful objects through embodied activities such as dance and music created a kind of immunization – an internalization of difference that both sustained integrity and accommodated novelty. Two

historical events disrupted this life-world, however: The first was the development of spoken and written language, which created new forms of "non-sensuous" similarity for their users. The second was the rise in modernity of instrumental rationality, which led to widespread repression of the primitive, and which facilitated the scientific and industrial domination of nature. For these theorists, however, some forms of modern art sustained the residue of primitive mimesis, and might thus reactivate a critical dialectic opposing the cultural conditions of alienation and domination. Tempered with a robust practice of non-instrumental rationality, art could serve as a refuge for weary and oppressed moderns, although its subversive effect, achieved through a complex process of simultaneously acknowledging and relativizing cultural conventions, might be unpleasantly galvanizing.[6]

Renee Girard

This French sociologist and scholar of religion proposed an account of mimesis based on the role of desire as an engine for the practice of emulation and rivalry.[7] Specifically, Girard conceptualized mimesis as a multi-layered, triadic structure of identity- and relationship-formation. This structure is developed between a desiring subject (a.k.a., the imitator), a second other (the mediator), and a third object that is animated by their shared desire. In this vision, the desire of the mediator for the object triggers feelings of jealousy and competition in the imitator. While it appears that they are both competing for possession of the object, the imitator is actually engaged in desire of the mediator – and specifically, of the mode of desire for the object that is practiced by that mediator. That is, the imitator desires to desire as the mediator desires, but misrecognizes that desire and displaces it onto a quest for control of the valued object. For both the imitator and the mediator, possession of the object serves to mark their difference, and ventilates the intolerable condition of their apparent sameness. To further complicate matters, the

mediator may develop desire for the desire displayed by the imitator for his or her own desire for the object. As this mutual mimicry escalates, the imitator and the mediator both lose their identification with cultural distinctions and hierarchies which might otherwise buffer their relationship. They focus increasingly on their desire to eliminate each other, and lose sight of their underlying desire for the object. Their relationship spirals into violent conflict, which can threaten the stability of a society. As a result, its members implicitly develop a solution involving displacement of their collective competitive mimicry onto a scapegoat figure, which is invested with a sacred, sovereign power of differentiation, but which is also vulnerable to populist destruction. The subsequent murder (literal or figurative) of the scapegoat substitutes for the elimination of the originally-divisive object, and creates a temporary experience of unification that releases cultural members' otherwise pent-up hostility. As a result, for Girard, the goal of social order is not to eliminate mimetic competition, but to organize its selfish and dangerous potential so that sufficient cooperation may be maintained through ritual sacrifice. Girard also recognized that competitive mimesis might be channeled by cultural elites toward selected objects which they controlled, and whose pursuit benefited their interests.[8]

Derrida, Lacan and Baudrillard

These contemporary French theorists engaged mimesis as a condition which advanced their post-structuralist and postmodern claims concerning the status of culture, textuality, and subjectivity. In these conceptions, mimesis clarifies the lack of foundational origins for linguistic meaning. This lack propels a reactionary realism in language, such that it typically asserts referentiality while nonetheless leaking evidence of its arbitrariness and paradoxical relations. Here, "the disappearance of the origin of the visible . . . gives rise to a chain of substitutions so that all presences will become supplements standing in for the absent origin."[9] This conception

of mimesis in and through semiosis invites the deconstruction of doubled, hybrid cultural artifacts, focusing on their productivity. A premier example here involves regimes of simulation which cultivate popular experience not by claiming the security of final referentiality, but through their winking acknowledgement of intertextuality (e.g., displayed through their use of quotation and parody). In this regime of hyper-reality, signs assert their resemblances to objects that are not only absent, but which do not exist. For developing human subjects, the psychic development of identity occurs not as a fated unfolding of unique, individual essence, but as the incorporation of reflected appearances and linguistic systems which offer the self-compelling-but-precarious illusions of unity and consistency. Through the mechanisms of repetition, displacement, and projection, the traces of our early identifications with significant others disperse and recur uncannily across an evolving field of relational partners. The world is represented to us as an ongoing churn of appropriation, refashioning, and recycling -- principally of images.

Our copies need no longer be held accountable to their ostensible origins. Instead, we acknowledge their value as repetitions which accommodate the contingencies of evolving situations, and which bear unpredictable configurations of residues into the future, creating unexpected outcomes. The postmodern image of mimesis thus celebrates a potential for liberation presumed inherent in critically embracing ambiguity over certainty, the agility of the present moment over the dead weight of traditions, excess over finitude, and contingency over self-unity. Ideally, this embrace generates alternative modes of difference that subvert the premature foreclosure of human flourishing. Related acts of deconstruction employ mimesis to precipitate a crisis of authority in realist discourses that aspire to wholeness, finality, and universality.

Mimesis in Communication Studies

The investment of communication studies in utilizing mimesis should already be apparent. We can confirm that investment by clarifying several distinct projects in its disciplinary appropriation. Among media historians, for example, mimesis conceptualizes the didactic modeling of communal integration, displayed by the value-driven heroes depicted in myths of pre-literate, oral cultures.[10] Mimesis has also been used by scholars in the related fields of media and technology studies to theorize the distinctive articulations of presence and absence achieved by "virtual reality" and gaming platforms, and their impacts on various identifications (e.g., national citizenship) held by users.[11] Additional questions for these scholars include the potentially therapeutic contributions of "alternate" mediated realities to psychic identity formation (and hence, cultural politics) by offering beneficial objects for assimilation.[12]

Mimesis has been employed by scholars of rhetoric and public address to conceptualize qualities of public discourse which induce artists and audiences to conform their responses to the entailments of represented conditions. Additionally, mimesis operates as a reflexive resource for rhetorical scholars, signaling both ancient philosophical debates concerning the production of *logos*, and also, more practically, the role of imitation in shaping both rhetorical pedagogy and performance.[13] When they are used to shape the relations between rhetors and their audiences, note G. Thomas Goodnight and Sandy Green, modern and postmodern mimetic strategies may unpredictably accomplish a variety of ends, including "institutional legitimacy, social innovation, generative dissemination, competitive rivalry, scapegoat sacrifice, a flaring of terms, networked resemblances, or self-organizing cultural play."[14] For rhetoricians, therefore, mimesis may be defined as "strategic (contending and contesting) imitation."[15] Rhetorical critics have also argued that the textuality of "fictional" forms employing mimesis is complex, and that their

ambivalent relationship with "reality" may facilitate the creative development of supplemental narrative visions.[16]

Among intercultural communication scholars, mimesis has been used to critique the often-ferocious politics conducted among and between cultural groups when their members controversially claim authentic identity with particular origins in a manner which transgresses legitimate categories and means of classification. Here, one critical issue involves the ways in which challenges posed by subaltern groups to encroaching claims of authenticity, and that are motivated to recuperate a desired standard, may nonetheless employ discursive devices (e.g., stereotypes) which contribute to their marginalization.[17] Mimesis has also been used to critique related discursive practices of imitation and substitution by which the identities of distinct cultural groups may be articulated so as to create a relationship of scapegoating, whereby the interests of one group can only be advanced at the expense of another's interests.[18]

Finally, among critical-cultural communication scholars, the complex and provocative theory generated by Frankfurt School scholars has been embraced as a powerful resource for reconciling the traditions of historical-materialist and culturalist critique, and for developing "redemptive" interventions into the hegemony of instrumental and realist discourses.[19]

Mimesis and Security Studies

We turn now to the parallel universe of security studies, and the importance of mimesis to its agenda. To characterize this relationship, we may begin by isolating two images in the contemporary cultural confluence of horror and science fiction texts devoted to apocalyptic themes of plague, vampires, zombies, and alien invasion. Our first image involves the enduring anxiety attached to scenarios in which dangerous others are able to violate, neutralize and otherwise overcome the defenses of valued cultural members. By using means such as

camouflage, deceit, seduction, and violent force, adversaries are able to victimize these apparently original subjects, and convert them into various forms of terminal imitation. While this image has been commemorated in western culture as the equine trickery practiced by ancient Greek soldiers against their Trojan foes, we may trace its intertextual rippling across contemporary discourses of medicine, journalism, and politics (e.g., depicting the "blue-on-green" attacks practiced on U.S.-led forces in Afghanistan by rogue members of allied security forces which they have mistakenly presumed to be loyal). Here, rich meanings and pleasures are developed as these texts construct various material and symbolic membranes which separate originals from their uncanny perversions. Narratively, these texts also press upon those membranes to poignantly explore related possibilities of suspension and reversibility (e.g., *Are zombies dead or alive?; Can vampires be cured?; How does one reconcile feelings of longing and responsibility when confronted by a beloved who has been "turned"*?, etc.).

Our second, closely-related image involves the subsequent conscription of mimetic victims into the ongoing reproduction of the threat which has claimed them. Here, images of political conspiracy and viral pandemic supplement the tragedy of extinguished originals with the depiction of their imitations' enrollment into an economy of predatory circulation. These dead copies are not only toxic, in other words, they are also highly contagious and mobile. Adversaries have appropriated their agency to create *copies which desire to make other copies*, now become servants of vicious and implacable regimes of *autopoiesis*. Here, cultural texts explore throbbing ethical issues of self-awareness, responsibility, and redemption. *To what extent are enrolled subjects conscious of, and identified with, their actions and their consequences? What is the nature of their relationship with their controllers? How does their evolving contact*

with candidates for conversion alternately confirm and subvert their compulsion to make

sameness?

Allegorically, these images crystallize the "actual" politics of security, which involve ongoing struggles conducted by individuals and groups who are embedded in relations of co-existence and interdependency. These struggles include: conceptualizing valued possessions that they desire to preserve; developing resources sufficient for ensuring that preservation (including the consent of their members to bear related requirements of sacrifice and productivity); discerning threats warranting the deployment of those resources; using those resources in ways that advance, rather than compromise, their interests; and living with and learning from the consequences of that usage. Beyond these allegories, however, we may also develop deeper connections between mimesis and security.

The theme of security, for example, is hiding in plain sight in early discussions of mimesis. More specifically, while conventional discussions of Platonic philosophy emphasize its hostility to artistic imitation, they underplay the role of security actors in this drama. That is, Plato's discussion in *The Republic* of his ideal city's curriculum displays a concern with its "guardians" which resonates in our current moment. Here, Matthew Potolsky's account is succinct:

> Socrates and his auditors worry that those individuals best suited
> to protect the city from external threats might themselves threaten
> the populace, since the aggression they properly turn outward can
> also be turned inward and threaten the city itself. For this reason,
> Socrates outlines a course of education for the guardians . . .
> [arguing that they] can be shaped ethically by the stories they hear.[20]

For our purposes, three themes are relevant here. The first involves implicit public awareness of the potential for promiscuous loyalty and violence among security actors. Particularly within liberal democracies, this potential creates enduring tension in the relations

between military institutions and civil society, as their members each assert shared codes of duty and patriotism which ostensibly subordinate the former's violent capabilities to the contingencies of public opinion and state authorization. The compulsory quality of these invocations, however, belies an awareness of risk that they seek to repress: The state claims to control an apparatus that it cannot coerce, and that furthermore may turn its ominous power back upon the state to appropriate its authority (as in the recent case of Egypt) or – presumably at the direction of the state – upon the citizens of the nation (as in the recent case of Syria).

A second theme involves the apparent inexhaustibility and self-fueling quality of security-related violence. That is, Plato's concern acknowledges the mimetic compulsion experienced by some security actors to extend, repeat, or otherwise misdirect violence that has been sanctioned for performance in a particular time and place, to another where it has not (and here, of course, we may nod to the current epidemic of PTSD among returning U. S. veterans).

Finally, we see the foreshadowing of a civil society that recognizes its own compensatory power in producing cultural forms that influence audiences. That is, those forms may serve to sustain the valued objects that ideally ground the motivation of security actors (i.e., by depicting a society worth defending). They may also induce self-inhibition among those actors, and cement their exclusive identification with the state's authority. It is particularly significant, then, that Plato most feared the communication of poetic form which might encourage the guardians to practice deception, and of poetic content which might encourage them to experience divided loyalty. Historically underlying the viability of any security apparatus, then, is an imperative for the state and its citizens to manage the mimetic habits of its actors.

This reading of Plato's work prepares us to acknowledge the profound significance of mimetic processes operating within and between *contemporary* security actors. The classic

concept of "the security dilemma" in international relations provides one example. Briefly, this concept encapsulates a dilemma facing states such that they cannot reliably determine the motives surrounding each other's displays of military capability. Potentially, this ambiguity leads states to misrecognize developments motivated by a desire for adequate defense as offensive threats, thus triggering spirals of competition, and heightening the risk of war. We may recognize, however, the reflexive levels of mimesis operating in this process. That is, the security dilemma primarily exists because states choose to develop their military capabilities as *both* material engines of "actual" force, and *also* as apparatuses signaling the *capability and intention to use that force.* That is, rather than obscuring their military capabilities and uncloaking them in the surprise of attack, states produce a *semblance* and *foreshadowing* of that terrifying violence through their management of artifacts. Granting that this semiosis generates useful options for states, we may also emphasize that it is an act of *sublimation* in which their desire to perform violence is suspended in a formation of gestures. This condition enables various groups to interact with those representations, and to generate their own supplementary texts (e.g., official intelligence estimates) – all of which may be technically distinguishable from the actuality of war. This choice, then, is a primary level of mimesis which modulates the temporality of war, and precedes the secondary level of envy and imitation emphasized in conventional conceptions of arms race.

In related work, Joelien Pretorius has examined the occurrence of "institutional isomorphism" among national security elites, noting that the legacies of modernity and imperialism have shaped the development of "security imaginaries" among some developing nations, inducing them to imitate the military organization of hegemonic Western models.[21] Similar conditions of envy operate, of course, in the formation of alliances between states (where

sufficient similarity is required to build trust, and where a hierarchy distinguishing junior and senior partners is typically developed). And these conditions infamously saturate the relations of conquest established between imperial powers and the officials and subjects of their colonial administrations. Homi Bhabha has discussed the critical potential of mimicry performed by the colonial subjects of Western imperialism, such that their apparent emulation of colonizer models actually served through uncanny mirroring to de-install their asserted qualities of naturalness and realism.[22] And elsewhere, in a study focused on the perverse mimetics of counter-insurgency warfare, Antonius Robben argues that attempts by U.S. forces in Iraq to imitate the urban warfare tactics practiced by their adversaries (e.g., dispersal into civilian populations, continuous mobility, and spontaneous attacks) produced tragic outcomes. These occurred because those forces could not simultaneously adopt those innovations and maintain their inflexible, Manichean frames for demonizing their enemy.[23]

Returning to our previous discussion of Girard, we see that the state has a fundamental interest in containing mimetic competition practiced among its citizens, lest it spiral into domestic anarchy. As a result, we should remain critically vigilant for how interaction between and among groups of state and sub-state actors succeeds in producing of scapegoats whose ritual sacrifice disperses this pressure. Two familiar examples here include the Rosenbergs in early-Cold War U.S. culture,[24] and the Tutsi in the 1994 Hutu-led genocide in Rwanda.[25] This condition also operates, of course, at the level of the international system: Xenophobic states may pursue war because they are reacting to anxiety posed by the apparent threat of alterity to their exclusive and rigid identity myths, such that war fulfills their desire to convert intolerable difference to tolerable sameness. Through conquest and occupation, aggressor nations may thus express "hostile desire," and incorporate difference in a manner which permits them to

recuperate their illusions of distinctiveness and virtue. Viewed from the vantage of feminist psychoanalysis, war also permits masculinist states to restore the ever-vulnerable and -vanishing phallus, which cements their obsessive desire for grounded identity and agency.[26]

Turning to other manifestations of mimesis in state security, we see how its officials are inherently concerned with assessing and validating the authenticity of apparent identities whose performance activates their gaze of jurisdiction and mission. Here, the conjuncture is one of visibility, legibility, vulnerability, authority, and mobility. Its exemplary scene is the administration of immigration and customs policies at national borders, including the use of technologies of surveillance, detection, and documentation. The obvious concern for the state is that unacknowledged and unauthorized imitations of legitimate identities not be permitted to "pass," thus achieving inhabitation of its space, and access to other benefits afforded by their affiliation with its sovereignty. In this process, the state presumes authority to assert the conditions of valid identities, such that the qualities of deception, deviation, and insufficiency may be attributed to candidate subjects.

Finally, we may acknowledge mimetic collaboration conducted between the state, civil society, and public culture in the reproduction of desirable national identities. That is, the imperatives of patriotism, duty, and loyalty which typically infuse the discourses of citizenship – and particularly the reactionary discourses of nativism and victimage – may be understood as a mimetic compulsion to reproduce desirable form. For critical scholars, of course, the irony is that such discourses assert their preferred identities as essential, even as their anxiety regarding the detection and discipline of difference belies their contingency as historical and cultural artifacts. When they are organized under the imperatives of state security, the principal processes

of cultural socialization are – or should be – devoted to appropriate mimesis – that is, to ensuring that citizens imitate the state's preferred models.

How might critical-cultural scholars use the concept of mimesis to engage the phenomena of security? Two recent works of scholarship provide worthy models for emulation.

Here, we may begin with Michael Dillon's profound discussion of security as an 'onto-political' phenomenon.[27] By this phrase, Dillon means that security is not simply one type of function that a society pursues among others such as politics, economics, religion, or education. Instead, security must be acknowledged as a fundamental condition in which a society violently interrupts, suspends, and re-organizes an otherwise organic continuity of primordial human Being. As a result, security encompasses all human activities operating to create limits on the potential evolution of Being by making distinctions and setting limits. These activities produce various dialectics of protection and constraint, and of Self and Other. They also betray, however, "an excess, or surplus, to which the very existence of [those] thing[s] remains . . . irremissibly indebted."[28] An especially important dependency here involves "insecurity" as an ineradicable condition that security creates through its very existence (e.g., by claiming it as a *raison d'etre*). Insecurity subsequently casts a perpetual shadow across those projects, threatening their imminent undoing, and undermining their claims to certain or final accomplishment. For Dillon, 'security' is thus not an object of politics which exists before or outside of it. It is instead the very condition by which the development of politics – as the creation and enforcement of order—is made possible. Its sphere includes instead all activities by which elemental human freedom is first secured (i.e., restrained) through the creation of conditions which *only then* make possible the generation of specific forms of knowledge, discourse, and power. Dillon's persistent question, thus, may be summarized as: *How must "security" first conceptualize and associate*

phenomena (including itself), before it may be practiced as itself? What are the means (e.g., calculation and repetition) by which it does so? Mimesis is central here in that it conceptualizes the objectification enacted by security upon its desired phenomena (including itself) as a sequence of productive conversions. In this process, "the thing to be secured is translated into the object susceptible to being secured, such that it then becomes that which . . . [has been] secured . . . [and] which now enjoys . . . substantive security."[29] Thus, Dillon concludes, "securing an object is only possible on the condition that the integrity of the original thing is destroyed."[30]

In another philosophical work that explores the role of mimesis more generally in international affairs, Necati Polat embraces this concept as a means of problematizing conventional schemes of order.[31] Polat is specifically concerned with political regimes which sustain their authority by enforcing arbitrary modes of differentiation and hierarchies of status which distinguish original models from dissembling copies. Recovering mimesis enables critics to validate the role of "worldly exchange that is constitutive of all meaning"[32] – particularly the significance of everyday experience that is otherwise erased in abstract and de-humanizing regimes of security. In particular, mimesis elevates narrativity – as a practice which both represents and relativizes security regimes – to the status of privileged means by which the hybridity, dependency and ideological productivity of those regimes may be clarified and evaluated (i.e., as generating artifacts that have no transcendental existence prior to their representation). Provocatively, for example, Polat deconstructs romantic myths surrounding the ideal of "peace," establishing that it is not so much a distinctive opposite of "war," as a complex collaboration among actors located within and between states. This collaboration creates an environment in which the authority of state and meta-state entities to use violence is deferred and distributed via representation through internal systems of politics and economics. The effect of

this process is to create a nominally plausible – and also quite precarious – appearance which should, however, not be confused with the absence or repudiation of violence associated with the ideal of peace.

Mimesis, Communication Studies, and Security Studies:

Models for Potential Collaboration

Given these resources, what are the specific sites of convergence where security studies and communication studies scholars might recognize each other as collaborators? That is, to reflexively invoke the frame of mimesis, what are the conditions which might induce these fields to desire each other as worthy models of emulation? Two recent projects suggest some possibilities.

My first example claims theatre scholarship as a cousin of communication via the bridging trope of performance. In her recent study of theatrical performance modes in the 20th and 21st-centuries, Jenny Hughes argues that theatre is a morally promiscuous form of mimesis that may be creatively appropriated by terrorist, counter-insurgency *and* anti-war groups to serve their interests.[33] In developing this project, Hughes builds on the work of Frankfurt School theorists to propose a "critical mimesis" for use by performers and audiences in the War on Terror. Ideally, this device is capable of "interrupt[ing] . . . the atrophic, petrified projections of self and other mobilized by the mimetic excesses of a system in crisis."[34] As a result, theatre may promote enhanced understanding and reflection concerning the possibilities of more closely approaching the ideals of equality and justice. Hughes specifically cites the uncanny ability of theatre to shape audience affect by simultaneously replicating familiar conventions and defamiliarizing them. Hughes draws on anthropologist Michael Taussig's well-known phrase to characterize current security lifeworlds as anxiety-ridden and reactive "nervous system[s]." By

isolating the ambivalent, dangerous, and regressive features of these lifeworlds, and by representing them in situations outside of their control, theatre may create ruptures in their existing circulation of fear, and articulate a "contingent and determined revaluing of threatened and wasted life."[35] As signaled in this phrase, the image of "waste" is a central trope in this politics of performance. Specifically, its stagings recover the abject, fragmented, bodily *remainders* of aggressions co-produced by contemporary globalization, militarism, and neo-imperialism. They usefully articulate the shared tendencies of theatrical and security regimes to engage in copying which produces the *decay* of their originals. 'Mortifying' performances employing critical mimesis may induce their audiences to reconsider their enduring desire for safe and habitable worlds, and their complicity in 'orderly' pursuits which violently preclude the legitimacy of others' similar desires.

My second exemplar involves James Der Derian's important work depicting the unsettling contemporary convergence between military institutions and mimetic regimes of simulation.[36] As Der Derian illustrates, this convergence has not only affected military strategy and tactics, but also relations among and between the state, its defense and cultural industries, and its citizen-consumers. As one example, Hollywood special effects professionals now collaborate with the armed forces to develop "dual-use" program content for both the popular cinema and military training programs. Der Derian locates the engine of these changes in the post-Cold War "Revolution in Military Affairs." Crucially, they include the incorporation of "new" information and communication technologies to create digital networks for collecting, transmitting, and analyzing information to support "kinetic" battlefield operations requiring precise coordination between lethal technologies and their remote controllers. While this development has been enshrined in the techno-cultural imaginary around the image of the

military "cyborg," Der Derian is more broadly concerned with its implications for the realist ontologies which have traditionally underwritten the use of military force by states. Concerning the fiction of territoriality, for example, he notes that the "borderless electromagnetic spectrum" has now replaced "the bounded text of geopolitical [entities]."[37] The conduct of war has subsequently become a mediated spectacle which permits officials to foster the illusion of surgical and successful operations, and audiences to distance themselves from the consequences of violence they implicitly sanction. The hubris of Achilles has thus merged with the cunning of Odysseus to create a new form of "virtuous war."[38] Der Derian's project thus forms a prescient, pre-9/11 invitation for critical and cultural scholars to consider the growing role of mediation in the conduct of both warfare and diplomacy. Specifically, he resuscitates Frankfurt School theory to propose the analytic device of "mimetic polyalloy" to challenge the modern tendency to prioritize technological development over moral illumination. "War and peace," he notes, "both are still in need of approaches that study *what* is being represented. But it is [sic] also in need of a virtual theory that can explore *how* reality is seen, framed, read, and generated in the actualization of the event."[39]

Conclusion

What conclusions may we draw from these models concerning the potential for useful mimesis between the fields of communication and security studies? First, it is worth confirming here that formal, interdisciplinary collaboration need not be required. That is, each field has already built a robust literature demonstrating that it can and will engage theoretical traditions and primary literatures which neither fully owns, but which each has strategically appropriated. Security studies, for example, has established research programs focused on communication-centric tropes such as discourse, narrative, and metaphor. The related scholarship, however,

rarely intersects with the self-identified literatures of communication (e.g., associated with the study of Cold War rhetoric). Communication scholars, in turn, are increasingly leveraging the discipline's strengths in depicting the situated performance of social – particularly discursive – practices, and the textuality of media eventfulness. They are documenting and critiquing the symbolic production, circulation and reception of contemporary security regimes – particularly as their operations intersect with the (post-) modern projects of bio-power, neo-liberalism, and risk management. They are exploiting their intimate familiarity with the history and structure of the cultural industries – particularly the news media – to assess the dire state of democratic deliberation concerning security matters. However, given that our institutions of higher education continue to promote the ideal of 'interdisciplinarity' (while, in my opinion, so far failing to create an infrastructure sufficient to realize its intellectual benefits), it is at least responsive (if not responsible) to cultivate promising relationships here.

My vision of that relationship involves an alliance of each field's critical and cultural scholarship. The projects that result could explore how our current security regimes display what Adorno and Horkheimer termed "mimesis unto death" – their phrase for the misguided reaction to worldly risk promoted by modern rationalities that are obsessed with control, that pursue that end through violent means, and that have forgotten primitive habits of organic adaptation (a process, by the way, which they believe fueled anti-Semitism leading to the Holocaust). These projects would emphasize how the relative privilege enjoyed by lives in the postmodern West are, at least in part, fueled by the systematic diminishment and termination of lives among scapegoat groups inhabiting the global South and East – groups which the West has written off as unworthy, hopeless, and dangerous. They would demonstrate how our security apparatus stands vigilant and potent, alternately rehearsing and fulfilling its desire to displace

and annihilate these groups. They would consider whether and how our security narratives permit us to discern and engage expressions of need issued by the Levinasian other, such that we are led not only to repeat those narratives. Instead, they would encourage us to develop our encounters with alterity in ways that open the possibility for re-experiencing what has always existed beyond – and instead of – the panicked assertions of certainty and necessity which underlie conventional security discourse. They would recover the mimetic limitation underlying language as a resource, such that we might more responsibly inhabit its gaps and silences. Rather than focus on which objects we should be securing and how, these projects would ask different kinds of questions, including: *Who or what were we, before we became secured in our current forms? Who or what were the objects we have desired to secure, before we secured them through the agency we have constructed for ourselves as subjects imbued with particular duties to secure? What roles have cultural discourse and media played in these processes? And finally, who or what might we and others become if we no longer sought to secure ourselves or others in this manner?*

Here, a collaboration between communication and security studies would invite the subjects of security regimes (and that includes all of us) to *embrace* rather than *deny* the arbitrariness and incompleteness of our narratives. This orientation would increase our willingness and capability to account for our complicity in perpetuating these regimes. It would privilege the other as a vital resource for recognizing the ontological secrets which have guided their organization. It would help us to reconcile our practical reliance on those secrets with their compulsive protection from reflective consciousness and dialogic encounter. It would adopt as a premise that the use of mimesis to achieve security only by reproducing sameness is amoral, and probably disastrous. It would privilege the dynamic and mutually-relativizing contact that exists

both among and between the official voices of security, and the vernacular discourses of security cultures. It would elevate the *petits-recits* which animate the lived experience of their members, and which guide their negotiation of related imperatives. In this process, we could honor the excessive and unruly integrity of our culture, which does not guarantee a successful or virtuous form of security, but which is the necessary resource for unsettling the hyphen which threatens to conflate the nation with the state. By suspending security's automatic projects of limitation and predetermination, we may thus re-member the withered limbs of our mimetic imagination. We may seek refuge *with*, rather than *from*, the haunting figures of our scapegoats.

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