

# On the spectral ideology of cultural globalization as social hauntology

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## Abstract

Globalization allegedly constitutes one of the most used and abused concepts in the contemporary academic and lay lexicons alike. This paper pursues a deconstructive avenue for canvassing the semiotic economy of cultural globalization. The variegated ways whereby ideology has been framed in different semiotic perspectives (Peircean, structuralist, post-structuralist, neo-Marxist) are laid out. By engaging with the post-structuralist semiotic terrain, cultural globalization is identified with a transition from Baudrillard's *Political Economy of Signs* towards a spectral ideology where signs give way to traces of *différance*. Subsequently, the process whereby globalization materializes is conceived as a social hauntology. In this context, global citizens engage in a constant retracing of the meaning of signs of globalization that crystallize as translocally flowing ideoscapes and mediascapes. The propounded thesis is exemplified by recourse to cultural consumption phenomena from the domains of cinematic discourse, computer-gaming, food and social gaming.

**Keywords:** cultural globalization, critical semiotics, scapes, *différance*, spectrality, social hauntology.

## 0. Introduction: From cultural hybridity to cultural flows

Globalization constitutes a multi-dimensional phenomenon, as varied and variously theorized as culture itself (Faulkner et al. 2006). "Globalization connotes the increasing interconnectedness and interdependence of social, cultural and economic phenomena across national boundaries" (Crane 2010: 1).

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This paper focuses narrowly on cultural globalization, while culture is approached predominantly through the dimensions of structure, process and products (i.e. cultural artefacts), based on Baldwin, Faulkner & Hecht's (2006) typology. The argumentation is in alignment with the research cohort (e.g. Tomlinson 1999; Inglis 2005) that views cultural globalization as a progressive attenuation of the ties between cultural production and physically demarcated place in the context of constant de- and reterritorializations (cf. Rossolatos, 2018b).

Theorizing or imagining cultural globalization begins where discursive articulations of cultural hybridity end. Cultural hybridity gained momentum amidst academic discussions about 'glocalization' that spawned the infamous dictum 'think global, act local', a managerial maxim that became entrenched ever since Levitt's *Globalization of Markets* (1983). The problematization of 'glocalization' was triggered by questioning the notion of 'local' in the first place. The transpiring of research streams such as cultural geography and place branding afforded to destabilize, retrajectorize and reterritorialize the meaning of 'locale' by critically questioning the overdetermination of cultural/experienced space by physical place. The concept of hybridity may be said to be if not outmoded, at least in recession, given that one of its fundamental assumptions is predicated upon a conceptualization of culture within a geographically demarcated territory. By the same token, culture has been dislodged from the province of the nation/state, while the latter is being increasingly approached as a construct that seeks to contain cultural diversity by evoking a phantasmatic dominant culture as the ideological correlate of an imaginary community (Anderson, 1983; Wodak et al., 1999), either within a state's boundaries or across geographical regions. Such antiquated ideologemes have been confronted with clown sightings<sup>1</sup> that mark events of carnivalesque respacing of territorialized space.



**Figure 1. Clown sighting: opening fissures in striated space.**

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2016\\_clown\\_sightings](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2016_clown_sightings)

Instead, cross-cultural fermentation in the context of globalization is viewed as constant flows (Castells 2004) of images within and between 'scapes' (Appadurai 2005), namely 'the multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe' (Appadurai 2005: 33). These imaginary scapes that bear considerable resemblance to Castoriadis' concept of imaginary constellations (cf. Rossolatos 2015b) consist in ideoscapes, mediascapes, financescapes, ethnoscapes and technoscapes. Here, the first two are of focal concern. More precisely, mediascapes constitute image-centered, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality, as series of elements (such as characters, plots, and textual forms) out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives (Appadurai 2005: 35), while ideoscapes constitute the ideological counterpart of mediascapes as "state ideologies and social movements' counterideologies that challenge it" (Appadurai 2005: 36). According to Appadurai (2005), globalization may be more pertinently couched in terms of a cultural imaginary, without an identifiable locus of centralized control, and of multi-directional orientation that eschews the restrictive cultural imperialism of centre/periphery. Imagination constitutes the driving force behind reterritorialization whose semiogenetic role by far eschews the strict confines of a cognitive faculty or of 'escapist fantasy' as conceptualized in neo-Marxist discourse.

Globalization has been heralded for the potential benefits that may accrue for suppressed populations in terms of enabling the articulation of subaltern voices (Appadurai 2013), of enriching cultural geographies with diasporic imaginary mediascapes (Harindranath 2006), inasmuch as it has been criticized as a new form of ideology that seeks to impose a homogeneous culture on a global scale (Hall 2000). Although the homogenization hypothesis has been vehemently criticized by otherwise non rejecters of the ideologically fuelled prong, the latent power plays that determine the extent to which some voices are heard more 'loudly' than others have been a recurrent investigative avenue in the extant literature (Wise, 2008).

This paper, although not trending on a biopolitical stream that assumes cultural politics as its vantage point, rather than cultural globalization *per se*, does cherish the ubiquitous concern of a latent ideology as globalization's invisible scaffolding. By adopting a critical semiotic outlook, against the background of a deconstructive reading strategy (Derrida 1994), the ensuing discussion sets out to identify the meaning of cultural globalization by attending to indicative signs, and to elucidate what sort of ideology may underlie it as process.

This form of cultural globalization, as will be argued in greater detail, is identified with a spectral semiotic economy that is predicated on an impossibly totalizable ideology. This spectral semiotic economy is tantamount to a hyperspace of proliferating cultural differences, without origin and without an identifiable teleology that corresponds to the movement of *différance* as the double movement of the production of differences and deferral from the 'source' or the origin of this differential play. Differences constitute traces, albeit traces that point to nowhere. They are not traces 'of', but traces that constantly *produce* their origin, an origin that may not be delimited by 'its' signs. The absence of source allows us to assign to cultural globalization the role of a spectral ideology, a post-ideology that is manifested as a social hauntology. This hauntology is explored in the following cultural exploratory through a tapestry of cultural artefacts, spectacles and immersive experiences from the domains of cinema, food, social gaming.

## 1. Ideology from a critical semiotic point of view

The analysis and criticism of ideologies as sign systems constitutes a mainstay in the broader semiotic discipline, and has been approached through multiple semiotic perspectives. In this overview, some of the most important perspectives that have theorized ideology are outlined. As remarked by Nöth (2014: 2), "among the semioticians there are some who describe ideology in a value-neutral way as any cultural or social sign system, while others define ideology critically as a hidden system of meaning in public messages requiring critical analysis." Critical semiotics does not adopt an either/or stance in the face of contrived ideological oppositions, but sheds light on the very processes that are responsible for the formation of disjunctive relations between seemingly opposed ideologemes. The ideologeme, according to Kristeva, corresponds to the minimal unit in ideological analysis that functions textually and intertextually as an assimilative and organizational principle for grouping entire textual sequences. In this sense, it is akin to what Barthes described as a 'global signified'.

The demonstration of how ideologies operate as popular myths was exemplified most lucidly in Barthes' *Mythologies* (1972). According to Barthes, the dividing line between ideological and non-ideological discourse is identified at the point where denotation gives way to connotation. The prominent function of ideology, according to Barthes, is the naturalization of axiology. This is most strikingly manifested in popular myths that are inscribed connotatively in pictorial and

multimodal signs. The famous example of the black soldier on the front cover of *Paris Match* that was drawn upon by Barthes (1972: 115) in *Mythologies* exemplified the function of ideology in visual signification by opening up connotatively the interpretive vistas to incorporate the signified of non-discrimination in terms of color against the background of a subordinate signified concerning patriotism. In ideological discourse two signification levels may be distinguished at a primary level of analysis: the object-language or the denotative level where a sign system consists of signs that are composed of signifiers/signifieds, and a metalanguage on the connotative level where the signifier of the object language assumes the position of sign, itself comprised anew of a signifier and a signified (Barthes 1972: 113-114). "Ideologies become successful [...] because they connect with and reinforce a group's metadiscourses, its discursive memory" (Schönle and Shine 2006: 27). This opening up of the signifier extends to and may accommodate multiple layers of connotative semiosis. In a similar fashion, "Eco describes ideology as an instance of overcoding, i.e., a process where (secondary) meanings are assigned to messages generated by a basic (primary) code" (Tarasti 2004: 17). Although in his later writings (S/Z) Barthes abandoned the prospect of identifying a degree zero of signification at an absolutely denotative, that is non-contextual level, claiming such a distinction within specific textual contours is a valid endeavor (as performed by Groupe  $\mu$ , for example, and their distinction between local and global degree zero; cf. Rossolatos, 2014).

From a neo-Marxist semiotic point of view, Rossi-Landi suggested that the internal structure of ideological sign-systems may be mapped out by attending to the interdependencies between three classes of artefacts, namely material, communicative, and ideological which he calls artefacts (*simpliciter*), signifacts, and mentifacts respectively. To this end, he coined the model of General Homology, consisting of "1) pre-significant elements, 2) irreducibly significant elements, 3) "whole pieces", 4) tools and sentences, 5) aggregates of tools, 6) mechanisms, 7) complex and self-sufficient mechanisms, 8) overall mechanisms or automata, 9) unrepeatable (singular) production, and 10) global production" (Bernard 2004: 50).

From a textual semiotic point of view, it is pivotal to distinguish between the axiological and the figurative levels, as endeavored in Greimasian structuralist semiotics (for a similar approach in a discourse analytic vein see Chouliaraki 2010). Ideology operates as a depth grammar or hidden axiology, that is a system of ideas, beliefs and values that is usually glossed over or mystified by a figurative grammar (lexical or multimodal), whether this is evinced in literary, cinematic or other textual forms. Ideological analysis consists in identifying repetitive patterns of surface level

textual configurations (e.g. recurrent lexemes, tropes, visual symbols) and interpreting them axiologically in line with the inner logic of each text. Based on the trajectory of signification, disentangling ideological discourse amounts to a stepwise transition between three levels, namely the figurative, the semio-narrative and the thematic (cf. Rossolatos 2014). “An ideological utterance is one that tries to mask its own axiological points of departure, so as to justify and universalize them by a myth that deceives the receiver, or by postulating one’s own values as if they were natural” (Tarasti 2004: 24-25).

From a Peircean point of view, ideology may be identified in various ways as being operative in a text, most eminently by examining the ways whereby the terms of a semiotic triad (object, sign, interpretant) are inter-related. Peirce’s time-hallowed triadic account of semiosis, according to which “a sign is a thing which serves to convey knowledge of some other thing, which it is said to stand for or represent. This thing is called the object of the sign; the idea in the mind that the sign excites, which is a mental sign of the same object, is called an interpretant of the sign” (Bergman 2003: 9) is particularly pertinent for the analytical task at hand. This triadic account renders the ‘object’ dependent on the sign(s) and the interpretant(s) for its existence, thus laying bare its irreversibly semiotic existence. “Semiosis exhibits a three-termed relationship of sign, object, and interpretant standing to one another in an indissoluble union. This process is open-ended principally by virtue of the sign’s capacity to generate innumerable interpretants” (Colapietro 2008: 240; also see Eco 1976). The object that ‘underpins’ a sign is always already a construction of the sign(s) whereby it is evinced to an interpreter through a string of interpretants. Peirce renders this ineradicable dependence of ‘object’ on its semiotic counterparts even more accentuated by drawing a further distinction between ‘immediate’ and ‘dynamic’ object. The immediate object is the object as it appears within the semeiosis process *as representatively present* therein, whereas the dynamical object is the object *as it really is* regardless of how or what it is represented as being in any given representation of it (Ransdell 2007). Hence, what is immediately given for interpretation in a sign is already enmeshed in a web of signifying relationships, beyond which lies the dynamic object that may affect this web, albeit in a manner that may not be known unless manifested in a mode that is not deprived of such relationships, that is as immediate object. In each signifying triad, the interpretant of a previous triad assumes the character of sign and so on ad infinitum. Moreover, Peirce distinguishes amongst three types of interpretants: “The “immediate” interpretant is the fitness of a sign to be understood in a certain way; the “dynamical”

interpretant is the actual effect a sign has on an interpreter; and the “final” interpretant is the effect which eventually would be decided to be the correct interpretation” (Misak 2006: 10). Ideological discourse works in such a manner as to effect an imbrication between a final interpretant and a dynamic object. This is what I call the ‘violence of the final interpretant’, on which ideological discourse feeds as an abrupt semantic closure to a discourse. This form of discursive violence has discernible parallels with the Derridean notions of violence of metaphysics and/or violence of representation. In Derridean terms, the dynamic object is identified with the master signified of an ideological discourse (cf. Rossolatos 2015a).

From a post-structuralist point of view, Baudrillard's strand of critical semiotics in the context of his *Political Economy of the Sign* (1981) seeks to transcend traditional oppositional pairs embedded in orthodox Marxist cultural economics, such as the use vs. exchange value, in tandem with the unilateral ascription of ideological mystification to the realm of the signified (or cultural values), by contending that the real working of ideology rests with a code that is responsible for inscribing commodities as signifiers with valuable concepts as signifieds. “It is the cunning of the code to veil itself and to produce itself in the obviousness of value” (Baudrillard, 1981: 145). The same code is responsible for the projection of subjectivity that is manifested as agency of choice.

A cultural economy, as shown by Baudrillard, is a semiotic economy consisting of free-floating signifiers that may be exchanged for a limited set of signifieds. This means that an artefact such as a car may be exchanged via a purchase act for the signified of success, inasmuch as the same signified as axiological component that is embedded in a cultural economy may be appropriated by purchasing a luxury watch brand. From a semiotic economic point of view, floating signifiers may be correlated with any signifieds whatsoever. ‘A signifier may refer to many signifieds, or vice versa: the principle of equivalence, ergo of exclusion and reduction, which roots the arbitrariness of the sign, remains untouched’ (Baudrillard 1981: 149). ‘What is involved here is precisely a free play of concatenation and exchange of signifiers, a process of indefinite reproduction of the code’ (Baudrillard 1981: 150).

In order to appreciate the modus operandi of cultural globalization, the exploratory focus will now turn to Derrida's critical deconstructive outlook as formulated in *Spectres of Marx* (1994). In the context of a political economy of signs, as outlined by Baudrillard, a system of values hovers over interchangeable signifiers as their signifieds. This system is omnipresent and ready to be exchanged for freely

floating signifiers. However, in a spectral semiotic economy no such axiology is at stake. Instead, the spectral semiotic economy, as noted by Derrida (1994) is equivalent to an economy of *différance*.

*Différance* points to a double movement whereby the proliferation of differences is coupled with traces that defer/postpone the presencing of their origin (Derrida 1976, 1981). Whereas Baudrillard's political economy of signs is anchored in an omnipresent axiology as the locus originarius whence stems the meaning of floating signifiers (even though Baudrillard does recognize this presence as what he calls the metaphysics of the code, rather than subscribing to it uncritically), for Derrida a spectral economy is incumbent on traces without origin. In these terms, the global as 'cause' and 'origin' constitutes a ghostly apparition that hovers over its traces. The traces produce the meaning of the global through repetition and the re-inscription in global flows. According to Derrida (1981), traces do not derive from an originary arche-trace as absent presence. As noted by De Man (1979), the 'object' recedes in infinite regress as soon as the question 'what is this?' is posed. The spectral is not an apparition of an absent presence, as contended, for example, by exponents of the materiality dependent relational ontology of absence (Meyer 2012), but of a presence that has never been, and that is produced through its traces. The trace produces the illusion of the origin, hence it is spectral with reference to an origin and not representational.

Subsequently, the anti-ontological reading of the meaning of a global culture lays bare a loose-ends structural organization, only nominally subsisting as such, that is via the recurrence of the arche-signifier (and at the same time master signified) 'global', whereas, in reality (that is the 'reality' that is mystified behind the cloak of the recurrent nomenclature) we are concerned with spectral signs and a spectral semiotic economy.

The global *is* (obliquely referred to by italicizing the existential copula) an abstract machine that spawns signs as a play of differences and flows, while being constantly deferred from appearing in a signifying chain (as arche-signifier), always sliding beneath the signs (as master signified). The proliferation of differences points semiotically to the processual aspect of globalization as a constant differing-in-itself. This in-itself is not incumbent on a dialectic between inside/outside or Geist/corporality or Same/Other, but on a hyperspace that constantly redefines its boundaries based on an interplay between provisionally overcoded cultural artefacts and novel semiotic configurations. This hyperspace is haunted by the 'global' as its spectrally present conditional absence that transforms it into a hauntological space.

The critical semiotic lens through which the 'global' is approached in this respect also alerts us as to the catch-all descriptor 'neo-liberalism' that is regularly evoked as a nominalized occasion for performatively exorcizing a plethora of underlying processes, stakeholders and relationships that have been accommodated by Castells (1996) under the paradigm of the network economy. This economy is largely identified with the hazy conception of neo-liberalism (Fairclough 2006). The operative concurrence of unfathomably inter-locking socioeconomic forces that slips under the signifier 'neo-liberalism' legitimates us to conflate its machinations with a divine, omnipresent, omnipotent existence. Although omnipresent, it may only be manifested, but never seen as such. In this respect, neo-liberalism constitutes what has been called by Zizek (1999) the sublime object of ideology. It is a spectral entity, "elevated to the status of the impossible Thing" (Zizek 1999: 77), yet whose power is felt very palpably in ordinary cultural predicaments. According to the preceding exposition of the Peircean model, then, positing neo-liberalism in all its abstractness antonomastically as a vengeful transcendental entity that tortures humanity is tantamount to the violence of the final interpretant whereby it is necessarily imbricated with the dynamic object, the sublime object of ideology in all its magnanimous awe and terror (according to the Kantian aesthetic model of the Sublime). Subsequently, if an ideological substrate buttressing globalization may be discerned, this is a phantasmatic entity, a ghostly apparition that may become reified in the same fashion as urban Pacman<sup>2</sup>, that is a spectral entity that is bound in a double movement of becoming and being (re)traced.



**Figure 2. Urban pacman.**

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.technologyreview.com/s/534306/turning-pac-man-into-a-street-based-chase-game-using-smartphones/>

## 2. (Re)tracing the signs of cultural globalization

The spectral economy of cultural globalization thrives with examples of imaginary flows whereby 'identities' are performed ec-statically, that is outside of territorialized symbolic roles. In this subsection three examples are drawn upon, namely the *Avatar* movie, its online 'correlate', i.e. the world of *Second Life*, and the *Hangover* movie (and the list is extended in the following section).

In the *Avatar* movie, Sigourney Weaver plays the role of a leading scientist who is sent to another planet to explore the prospect of colonization in the face of the earth's precipitate inhabitability. Due to the inhumane environmental conditions, Weaver conducts her regular expeditions in the form of an Avatar that mimics perfectly the indigenous population. The movie was soon catapulted to an ideological battlefield in terms of projecting narratively the depicted cultural clashes in the context of globalization (in a pre-spectral, territorialized regime, that is; see Mirrlees 2013 for an extended discussion). What is most important, from a spectral semiotic economic viewpoint, is that Weaver, as the motivator of the cultural clash between the indigenous population and the colonizing forces, is an apparition, neither living, nor dead, yet capable of bringing a new order in an existing planet.



**Figure 3. Sigourney Weaver as Avatar.**

It is a ghost that sublates the old and the new under a spectral presence of ambivalent origin and purpose. In other words, it is an effigy of undecidability, both in *International Journal of Marketing Semiotics Vol.VI (2018)*

form and function: in form she resembles the indigenous population, whereas, in reality, she *is* a member of the invading forces; in function, she counteracts the purpose of the colonizing forces, even though she *is* one of them ‘in flesh and bone’.

On a similar note, we encounter in the online world of *Second Life* avatars that constitute the survival of the ‘real’ individual through avataric signs, not replicas, but ghostly apparitions in a hyperreal world. The ‘real’ individual in avataric form is ‘metamorphosed into a supernatural thing, a *sensuous non-sensuous* thing, sensuous but non-sensuous, sensuously supersensible. The ghostly schema now appears indispensable [...] a ‘thing’ without phenomenon, a thing in flight that surpasses the senses’ (Derrida 1994, cited in Joseph 2001). The avataric apparition can chat with other ghostly individuals, it can dance, albeit it cannot sense the surroundings. It is precisely present as neither living nor dead, and it is in such a fashion that it interacts with others in this hauntological mediascape. Ghosts experience immersively their avataric interaction as immediately present. The event is naturalized due to the technological apparatus’s ability to condition the senses into believing that it is the individual in flesh and blood that undergoes the experience. Ideology is operative, in this instance, “because it turns social relations into ghostly forms” (Joseph 2001: 102). This is why the affective part and the sensori-motor apparatus constitute the primary ground for ideological work.

The same mechanism underlies immersive translocal experiences, e.g. online multiplayer gaming, whereby the effacement of (physical) spatiality produces the effect of immediacy as naturalization of the lived experience and propagates the ideological myth of self-presence. “The technologies of immediacy [...] hide the act of mediation by presenting their content as if it were the only natural reality available” (O’Neill 2008: 22).



**Figure 4. Avatars from Second Life.**

Finally, and quite archetypically with regard to the (re)tracing process, in the movie *Hangover* we encounter a group of four friends in escapist adventures whose collective imaginary has been gripped (repetitively so, at least in the first two parts of the trilogy) by an arche-trace that has been obliterated beneath the signs and that must be recuperated by retracing them. The retracing process consists of extreme social situations, not necessarily connected to each other, that is spectral, self-contained fragments of a totalizing discourse that is imaginarily strewn at the fringes of the socially sanctioned roles that are otherwise performed by the heroes.

Drugs, in the movie's *fabula* (that is its manifest plot-line), are instrumental for bringing the wolf-pack (Galyfianakis' nomenclature for the male coalition) into the requisite mindset that will allow them to engage in cultural practices that would normally run counter to the pack members' ethotic pattern, such as getting tattoos and marrying a prostitute at an Elvis chapel.



**Figure 5. The Hangover wolfpack (minus the missing arche-trace) outside of the Chapel.**

Drugs, in this instance, function as a reification of the bifurcated Platonic notion of *pharmakon* (as analyzed in Derrida's *Dissemination*), while being responsible for causing temporary memory loss. "The *pharmakon* is that double-edged word in Plato's text that causes the metaphysical oppositions to waver and oscillate" (Brogan 1989: 11; cf. Derrida 1981: 99), just like snake poison that that may be used for curing a bite, inasmuch as for effecting death. Here, *pharmakon* is accidentally disseminated as bad medicine, yet necessarily so in order to effect a collective *lapsus* (coupled with the audience's requisite *regressus*). The 'event' of *lapsus* is a necessary condition for the wolfpack's engaging in the economy of *différance* by becoming immersed in cultural differences beyond a good/evil dialectic whose meaning is constantly deferred while retracing differences as signs. The feats accomplished by the wolfpack in a state of *lapsus* constitute moments of a spectral semiotic economy where each social situation is enacted by automata who are neither living nor dead. They are not living as their actions, embedded in an 'imaginary world', run counter to the very symbolic structures that have allowed them to perform socially sanctioned roles thus far, and they are not dead since they are still biologically functional.

Most importantly, this spectral economy is underpinned by the 'real' economy, consisting of corporate structures and entrepreneurship. It is in direct complicity with the real market and in fact is funded by it: Galyfianakis' funding, based on the movie-script, stems from his father, a successful businessman with a sizeable fortune, as

reflected in his lavish abode, who is always willing to serve his son's eccentric needs, including his abundant drug-use. The father, here, stands for the 'real' economy, whereas Galyfianakis is a sign of the imaginary economy, as deterritorialized flow of images and experiences. The real economy functions as the enabler of the imaginary, spectral economy.

### **3. Spectral ideology for a spectral semiotic economy: The 'global' as absent conditional for a social hauntology**

If ideology may still be ascribed to cultural globalization as above canvassed, this is a post-ideological ideology, that is an ideology that is not tantamount to a system of ideas and values, but an aestheticized and constantly mutating set of abstract schemata. "Ideology is not the reflection of real relations but that of a world already transformed, enchanted. It is the reflection of a reflection, the phantasm of a phantasm" (Kofman 1999: 11).

Post-ideology haunts cultural globalization by liquidating time-hallowed oppositions such as good vs. evil, functional vs. dysfunctional, local vs. international, by reducing them to symptoms of *différance*. It is the spectre of ideology, as the ghostly apparition of an illusory depth or as having become self-conscious about the illusory status of cultural ideals. This regime values syntagmatic constellations at the expense of idealist paradigmatic selection, and lends further credence to Appadurai's emphasis on the imaginary as shaping and sustaining globalization, while equating the production of differences with the proliferation of images. These images as signs of globalization cross borders without necessarily being motivated by a centralized agency of cultural production that regulates the translocal flows or by manifesting a correlation between the locus of production and the cultural output.

A remarkable example of such signs as imaginary syntagmatic constellations is the *Toilet Restaurant* that operated in Hong Kong until 2010 (with a similar concept now 'flown' to Japan). The interior design featured objects that are customarily used in toilets, the actual plates were toilet-shaped, while the menu was packed with forms and shapes that are reminiscent of the output of a toilet session. Thus, the customary function of the toilet was disruptively transposed from the final resort of waste and reintegrated into the nutrition chain. This sort of recontextualized cultural symbolism is inscribed at a foundational biological level, by questioning embedded distinctions between nutrition and waste, life and death. It operates as what Žižek (1999) called

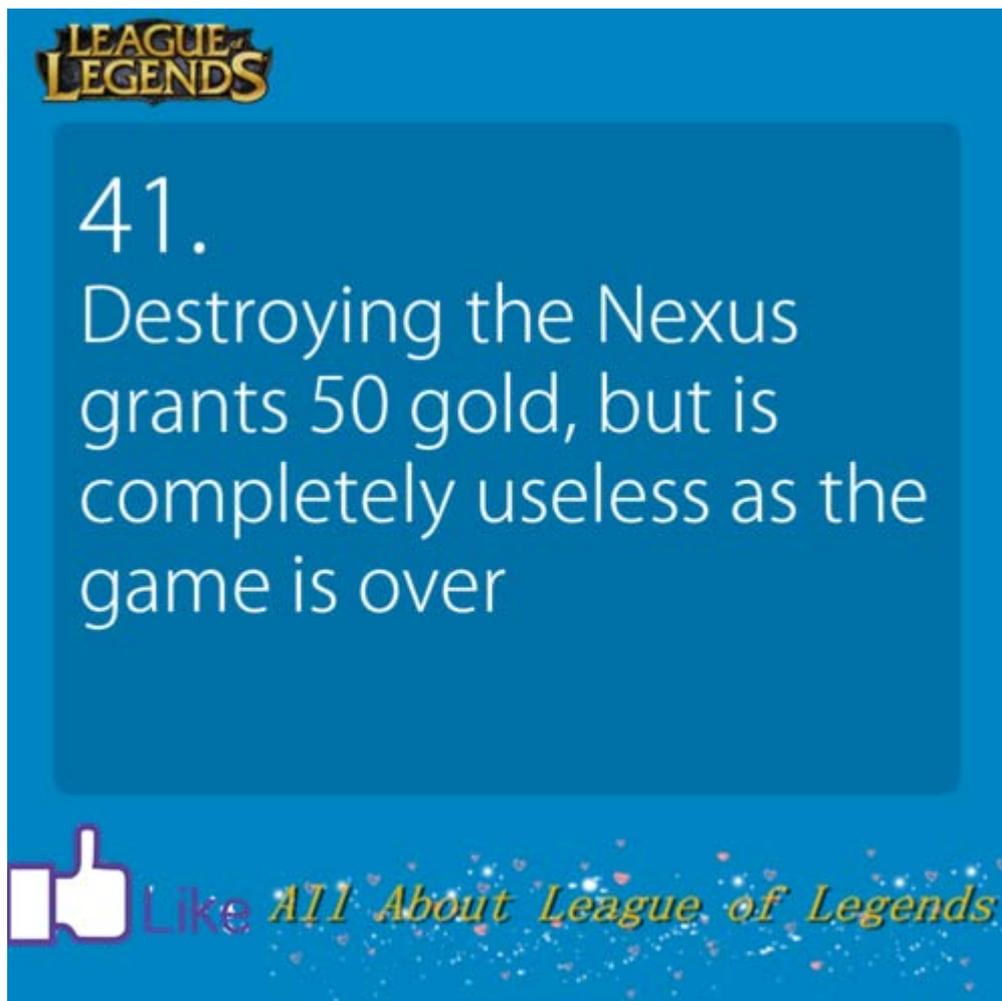
the *counter-movement* of Hegelian shitting, of absolute knowledge as *emptied* subject.



**Figure 6. Toilet restaurant goodies.**

The signs of the spectral semiotic economy are concatenated via relations of sheer contiguity, and hence give away the impression of pure assemblages in a post-ontological cartography. They are not signs underpinned by an absent Being that sustains social actors as social ontological scaffolding, but signs of a social hauntology that maintains *in absentia* the global as master signified. The global, thus, may only be presented as an apparition through acts of conjuration (Derrida1994), rather than working as the ideational substrate of signification. The summoner who performs this conjuration is none other than the player in the popular online multiplayer game *League of Legends* whose target is the non-localizable networked

economy as *nexus*. The nexus as impossibly totalized and totalizing entity may only appear spectrally as an apparition to its summoner. In the *League of Legends*, destroying the nexus yields imaginary capital, albeit impossibly so, since at the same time it marks the end of the game: an impossible exchange for an impossible presencing. The nexus may be destroyed only through the obliteration of the signs of destruction that may not be exchanged for 'real' currency.



**Figure 7. League of Legends destruction of nexus: Game Over (?)**

The escape rooms social game that has been gaining popularity over the past couple of years is a remarkable inscription of social hauntology. The structure of the game consists of a group of friends who are locked in a room for a certain amount of time and must discover hidden messages (traces) leading to other hidden messages in order to ultimately locate the key for unlocking the door before the gaming time erupts.



**Figure 8. Escape rooms (London).**

This is a reinscription of the Da Vinci code, albeit relieved from any ontotheological significance. Thus, “the spectrality of ghost/machine becomes a part of common experience” (Joseph 2001: 104). What binds groups of players in this social game in a social hauntological predicament is their mutual immersion in the process of retracing.

The transition from social ontology to social hauntology is effected as the crossing out of Being as master signified that always appears as an invisible bond (the ‘cum’ that binds beings in ordinary affairs) towards the Spectral as irrecuperable absent conditional for being-with. In this manner, the ‘global’ as the constantly deferred object of *différance* in a post-ideological spectral regime, is always in a double movement of becoming and being (re)traced, evinced in cultural practices and artefacts as a social hauntology that is sustained as an apparition amidst proliferating, borderless differences.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Contrary to arguments about globalization as a homogenizing force that seeks to efface cultural differences, dislodging the global from place-centric constraints allowed us to reorient our focus from structure to process. In this manner, cultural globalization was in fact re-imagined, by opening up Appadurai’s concept of imaginary flows to a deconstructively inflected semiotic terrain, as non-locally

dependent and non-centrally controlled flows of mediascapes and ideoscapes. The release of cultural globalization from spatial constraints gave way to its identification with a non-originary locus as non-presentable absence that is evinced as constant retracing.

The scrutinized signs of globalization allowed for a transition from a political economy of signs to an economy of *différance* and, concomitantly, from anchoring signs to omnipresent signifieds as signs 'of', to traces that produce the global as absent conditional. This turn also implies a freeing of the signifier from the idealist yoke of the signified. In the spectral post-ideological regime of cultural globalization, and as a further semiotic qualification of the relationship between Appadurai's ideoscapes and mediascapes, we are concerned with undercoded imaginary signifiers, rather than signifiers that are symbolically attached to ideoscapes as overcoded ideologemes (in the traditional sense of semiotic analyses of ideology). These imaginary signifiers constitute traces 'of' the global as always sliding arche-trace. The non-localizable global legitimates us in stressing that cultural globalization thrives in a post-ideological regime where the object of ideology is identified with a spectre. Subsequently, this spectre that hovers over cultural production also produces the social in hauntological terms.

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