The Ambassador’s Letter
On Diplomacy as Ideological State Apparatus
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Introduction

*A sincere diplomat is like dry water or wooden iron.*

Joseph Stalin

It is the world of international politics and diplomacy that has given us some of the most memorable public speeches from the last hundred years. From John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan in Berlin to Winston Churchill and Charles de Gaulle during the Second World War and Mikhail Gorbachev and Nelson Mandela at the United Nations, the role of public speeches and rhetoric in world politics has perhaps never been as important as it was during the last century. Already in the fifties, Communications scholar Robert T. Oliver illustrated this point by criticizing academics of both Rhetoric and International Relations (IR) for neglecting the significance of public speeches in the world of diplomacy and urging for investigations into what kind of functions public speaking might serve in the diplomatic sphere. In what has become a foundational article for the field of Rhetorical Studies on diplomacy, Oliver argues that the role of academics studying diplomatic speeches is to “judge what they [politicians and diplomats] are doing and to help them to do it better.” Since the publication of Oliver’s article the field studying diplomatic communication has grown significantly in the US, even though it still makes up a fairly small part of the entirety of the academic field of Rhetorical Studies and is basically non-existent outside of North America. One reason behind the limited success could be connected to problems of method in the field, since rhetorical scholars, for the most part both in the US and elsewhere, have come to abandon the traditional model of analyzing and evaluating speeches in the form suggested by Oliver. Nevertheless, a number of scholarly works have been dedicated to understanding international communication (particularly that of US presidents), most notably in the journal *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* which also lists diplomacy as one of its main topics of interest.

Scholars of Rhetoric interested in diplomatic speeches have in general remained faithful to the questions and positions suggested by Oliver, thereby treating the arena of international politics and diplomacy as a continuation of

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the, for a rhetorician, perhaps more familiar field of so called nation state politics. This means that diplomatic speeches either are evaluated on the basis of their effectivity in the given situation (did the politician in question chose the right topics, the right words, the right occasion, et cetera?) or analyzed in order to understand and explain how specific foreign policies, goals, and ideas regarding international relations and diplomacy held by a head of state shows themselves in and through public speeches.\(^3\) One major question does, however, seem to remain unanswered by the majority of works within this field; that of the nature of diplomacy. Already in Oliver’s definition of the goal of rhetorical analysis of diplomatic speeches, an implicit understanding of diplomacy is guiding his argumentation: if the goal of a rhetorician is to, as he puts it, “help them [politicians and diplomats] to do it better”, we have to know what the goal of the diplomatic practice is, going beyond a general aim to persuade. In an attempt to analyze Ronald Reagan’s famous speech at the Brandenburg Gate in 1987 Robert C. Rowland and John M. Jones reach the following conclusion:

At the same time, Reagan also recognized the power of facts on the ground, the circumstances of the moment, and the necessity of adapting to them. Unlike the neoconservatives in his administration who, based on ideology, saw glasnost and perestroika merely as attempts to mislead the West, Regan saw an opportunity and took steps to capitalize on it. While stating in public that the only way that Gorbachev could provide real proof of change was to “tear down this wall”, through policy actions and other statements, Reagan made pragmatic efforts to reach out to Gorbachev. Reagan did not let ideology get in the way of taking advantage of an opportunity to support real change in Soviet society. He didn’t wait for Gorbachev to open the gate or tear down the wall. Reagan recognized the power of a rhetoric based on definition, but he also understood the dangers associated with such a rhetoric and the importance of adapting to circumstances. He understood the power of a rhetoric based on ideological and moral clarity, but also the risks of such a rhetoric and the power of combining pragmatism with principle.\(^4\)

The aim of Reagan’s speech is here taken at face value; it is assumed that he, by directing at least part of the speech explicitly to Gorbachev, had the

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\(^4\) Jones & Rowland, “Reagan at the Brandenburg Gate”, p.43.
intention of actually persuading Gorbachev to “tear down this wall”, at least in a metaphorical sense. Let us for a moment overlook the obvious issue of intentionality inherent in the methodological approach of Jones and Rowland and instead focus upon the understanding of diplomacy implied in their conclusions. Rowland and Jones are placing the persuading power of rhetoric at the heart of their analysis: it is the sound rhetorical choices made by Reagan that allows his speech to persuade Gorbachev to go even further in his attempts to prove that glasnost and perestroika actually were real efforts to change the situation in the Soviet Union. Diplomacy is, in other words, identical to rhetoric wherein public discourses persuade (or fail to persuade) the audience into taking action. But at this point the rhetorical tradition, with its focus on public speeches, arrives at a fundamental divide separating it from the diplomatic tradition. Against the rhetorical emphasis on publicity, openness, and, above all, monologue, diplomacy has since its birth been tied to ideas about the proficiency of dialogue, rational discussion, and, above all, secret negotiation. However, this divide does not only actualize problematic presuppositions about persuasion and the relationship between monologue and dialogue, public speech and secret negotiation, but also, and perhaps more importantly, it forces us to ask questions about the very nature of diplomacy. How are we to understand a practice which on the one hand is founded on the idea of preserving peace through dialogue, discussion, and argumentation while on the other demanding that these negotiations are kept behind locked doors? And how are we to understand a practice which on the one hand has given rise to some of the most important and well-known public speeches of the last century, while simultaneously keeping the majority of the arguments secret in protocols only available for the highest officials of democracy? The difference between monologue and dialogue, public speech and negotiation, therefore seems to touch upon one of the most fundamental questions of diplomacy’s being: how can a practice which emerged as a way for feudal lords to secretly interact with both allies and enemies have a role in the democratic state of the twentieth century? Consequently, the aim of the work at hand is to pose this question about the nature of diplomacy and its role in the contemporary political system in order to reach the antagonism at its very heart.

Hence, the present text will have the following structure: Before attempting to understand or to answer any of the problems and questions regarding diplomacy posed here, we first need to consult the answers provided by the existing subfield of International Relations known as Diplomacy Studies. We will do this by initially presenting (what is here going to be called) traditional Diplomacy Studies, beginning with their theoretical understanding of diplomacy, before proceeding to how they depict diplomacy’s historical evolution. The reason behind distinguishing between traditional and contemporary Diplomacy Studies lies in the theoretical and methodological shift that contemporary Diplomacy Studies underwent during the 1980s and 1990s, which to a great extent has influenced especially the understanding of diplomacy within
the Anglo-Saxon branch of the field. The presentation of the traditional strand of Diplomacy Studies will be followed by a review of the contemporary field in an attempt to portray the differences and similarities between them by focusing on the renewed epistemological grounds, the notion of an extended history, as well as the growing interest in what we might call the problem of modernity and mediation. This will not only allow us to understand how diplomacy is and has been treated by the field of Diplomacy Studies and International Relations, but it also presents us with an opportunity to expand on the theoretical and methodological foundations of this project. The third chapter will therefore attempt to formulate these foundations and how they will guide the present attempt at studying diplomacy. In contrast to the possibilities of studying diplomacy influenced by a Foucauldian or Derridean theory and method we will opt for the third contemporary French master, Jacques Lacan, and his role in the critique of ideology as it has been formulated by Slavoj Žižek. The fourth part of the text presents us with a reading of André Brink’s novel The Ambassador as one way to illustrate the ways in which diplomacy, in its role as Ideological State Apparatus, produces different kinds of subjects. Finally, part five of the text consists of a reading of the ideologies at work in contemporary Diplomacy Studies and what these ideologies might tell us about the workings of the diplomatic institution as an Ideological State Apparatus. Since this text is structured around two different, but not entirely separate, theoretical traditions it will be necessary for us to continually return throughout the text to the same historical and theoretical examples, seen from different perspectives, in order to illustrate how interpretations transform and how they relate to each other.
I. On the Traditional Study of Diplomacy

More or less formalized relations between different groups of people are thought to have existed for as long as there have been human beings on Earth. Consequently, many accounts of the origins of diplomacy include some kind of mythical tale about when one brave pre-historical group of humans first dared to do what up to that point had been unthinkable: to speak with their neighbors rather than just kill them.\(^1\) Despite the fact that this idea of a mythical beginning of diplomacy has been wide-spread in twentieth century Diplomacy Studies it has not acted as a unifying feature: instead the understanding of the history as well as the concept of diplomacy guiding the different traditions of Diplomacy Studies seems to have had the most significant impact on how the proper beginning of diplomacy theory is perceived. Take for instance the anonymous writer of *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum* who, in the fourth century BCE, argued that the purpose of diplomacy was to be found in counteracting or compensating some of the drawbacks of a state or a kingdom:

> We should form alliances with the most just and with the very powerful and with those who are our neighbours, and we should have the opposite of these as our enemies. […] It is necessary to obtain allies on occasions when the citizens are not able to guard the country and the forts or keep off the enemy by their own efforts.\(^2\)

The purpose of what we today would call diplomacy was, in the eyes of this Greek rhetorician, to ensure a strong and enduring city state or kingdom through peaceful alliances at least partially based on the envoy’s ability to persuade. This example can also be seen as illustrating the form reflections on diplomacy generally took until the early twentieth century: it is rhetoricians, historians, and philosophers of law and politics who often included thoughts on foreign relations in their work. The quoted text is therefore neither to be seen as an isolated case nor as just something specific to ancient Greece, where orators often were used as envoys between city-states, especially in religious

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matters. Rather, the connection between rhetoric or oratory and diplomacy is found throughout the history of diplomacy, for instance in the position of orator in fourteenth century Italy, often seen as one of the foregoers to the first resident ambassadors a century later. But this connection is not only found on the level of practice where envoys were chosen because of their ability to persuade. Instead, a theoretical connection was established already in the early works on international law written in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Most important among these theoreticians, besides perhaps Hugo Grotius, was Italian philosopher of law Alberico Gentili. As noted by Joanna Craigwood, his work De Iuri Belli Libri contains an understanding of diplomacy deeply indebted to the fundamentally platonic problems of rhetoric and poetry. Much like Plato himself in the Phaedrus Gentili’s problem consisted in going beyond the incommensurability of technê and telos established by Plato in Gorgias. In other words, the problem of Gentili’s theory of diplomacy was the same as that of Plato’s phaedric rhetoric: how is it possible to bring together a technê which may be used with both good and bad intentions (an orator can lie to win over the audience, an ambassador could be nothing more than a spy and a conspirator) with its true telos (for Plato the philosophical truth and for Gentili to sustain peaceful relationship between rulers both of the same and of different faiths).

During the twentieth century scholarly works on diplomacy has, for the most part, been written within two separate disciplines: the subdivision of Political Sciences known as International Relations (IR) and History. Understandingly, the nature of these works differ due to how the two disciplines understand their own object of study, their methodologies, as well as the reasons behind studying diplomacy, nonetheless they share a number of similarities regarding their respective histories. Both the earliest writing on the history of diplomacy (that went beyond treating the diplomatic relationship between two countries), as well as the entire sub-discipline of International Relations, emerged during the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. Continuing on this shared path both disciplines saw their

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6 For more on Gentili’s position on the goals of diplomacy see Langhorne, “Alberico Gentili on Diplomacy”, pp.312-317.
most important early works published in the post-war period, mostly in the fifties and sixties. Finally, in a period ranging from the late eighties to the first decade of the twenty-first century, the field saw both a massive critique against the earlier works as well as a gradual rapprochement of the two traditions. Since the beginning of the 1990s we have also seen a dramatic increase in collective volumes, such as *Diplomacy vol. I-IV, International Diplomacy vol. I-IV, Routledge Handbook of Diplomacy and Statecraft, The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy*, and *The SAGE Handbook of Diplomacy*, aimed at consolidating the field by painting a picture of the emergence and transformation that Diplomacy Studies has undergone. Just as in the broader field of International Relations the distinction between traditional and contemporary studies of diplomacy is primarily made on a theoretical level: in IR-theory the current divide is usually labeled as a battle between the older rationalist and the emerging constructivist field, a distinction that sometimes returns within Diplomacy Studies, although it is much more common among contemporary scholars to simply dismiss their forgoers as non-theoretical.9 The idea, prevalent within the subfield of Diplomacy Studies that IR-studies in general is lacking scholarly work focused on diplomacy as an international institution in its own right, is partially explained by the way in which diplomacy has been conceptualized. There have been numerous attempts to explain the shortage of diplomatic theory, ranging from the inherent ambiguity of the term diplomacy (Christer Jönsson provides at least six different meanings10), via a certain indifference, especially among historical scholars, towards questions of theory, to the idea that diplomacy itself (perhaps through its secretive nature) is inherently resistant to theorization.11 Nevertheless, as Costas M. Constantinou and Paul Sharp claims, there are basically three approaches to diplomacy within IR-theory: either diplomacy has been understood as a specific instrument (traditionally of the state and used with the purpose of creating peace), as a medium (a specific context for solving interstate relations), or as

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a mixture of the two of them. When diplomacy is viewed, as it has been in the general field of IR-studies, as simply a medium for state to state communication it is easy to see how the same discipline might term it both “the master-institution” of international relations and as a form of communication on the verge of extinction, since the context labeled diplomatic can be broadened to encompass any interstate communication or narrowed to only include communication passing through an embassy.

Since the relevance of contemporary Diplomacy Studies is usually motivated by referring to questions of theory – either their forgoers lack thereof or the problematic presumptions guiding those earlier works – our search for an answer to the question of the nature of diplomacy must take into account the transformations that diplomatic studies has undergone during the last century. These questions are, however, not only limited to the actual theoretical understanding of diplomacy but also includes the critique of the historiographical premises employed by historians and political scientists alike. Hence, we should here adopt the distinction established by contemporary diplomacy theory between itself and its forgoers by initially present the early history of diplomatic theory.

1. The History of the Theory of Diplomacy

It is not a simple task to locate the proper beginning of the study of diplomacy. Partially, as mentioned, because it is not established as a separate object of study until the twentieth century, but also because of the differences in how diplomacy is defined. Following a broad definition of diplomacy as designating the managing of peaceful relations between different political entities (e.g. states, kingdoms, tribes) many contemporary scholars point out handbooks on statecraft and rhetoric as the earliest theoretical reflections on this practice. Most commonly included among these works are a number of texts from the fourth century: from Greece the already mentioned Rhetorica ad Alexandrum as well as the exchange of speeches between Aeschines and Demosthenes known as Peri Parapresbeias or On the False Embassy, and, perhaps most importantly, Thucydides writings on the Peloponnesian War, and from India a treatise on statecraft and politics known as Arthashastra. Some, expanding the notion of diplomacy to include every mediation of two identities, goes as far as including Augustine’s City of God in the canon of early diplomatic thinking since he, in this work, treats the relationship between the city of men and the holy city of God. The first work treating diplomacy as a separate object of study is usually said to be Ambaxiatorium Brevilogus, a handbook on

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13 Ibid. pp.13-16.
14 Der Derian, On Diplomacy, pp.60-61.
ambassadors published in 1435 by the provost of Toulouse, Bernard de Rosier. This work was followed by an increasing number of handbooks reflecting on the art of negotiating and representing, and together with the rise of philosophy of law, most famously with Hugo Grotius and Alberico Gentili, and the political philosophy in the wake of Machiavelli, these three genres remained central to all reflections on foreign relations up until the first half of twentieth century. The establishment of Political Science as a separate discipline, with its early emphasis on evolution and progress, a new form of diplomacy theory arose during the twentieth century which aimed at separating itself from what was seen as the anecdotal nature of the existing handbooks. It is this shift, taking place during the first half of the twentieth century that we shall here treat under the heading of traditional theory of diplomacy.

The establishment of International Relations as a scientific discipline separate from Political Science took place after the First World War. The early scholars of IR-theory are today commonly referred to as the Idealists and within the field the common conception is that the Idealists established the discipline’s focus on the relationship between peace and war through their aim at reforming the international political practices in order to create an everlasting peace. The idealists did, due to the explicit goal of their scientific endeavor, for the most part neglect the actual practices and institutions of diplomacy in favor of working with questions of international law and its relation to creating peace.\(^\text{15}\) As the history of International Relations is traditionally written the end of the Second World War led to a crisis in the idealist tradition, mainly because of the notion of an everlasting peace, and in the US the Idealists were critiqued from a growing number of scholars later known as the Realists.\(^\text{16}\) This criticism, mainly focusing on the impossibility to prescribe, through law, the way to achieve an everlasting peace, eventually proved to be the end of the idealist strand of theory in International Relations. With the emergence of the Realist notion of IR-theory, inspired by early political theorists such as Machiavelli, the practice and theory of diplomacy also became an object of scientific interest in the field. Important works among the early realists include Hans Morgenthau’s *Politics Among Nations*, E. H. Carr’s *The Twenty Years Crisis*, and George F. Kennan’s *American Diplomacy* which aided in laying the foundation for what eventually became Diplomacy Studies.\(^\text{17}\) The realist understanding of international relations is, as described by for instance Justin Rosenberg, founded on three basic propositions: primarily that international politics is a realm separate from domestic politics wherein sovereign authorities interact with each other. Secondly, that international relations are characterized by a certain anarchy, which means that the different

\(^{15}\) See for instance Der Derian, *On Diplomacy*, pp.142-143


desires or interest of these sovereigns are not organized, structured, or regulated by some higher authority, and finally that the entire complexity of international relations is first and foremost guided by the principle of ‘balance of power’. Hence, the goal of a scientific study becomes to understand this balance in order to explain how politics on an international level is functioning. Based on these three premises diplomacy becomes one of many instruments, together with for instance the armed forces or wealth, available for the state to use in order to exercise power over other states while the task of the diplomat, within such a perception of international relations, is one of reflecting or representing the will and the power of his master from which the force or power of the diplomatic speech emanates. A diplomat’s use of words rather than brute force is therefore understood as veiling the real power, the material forces possessed by the state, giving the words their particular persuasive strength. This understanding of diplomacy is for instance dominant in Hans Morgenthau’s definition of diplomacy’s four tasks:

Taken in its widest meaning, comprising the whole range of foreign policy, the task of diplomacy is fourfold: (1) Diplomacy must determine its objectives in the light of the power actually and potentially available for the pursuit of these objectives. (2) Diplomacy must assess the objectives of other nations and the power actually and potentially available for the pursuit of these objectives. (3) Diplomacy must determine to what extent these different objectives are compatible with each other. (4) Diplomacy must employ the means suited to the pursuit of its objectives. Failure in any one of these tasks may jeopardize the success of foreign policy and with it the peace of the world. [...] These four tasks of diplomacy are the basic elements of which foreign policy consists everywhere and at all times.

As is obvious from this quote Morgenthau is less interested in actually studying diplomacy than he is in prescribing the superior form of diplomatic practice. This intention is partly based in Morgenthau’s claim that proper diplomacy is in decline following the end of the Second World War since the power struggle that he regards as intrinsic to foreign relations is not granted its place at the center of international politics. Morgenthau’s solution to this situation, necessary in order for nation-states to be able to exercise diplomacy effectively, is that states need to acknowledge this natural aspect of their being-together. A common critique of the realist tradition, both on the general level of International Relations as well as from within the specific domain of Diplomacy Studies, is first and foremost directed at its lacking ability to produce

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21 Ibid. p.552. See also Jönsson, “Theorising Diplomacy”, pp.18-19.
theory, some going as far as calling it “an operator’s manual posing as [theo-
ry].”22 The realist theory is characterized by a descriptive and, to some extent,
also a normative approach, both highly dependent on anecdotal considera-
tions, which might be explained by the fact that seminal figures such as Carr
and Kennan both had a history as active diplomats.23 Another important figure
in the field of International Relations usually included among the Classical
Realists is Raymond Aron whose seminal work War and Peace had a huge
impact on the field.24 But, although it is correct that Aron share some funda-
mental premises with the Classical Realists, such as the focus on the relation-
ship between war and peace, the presumption that it is the will or interest of
states which furthers the events of international relations, and the understand-
ing of the field of international relations as anarchical,25 the sociological and
historical foundation of his theory still separates him from the more overt sci-
entism of someone like Morgenthau.26 Nevertheless, diplomacy in Aron’s
view still pertains to the same role as it does in Realist theory, namely as the
peaceful counterpart to warfare and as a technique of manipulating or main-
taining the balance of power through consciously exploiting the different
strengths and weaknesses of states.27 We should also note that Aron’s blend of
classical Realism and sociology has been a lot more influential in the French
tradition.28

The supposed lack of both theoretical depth and methodological consis-
tency characteristic of classical realism together with its normative and pre-
scriptive tendencies and what some even have called “pre-scientific moraliz-
ing premises”29, eventually forced IR-scholars in the United States in a new
direction.30 One of the main sources for the critique of classical realism is

22 Rosenberg, The Empire of Civil Society, p.10. On the critique from within diplomacy studies
see for instance Christer Jönsson, “Diplomacy, Bargaining, and Negotiation”, in ed. W. Carls-
naes, T. Risse & B. A. Simmons, Handbook of International Relations, (London: SAGE Pub-
25 Raymond Aron, Peace & War, (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2003), pp.21-46, see also
26 Aron, Peace & War, pp.369-372, wherein he notices the technological development and the
globalization of diplomacy as two aspects distinct of the modern situation, without asking if it
might have an effect on diplomacy as a practice. It should also be noted that Aron explicitly
criticizes the whole of the realist tradition, especially the writing of Hans J. Morgenthau, see
also Aron, Peace & War, pp.595-597.
27 Aron, Peace & War, pp.40-46.
Po, 2012), Meredit Kingston de Leusse, Diplomatie – Un sociologie des ambassadeurs, (Paris:
Empire of Civil Society, pp.9-37.
far as stating that “institutions have minimal influence on state behavior”, see J.J. Mearsheimer,
found in Kenneth Waltz’s book *Theory of International Politics*. The success of Waltz’s book when it was published in 1979 also drove the school of Realism away from studying diplomacy. In what is seen as a shift from the unit-level to the systems-level, diplomacy lost its important function within realist theory as one of the *technoi* of state-power (a status that did not mean that classical realists gave diplomacy nearly as much attention as they gave its counterpart warfare).\(^{31}\) *Neo-realism*, as the theoretical strand stemming from the writing of Waltz is known as today, has since its emergence generally shown very little interest in any of the institutions of international relations since it aims at inferring “some expectations about the outcomes of states’ behaviors and interactions […].”\(^{32}\) The main focal point of Neo-realism is, therefore, the states, and how their different ways of interaction fits into a system, and how the understanding of such a system allows political scientists to make predictions about future courses of action. Diplomacy was reduced to an aspect of international politics which might be of interest for scholars observing some specific historical chain of events, but which played no part in establishing a theory of the field itself.\(^{33}\) This problem, in the words of Benno Teschke, is one wherein “[t]he survival of the system overrides the survival of any of its components.”\(^{34}\)

The theoretical tradition of Realism has, to a great extent, been the predominant one in the United States, but the Anglo-Saxon world of international relations studies also includes another important theoretical perspective on diplomacy: the so called *English School*. Although significantly younger as a term (it is usually said to have been coined in the eighties) the English School goes back to the works of a number of British scholars such as C. A. W. Manning, Martin Wright, and Hedley Bull, all active during the fifties and sixties.\(^{35}\) Instead of taking the *Realpolitik* conception of international relations as a natural state without any fixed relations as its foundational premise, the English School opposed what they saw as the reduction of a complex network that

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\(^{32}\) Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* p.50.

\(^{33}\) Ibid. p.38-59. The lack of interest in diplomacy from Neo-realists has, however, been critiqued by the contemporary community of IR-scholars in the US, see for instance Geoffrey Wiseman, “Bringing Diplomacy Back In: Time for Theory to Catch Up with Practice”, *International Studies Review 13*, 2011, pp.710-711.

\(^{34}\) Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*, p.15.

\(^{35}\) There is a plethora of work on the English School within the field of International Relations, and the understanding of the emergence and later development of the tradition differs. These differences are meticulously laid out by Andrew Linklater & Hidemi Suganami in *The English School of International Relations: A Contemporary Reassessment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp.13-17.
comes with this understanding of international relations, and chose rather to found their work on the existence of what they termed the international society, a concept which presupposes a minimum level of solidarity among states. In the preface to their seminal anthology Diplomatic Investigations Martin Wight and Herbert Butterfield write: “First, the frame of reference has been, not the limits and uses of international theory, nor the formulation of foreign policy, but the diplomatic community itself, international society, the states-system.” The difference between early English School scholars, which came together under the name the Committee on the Theory of International Politics housed at the London School of Economics, and the then predominant Realist theory was at its initiation almost negligible to the point where someone like E. H. Carr actually is considered an important figure within both traditions. But while the Realist tradition was founded on the idea that international relations were to be understood as traditional nation-state politics exercised on another level (obvious already in the title of Morgenthau’s Politics Among Nations), early scholars of the English School, such as Martin Wight, explicitly opposed the internal politics of a specific polis with its external counterpart; diplomacy. Diplomacy in this sense was used as a general term covering “all international intercourse, its purposes and subjects, in time of peace.”

What Wight aimed at adding to a tradition dominated by realist thinking was a historical and practical dimension to the understanding of diplomacy: diplomatic theory was no longer simply the attempt to prescribe the most effective way of conducting peaceful international relations (although the English School theorization of diplomacy did have an obvious normative dimension to it) but a way of understanding the prevalent ideas regarding diplomacy during a specific period of time, questions more in line with the

discipline of Intellectual History rather than with the policy and future oriented Political Science. In this sense the English School also emphatically rejected the notion of progress integral to most IR-theories at the time, without necessarily rejecting some other fundamental assumptions about for instance the anarchical character of the field of international relations and the role of the notion of a ‘balance of power’.\footnote{See for instance Wight, “The Balance of Power”, in ed. M. Wight & H. Butterfield, Diplomatic Investigations, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1966), pp.149-175, Butterfield, “The Balance of Power”, pp.132-148. See also Jackson, “Martin Wight’s Thought on Diplomacy”, pp.1-28, and Hedley Bull, “Martin Wight and the Theory of International Relations: The Second Martin Wight Memorial Lecture”, British Journal of International Studies, vol.2, no.2, 1976, pp.101-116, Neumann, “The English School on Diplomacy”, pp.93-95.} Another similarity with the Realists of the US was that the scholars of the English School also tried to defend what the growing number of critics of diplomacy since the French revolution pejoratively had called Old Diplomacy. Against the claims that, among other things, the two World Wars and following the frosty relations between the US and the Soviet Union had proven that diplomacy lacked to ability to create a lasting world peace, English School scholars usually downplayed the threats and challenges described as facing diplomacy, claiming that so called Old Diplomacy was still functioning properly in the background of seemingly new or radically changed international institutions.\footnote{See Herbert Butterfield, “The New Diplomacy and Historical Diplomacy”, pp.181-182, Adam Watson, Diplomacy: The Dialogue Between States, (London: Eyre Methuen, 1982), pp.132-157.} In this sense, both the Classical Realist and the English school shared a certain conservative tendency claiming that the true forms of diplomacy were to be found in the eighteenth century.\footnote{See Sharp, “Herbert Butterfield, the English School and the Civilizing Virtues of Diplomacy”, p.875}

Compared to the Realist focus on how diplomacy should function in order to properly maintain the balance of power, the English School set out with a slightly different aim by attempting to provide a more descriptive approach to their object of study. On the topic of the diplomatic system Martin Wight makes the following distinction between modern and ancient diplomacy:

> The master-institution of the modern states-system is the diplomatic network of resident embassies, reciprocally exchanged. This Italian invention seems to be unique, and found in no other civilization. The Greeks did not know it.\footnote{Martin Wight, Systems of States, (Leicester: Leicester U.P., 1977), p.53.}

Here we can see the intended historization of diplomacy in action, presenting it as born in early renaissance Italy, which also includes a radical separation between a pre-history of diplomacy, non-resident and outside the system of nation states, and the history of diplomacy proper, emerging in harmony
with this system. Although the early English school did not make any attempt at writing a specific history of diplomacy it is still conceived of as an integral part in for instance Martin Wight’s work on the history of the states-system, wherein he depicts the evolution of today’s global system of nation states. Another thing to note here is how the English School in this regard shared another basic premise with their Realist counterparts in understanding diplomacy as connected to the emergence of modernity in the sense that its proper history takes it starting point in the Early Modern period in Renaissance Italy. In one aspect the focus of Wight and other early proponents of the English School, especially Herbert Butterfield, did, however, differ from that of their contemporaries in the United States in that they nevertheless aimed at describing, rather than prescribing, the actual practices of diplomacy. In this sense the Realist fondness for thinkers like Machiavelli and the idea of an anarchic field in which the struggle for power is the basic propelling force was explicitly abandoned in favor of the early philosophers of international law, such as Hugo Grotius. This goal to study the actual practices of diplomacy has, however, been criticized since the actual methodology of someone like Martin Wight was mostly limited to the study of texts on international relations written by scholars, philosophers, and politicians alike, with a preference for the “speculations” and “ruminations” of these writers. This focus did, however, slightly change through the emergence of what is known as the second generation of English School scholars led by Hedley Bull who in 1977 published his emblematic work The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics. For Bull, a central concern had been the problem of tying together the idea of an international society with the obvious anarchic order of this society. In other words: How could the international community of states be considered a society without totally neglecting its obvious non-societal aspect? This meant that Bull, in order to find this link, focused his work on the inner logics of what he named the five institutions of international relations; the balance of power, international law, war, the great powers, and diplomacy. Against the more Machiavellian Realists the English School now solidified themselves in the tradition that Wight previously labeled Grotian, emphasizing a potential of diplomacy to create and protect peace through rational consideration, solidarity, and a focus on the common good. Together with for instance Adam

45 See for instance Wight, Systems of States, pp. 141-147.
Watson, Bull developed the somewhat fragmentary work initiated by Wight into a proper school of IR-theory which pertained to the latter’s idea of the field of international relations as anarchic but still developed enough to be understood in terms of a society. Diplomacy was, just as in the writings of Wight, considered a fundamental part of this international society (to which Bull added an idea of a diplomatic culture), although the understanding of it had changed slightly since the first generation.

Diplomacy was, at best, treated by the first two generations of English School scholars as one of a number of institutions and practices active within international relations but it would be misleading to claim that there were any more elaborate work on diplomacy among its early members, with the sole exception of Adam Watson’s *Diplomacy: The Dialogue Between States*. What separates someone like Watson from what is here referred to as contemporary diplomacy theory is that his theory of diplomacy is characterized by the attempt to describe diplomacy as the practice of interstate communication:

States which are aware that their domestic policies are affected by ‘everything that happens’ outside, are not content merely to observe one another at a distance. They feel the need to enter into a dialogue with one another. This dialogue between independent states – the machinery by which their governments conduct it, and the networks of promises, contracts, institutions and codes of conduct which develop out of it – is the substance of diplomacy.

The fundamental differences that separates traditional from contemporary theory of diplomacy are therefore primarily that diplomacy is consequently limited to interstate communication, but also that the problem of modernity is either not mentioned (the evolution of diplomacy from renaissance Italy until today is simply understood as a natural progress) or left unanswered, as is the case in Watson’s *Diplomacy*.

With the latest theoretical turn of the English School, the concept of diplomacy has become almost totally absent from all theoretical work, which according to some scholars appears contradictory to the fact that a central figure like Tim Dunne turned the English School’s focus even more towards the task

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*International Relations*, pp.60-63. Wight’s depiction of the three schools of thought on international relations, Machiavellian, Grotian and Kantian (or realist, rationalist and revolutionary), does not necessarily correspond to three different theoretical outlooks. Such a statement is of course based in a certain idea of theory, but as for instance Iver B. Neumann has noticed, diplomacy, although discussed as an important reflection of interstate relations, rarely receives the attention given to the more central questions of the objectives of a state (e.g. security, territory), see Neumann, “The English School on Diplomacy”, p.99. See also Jönsson, “Theorising Diplomacy”, p.20 who describes Watson’s and Bull’s writing on diplomacy as “fruitful and stimulating observations rather than full-fledged theories of diplomacy.”

50 See Chapter II.
of writing intellectual history. The problem, according to for instance Iver B. Neumann, is that the style of intellectual history prevalent in the English School attempts to treat institutions and phenomenon of international relations in isolation and not as parts of a bigger whole. This means that, as he puts it: “it seems clear that diplomacy, and the other institutions of international relations for that matter, are not special enough for this splendid scholarly isolation to be warranted.” Another fundamental problem pertaining to both the English School and its Realist counterparts is their almost purely formal treatment of diplomacy (despite the latter’s call for a focus on the practices). Across the entirety of what is here called the traditional theory of diplomacy the concept is almost exclusively treated in its formal elements; its purposes, institutional components, goals, et cetera, are all treated as ideas involved in an ongoing debate before they are executed with more or less accuracy throughout history. To some scholars, mainly of the English School, these forms are subject to a historical evolution in the debates of politicians and scholars, but every time diplomacy at some point in history seems to be failing it is explained as due to a problem of the implementation of the proper form of diplomacy in a certain historical situation. Two examples of this is Herbert Butterfield, who explains the failure of the utopianism in diplomacy after 1919 as simply “a facile attempt to pander to the self-esteem of the masses” and Hedley Bull, who blames the decline of diplomacy on “periods of low consensus in the international society.” Another example of this is how Hedley Bull simply disregards the problems that comes with the modern democratic state where diplomats go from representing a monarch, a single person, to the entirety of a state’s population by only focusing on the formal fact that the diplomat still is a representative for the entity supposedly in power. Finally, this tendency to treat diplomacy in a purely formal way shows itself in the, often brief, depictions of diplomatic history: the focus when portraying the evolution of modern diplomacy is almost exclusively limited to how the foundational ideas of communication and representation have been realized differently due to the sovereign’s understanding of the international society around him. Take Adam Watson’s depiction of the different conducts of Greek diplomacy during the fifth century BCE as an example:

When a city was in an imperial or expansionist phase, as the Athenians were for instance in the period leading up to the Peloponnesian War, they tended to
dominate their allies and to treat them as subordinates, disciplining those who did not accept their decisions; whereas the alliance or coalition opposed to the dominant city had to depend more on voluntary adherents, so that allies of the Spartans at the time of Athenian imperial expansion used to meet separately from the Spartans and to have a much greater say in policy-making than the Athenians allowed to their allies.57

Watson’s attempt to describe why the diplomacy within the Spartan alliance differed from their Athenian counterpart basically boils down to the fact that the Athenians and the Spartans had different understanding of their so called international society. Diplomacy is still understood as the art of managing the balance of power but when one of the parties perceives itself as more dominant it allows it to give less consideration to the others involved in the diplomatic dialogue. This tendency of giving priority to form, which is consistent over a long period of time, over its historical content or application, in matters of history as well as the contemporary situation and future-oriented policy making, produces in the writings of both Realist and English School scholars a somewhat ahistorical perception of diplomacy, despite the aims of some to do the exact opposite. This perception is perhaps the main difference between traditional and contemporary works on the theory of diplomacy, the latter showing a greater sensitivity to matters of historiography, a difference to which we will have to return.

Besides these two main outlooks on diplomacy prevalent within IR-theory during the last century, the Realists and the English School, this field also includes another form of scholarly reflection on the subject. As noted, Martin Wight attempted to separate three different perspectives on international relations labeled Realist, Rationalist and Revolutionary (or Radical).58 Although these perspectives were primarily elaborated on the basis of texts written by politicians, active diplomats and the like, they still had to a certain extent a connection to the study of diplomacy. The Realist perspective, also known as the Machiavellian, was with its focus on power-games derived from the work of Classical Realists such as Hans Morgenthau. The Rationalist perspective, modeled on the work of Hugo Grotius was, as already noted, in many senses not only an ideal for Wight himself but also for his followers in the English School. Finally the third perspective, the Revolutionary, although not as proliferate or successful within the field of IR-studies in the more narrow sense, its prosperity is rather to be found on the one hand in the world of policy making and political organization and on the other in philosophy. For Wight, someone like Woodrow Wilson should be considered the main example of a revolutionary outlook on diplomacy since he, in his role as president of the

57 Watson, Diplomacy, p.86.
United States, called for more transparency and less of the questionable methods traditionally associated with diplomacy. But the concept of Revolutionary diplomacy also includes the more theoretical writings of philosophers like Kant, Hegel, and Lenin. The point of this perspective is in a sense to transform or even abolish diplomacy through reimagining the entire realm of international relations, which made the rather conservative Wight to describe it as anti-diplomacy. 59 This anti-diplomacy started off as a progressive critique of the aristocratic influence on diplomacy during the late eighteenth century and over time it came to include thinkers such as Burke, Thomas Paine, and Kant, the latter also used by Wight as the emblematic figure for this perspective. However, this tradition has generally had a minimal influence on the field of Diplomacy Studies, and even though the last three decades have seen a growing Marxist critique of IR-theory, most notably Fred Halliday’s *Rethinking International Relations*, Justin Rosenberg’s *The Empire of Civil Society* and Benno Teschke’s *The Myth of 1648*, these scholars rarely provide any lengthy treatment of diplomacy, nor are they treated with anything but suspicion from the more traditional scholars in the field. 60

As we have seen, the two main strands of IR-theory that, during the Cold War, did show some interest in the theory of diplomacy was the classical realists and the English School, nevertheless none of them are really considered diplomatic theorists by the standards of today’s scholars. Despite the fact that they held diplomacy as an integral part of the practice of managing international relations (shown for instance in Martin Wight’s definition of diplomacy as the master-institution of international relations 61), their actual work on diplomacy is limited in terms of its impact on the field of International Relations, especially in comparison to other topics within their research. 62 Its focus has traditionally been on diplomacy as interstate interaction and diplomacy as a way to avoid crisis. 63 But the shift of focus within both realism and the English School in the late seventies and early eighties could have meant the end of diplomatic studies within IR-theory (there still existed, however, an interest in this practice from historians 64), but out of this situation arose a new form of diplomatic theory influenced by the turn towards Intellectual History instigated by the early third generation English School-scholars. This new form did, however, not perceive diplomacy as an institution taken for itself and as

59 Wight, *Systems of state*, p.121. This concept is also used by Der Derian, see *On Diplomacy*, pp.134-167.
60 See Jönsson, “Theorising Diplomacy”, pp.15-28 and Neumann, “The English School on Diplomacy”, pp.111-113. We should of course note that James Der Derian, in *On Diplomacy*, actually uses the concept of alienation by partly drawing from Marx. His reading of Marx is, however, totally devoid of any revolutionary tendencies.
63 See also Steiner, “Diplomacy and International Theory”, pp.493-509.
part of a continuity (progressive or not), but instead as a part of specific historical and cultural circumstances. Today four of the five most prominent scholars within the Anglo-Saxon field of diplomatic studies are considered to be connected to the English School in one way or another. So, besides the many threats to the very existence of diplomacy, not only as an object of academic studies but also as a practice of politics, the final years of the Cold War did see the beginning of a second revival of Diplomacy Studies in academia. We will have to return to this situation, under the heading of contemporary diplomacy theory, in the following chapter.

2. The History of the Historiography of Diplomacy

In recent years a critique of the historiography of traditional Diplomacy Studies has been heard from IR-scholars and historians alike, partly because of how the writing of a history of diplomacy has been influenced by a certain teleology. To understand the contemporary situation we should, therefore, begin by sketching the fundamentals of these teleological writings on the history of diplomacy in order to locate its points of interest. Earlier attempts at tracing a history of diplomacy is today usually critiqued for being undertaken in a profoundly Whiggish manner, both in scholarly works such as Otto Krauske’s The Development of the Permanent Diplomat: From the Fifteenth Century to the Resolutions of 1815 and 1818, Garrett Mattingly’s Renaissance Diplomacy, and Donald Queller’s The Office of the Ambassador in the Middle Ages as well as in the numerous handbooks on diplomacy. Hence, these works were all written as attempts to prove the, at the time, dominant idea that diplomacy evolved in harmony with the nation state and bureaucracy as three institutions with a common birthplace in early renaissance Italy and from where they were inherently destined to one day evolve into the global system we see today. Diplomacy was therefore seen as mainly a medium that aided states in securing their territory against the imminent threat of being subsumed under an empire.

As we have seen, the scientific study of diplomacy is a fairly recent invention. It was only with the end of the First World War that the Political Science took up an interest in what would later be known as the discipline of International Relations, and many of the founding texts of Diplomatic Studies, such as the aforementioned Hans Morgenthau’s Politics Among Nations and Raymond Aron’s Peace and War, were not published until after the end of the

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Second World War. The post-war diplomatic works on the theory of diplomacy, in Realism as well as within the English School, did, for epistemological or methodological reasons, not contribute in any large extent to the history of diplomacy since the focus of Realism was to produce knowledge which could guide the state’s future policy-making while the English School-scholars focused on the state’s role in the so called international society limited their interest in diplomacy to its role in the evolution of the nation state from the Renaissance and onwards.66 Within IR-theory it is therefore common to separate between on the one hand the theoretical and on the other the historical study of diplomacy. Perhaps the most famous attempts at writing a specific history of diplomacy therefore comes from a historian. Garrett Mattingly’s well renowned Renaissance Diplomacy from 1955, did, together with the work of Donald Queller and later Matthew S. Anderson, for a majority of the twentieth century make up the foundation of historical writings on the history of diplomacy.67 What these historians shared with most of their contemporary scholars of IR-theory, regardless of the latter’s interest (or lack thereof) in history, is the idea of diplomacy as a practice tied to the nation state. Therefore, in attempting to write the history of diplomacy as one of progression towards a very specific telos, the modern states system, it was common to draw a line separating the diplomacy of the earlier medieval society, organized around ideas of a Christian unity, and the diplomacy of the Renaissance. In this sense diplomacy could be understood as one aspect of much larger transformations in society taking place during this time period, such as for instance the separation between church and state. Mattingly writes:

The same sense of unity which led men to think of themselves as living in one society under the rule of a common law made it difficult for them to formulate a precise theory of diplomatic principals. Our modern notion of an international society composed of a heterogeneous collection of fictitious entities called states, all supposed to be equal, sovereign and completely independent, would have shocked both the idealism and the common sense of the fifteenth century.68

Mattingly here expresses a widely held conception, shared with theoretical scholars, within the traditional writing of the history of diplomacy: that it is the modern, anarchic, states system that makes up the foundation for a proper diplomatic practice. The idea is that the transformation of the political landscape on the Italian peninsula during the middle of the fifteenth century created the necessary conditions for the emergence of a new kind of sovereign

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66 Among these scholars we can include for instance Hans Morgenthau and Kenneth Waltz. See also Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, p.160.
and, with him, a new kind of state. This sovereign was supposedly characterized by the fact that he no longer saw himself as part of a certain bigger (Christian) unity, but rather as one ruler striving for territorial sovereignty in a landscape of potential allies and enemies.\(^{69}\) Such an understanding of the transformation in power structures initiated in Early Modern Europe does not imply that scholars believed that the sending and receiving of envoys was an invention of the Renaissance. Instead there is a wide-spread notion of a pre-history of diplomacy proper usually guiding these works and in which the *nuncio*, the *legati*, and the *oratori* of medieval society, as well as the Greek heralds, the *kerkyes*, often are portrayed as the forgoers of the modern ambassador.\(^ {70}\) This distinction is therefore made between a pre-history of diplomacy, in which sovereigns, tribes, and societies perhaps since the dawn of human kind had organized a system for intersocietal communication, and modern diplomacy, as the collaboration of free sovereigns in mutual recognition.\(^ {71}\) The most famous example of an attempt to trace this pre-history is found in Donald Queller’s *The Office of the Ambassador*, in which he summarize his work as follows:

In the course of the more than three centuries [1100-1400] during which the ambassadorial office has been considered here, great changes were wrought in that office in conformity with sweeping changes in the fabric of a society in the progress of transformation from feudal to modern. In the mid-twelfth-century governments were relatively poor financially, bureaucracies were only beginning to develop, specialists in judicial and financial affairs were emerging from the undifferentiated *curia*, and diplomatic dealings among states were infrequent. By about the end of the fifteenth century, however, modern states were conducting frequent or continuous diplomatic relations very much as we do now.\(^ {72}\)

The scholars naturally identify a varying number of developments acting as the driving forces behind the emergence of this new kind of state formation in the middle of the fifteenth century. Central to all of them was the increasing disintegration of Christian unity in Europe related to the failing power of the


\(^{71}\) Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, pp.158-163. The same distinction is made within the French context, when speaking about a diplomatic history of the Medieval Era “even though, at the time, it did not exist neither the vocabulary nor the institution or even a clearly distinguished notion of foreign affairs”, see Philippe Contamine & Françoise Autrand ”Naissance de la France: Naissance de sa diplomatie”, in ed. D. de Villepin, *L’histoire de la diplomatie française*, (Perrin: Paris, 2005), p.41.

\(^{72}\) Queller, *The Office of the Ambassador in the Middle Ages*, p.225.
pontificate, the growing number of princes seeing themselves as the sole master of their territory, and the growing number of hereditary monarchies established at this time.⁷³ In IR-theory, the different attempts to explain the rise of this new state is possible to characterize through the help of two of the three traditions of thought in IR-theory defined by Martin Wight:⁷⁴ For the Realists inspired by Machiavellian thinking, to which we also can add a majority of the twentieth century historians of diplomacy, the power vacuum created by the fall of the Emperor and the dwindling power of the Pope forced the princes of northern Italy to realize that they were in a situation were no external sovereign decided the hierarchy between their city-states and that it was up to them to organize the anarchic field of fragile societies.⁷⁵ The English School, on the other hand, turns as previously mentioned to the writings of philosophers of natural-law, most notably Hugo Grotius and Alberico Gentili, in order to understand this evolution. Against the idea of international relations as a field characterized by anarchy in which princes had to assert their own power, this tradition claims it was the idea of natural-law based in Christian theology that guided this evolution. Since this thinking naturally gave priority to a community of rulers of the Christian faith (Muslims and other non-Christians were still very much unthinkable as diplomatic counterparts during the early Renaissance), Hedley Bull for instance claims that the idea of a balance of power does not arise until much later in the field of international relations, meaning that since diplomacy “presupposes the existence of an international system”⁷⁶ it cannot be properly formulated as such until the philosophy of natural law emerges during the course of the seventeenth century.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, up until the mid-eighties nearly every text that in one way or another treated the history of diplomacy mentions two central inventions required for diplomacy to evolve: the early forms of a bureaucratic state and the rise and institutionalization of the resident envoy.⁷⁸ There are, therefore, three main reasons traversing these attempts to write a history of diplomacy, explaining why diplomacy proper is said to find its beginnings somewhere between the end of the fourteenth and the middle of the fifteenth century in Italy:

1. The changes in the power structure and geopolitics of the region (e.g. the waning influence of the Pope and the Emperor, the discovery of the New World), leaving princes competing for power and territory without an absolute sovereign dictating the outcome of this struggle.

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⁷⁴ See Chapter I.I
⁷⁷ Ibid. pp.30-33, 44-47.
2. The early developments of the bureaucratic state, sometimes together with a growing number of educated men in these city-states that could be employed in order to keep it functioning properly, allowed for the princes to gather and organize intelligence in order to better their position in this new anarchic field.

3. The rise of the resident ambassador which served not only to provide the necessary intelligence, but also to manipulate foreign sovereigns in a direction that was profitable for their master. Taking these aspects as a basis for understanding the emergence of diplomacy a discussion naturally arose, especially in the field of History, regarding the way to properly date the birth of diplomacy: is it the case, as many seem to claim, that the first proper resident ambassador was Nicodema di Pontremoli who was sent to Genoa in 1455 by the duke of Milan? Depending on how one defines permanent residency, integral to this understanding of diplomacy, it is possible to find the first ambassador as early as in the year 1375, once again Milan was involved, this time to receive Messer Bartolino de Codelupi who functioned as the representative of Lodovico Gonzaga of Mantua for a period of at least four years. Thus, the issue most often raised in this field is the one regarding the definition of residency, since resident envoys are possible to find much earlier in history, such as in the Greek city-states or the representatives of foreign merchants, like the baiulo in Venice, during the European Middle ages. It has, thus, become important to establish a distinction between these envoys and the proper resident ambassador of renaissance Italy. Usually scholars point out that the resident envoys sent out before the fifteenth century rarely were appointed by the sovereign whom they were set out to represent (in Greece the city-states usually selected a foreigner living in their city to act as the representative of his native city), nor did they reside at the court of another sovereign with the main purpose of upholding a diplomatic relationship (the main task of the baiulo was to deal with questions of trade in which his compatriots were involved). The most important distinction in writing the origins of diplomacy in Mediaeval and early Renaissance Italy has, however, been the one between the resident ambassadors and the special em-

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80 The most important source of this statement is without a doubt Harold Nicolson, who many use as a reference, see *Diplomacy*, p. 30. Others have claimed that di Pontremoli’s earlier stay, to Florence between 1446 and 1449 should be counted as the first permanent ambassador. See Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy*, p.221, Kingston de Leusse, *Diplomatie*, p.20, n.20.


issary, the latter being appointed solely as a representative charged with handling one single task or question in the relationship between two sovereigns. But leaving the question of who actually might have been the first resident ambassador in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century aside, most historians of diplomacy seem to agree that diplomacy was properly generalized and institutionalized in this region during the years following the Peace of Lodi in 1454, wherein Milan, Venice, and Florence signed a treaty after almost a century of war in the northern parts of the peninsula. This treaty, together with a growing diplomatic corps in the Vatican City, is therefore usually understood as the two first steps towards universalizing this practice. It is also common to claim that amongst these mid-fifteenth century ambassadors, usually envoys sent to the pontificate from the different rulers in Italy, it is possible to distinguish the first development of a specific diplomatic culture, another key aspect in the traditional understanding of diplomacy. During this time period the resident ambassadors in Rome developed specific codes of conduct which also had the effect that aspiring diplomats were encouraged to spend a séjour in Rome as it was considered the best school for young diplomats. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries there was also a growing interest in trying to understand these new practices of diplomacy and international relations among scholars and rulers alike, illustrated for instance by the first handbooks and reports on diplomatic conduct as well as the early philosophers of natural law formulating a legal system related to foreign affairs. The earliest handbook, Ambaxiatorum Brevilogus, was published already in 1435 by the provost of Toulouse, Bernard de Rosier and has provided a foundation upon which many twentieth century historians based their own work. Thereafter followed a wide range of texts in the wake of the development of an international system of diplomacy in Europe and many rulers started commissioning reports on the nature of diplomatic practice and how one should handle them in the most efficient way. At the same time we see a growing number of primarily legal but also, like Machiavelli’s The Prince, some political treatises covering both the practical and juridical side of diplomacy. The prevalent notion of the continued evolution of diplomacy includes the story of how it spreads north of the Alps during the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the

85 See Queller, The Office of the Ambassador during the Middle Ages, p.60. Here we should add that the term ambaxiator has a much longer history than diplomacy, since it was used interchangeably with a number of other terms throughout the Medieval period.
sixteenth century as the larger kingdoms, especially France following the coronation of François I in 1515, also established the practice of holding permanent ambassadors. At the same time this evolution is said to have been limited or held back by the incessant wars over sovereignty that plagued Europe during this time, but diplomacy still gradually acquired a more stabilized form as the century progressed. One important distinction established during the same period was the one between different officials. In the beginning of the sixteenth century rulers usually separated the ambassadors from mere agents, but the system gradually came to develop codes regarding if a ruler was allowed to have their envoys granted the status of ambassador or not. Traditionally only the kingdoms, at this time Spain, France and England, together with the Pope, the Holy Roman Emperor and, for historical reasons, Venice, were allowed to send emissaries with the status of ambassador (which guaranteed special treatment, such as, among other things, immunity against most prosecutions and a permanent seat in the royal chapel). Two other things are often highlighted, showing how diplomacy is institutionalized and moving towards the establishment of nation-states; the number of different titles increased during this time period to include for instance minsters and plenipotentiary ministers as well as ordinary and extraordinary emissaries, while sovereignty also slowly came to be a basic necessity for a ruler to be allowed to dispatch envoys. This meant that many of the founders of the diplomatic system in Italy a century earlier at the middle of the sixteenth century only were allowed to send agents as representatives at the royal courts, since many of them at this point were under foreign rule.

After yet another short period of relative stability, Europe was once again thrown into a period of intense warfare in the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century. Some historians go as far as to claim that this development was partly due to the fact that diplomacy as a practice had lost its central place at the European courts. Diplomats were perceived as spies and troublemakers, a hatred which, according to the history of diplomacy, also was fueled by the growing religious divide. Within traditional IR-

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87 See Carter, “The Ambassadors of Early Modern Europe”, pp.232-239. Carter points out that Venice’s peculiar position was mostly defended by the fact that they were among the first to hold resident ambassadors in the courts around Europe, but, as he goes on to show, their influence was waning and their role in discussions got less and less prominent. See also Anderson, The Rise of Modern Diplomacy, 1450-1919, p.55.
88 See Black, A History of Diplomacy, pp.49-51, Anderson, The Rise of Modern Diplomacy, 1450-1919, pp.42-43. The tradition of allowing rulers without absolute sovereignty the honor of sending and receiving envoys was later, at the end of the seventeenth century, seen as a historical anomaly destined to die.
89 See for instance Carter, “The Ambassadors of Early Modern Europe”, pp.232-239 and Black, A History of Diplomacy, pp.59-60, the latter even claiming that it was based in a fear of diplomats being spies and troublemakers sent out to undermine the ruler rather than facilitating a peaceful coexistence.
theory the year 1648 is impregnated with a particularly important signification since the signing of the peace treaty of Westphalia is commonly understood as the historical moment when the nation-states and its system of international relations “comes of age”91. This perception of the importance of the treaty also leads to a rarely acknowledged divide between on the one hand IR-scholars and on the other historians. What occurred during the first half of the seventeenth century, according to for instance Matthew Anderson, was that the last ambiguities of the medieval system of envoys finally were eradicated: from this point onwards only sovereigns possessed the right to send and receive ambassador.92 The actual role of the treaty signed after the war remains disputed; some claim, as mentioned, that it signals a shift and even the birth of both the modern state and of modern diplomacy, while others mean that the Thirty Years War should simply be seen as an interruption of what had already been present for a long time. But the end of the Thirty Years War did see one new invention ushering the practice of European diplomacy into a new era: the congress. The practice of organizing a congress is usually described as crucial to the eventual signing of the peace treaty of Westphalia as it allowed for all the warring parties to meet on equal terms (although all parties did not actually meet in person since half of the delegates met in Münster while the other half met in Osnabrück, with two mediators moving in between).93 After this successful event the congress became the standard procedure in which to deal with matters of peace and war in Europe up until the Second World War, including such famous examples as the congress of Vienna which settled the aftermath of the French Revolutionary Wars and the Napoleonic Wars. This congress also inaugurated what is usually seen in the last stage of development of diplomacy into its fully modern form: the establishment of international organizations and, as the academic field of International Relations usually has it, the proper beginning of international relations.94 These general trends in Europe re-actualized a number of more reactionary ideals earlier shunned in European diplomacy: already before the revolution voices had been heard claiming that the calamities and wars in Europe were due to the decline of a general Christian state securing peace and prosperity in the region. The fragmentation into small principalities, and eventually the creation of nation-states, after the peace of Westphalia was seen as the biggest threat against a

91 Wight, Systems of States, pp.141-147.
92 Anderson, The Rise of Modern Diplomacy, 1450-1919, pp.42-43. As Anderson notes, the idea that this was something that characterized the seventeenth century was also strong among the writers of diplomacy of the time, such as for instance de Calières.
93 To be precise the congress at Münster consisted of the delegations of France, Spain, Portugal, Holland, Florence, Savoy, Mantua and the Swiss confederation while Osnabrück were hosting the delegations from the Emperor, Sweden and the members of the empire. As mediators acted a representative from the Papacy and a Venezian diplomat, see Richard Langhorne, “The Development of International Conferences, 1648-1930”, in ed. C. Jönsson & R. Langhorne, Diplomacy II, (London: SAGE Publications, 2004), pp.285-286.
stable Europe. Within the diplomatic community ideas like these were initially rejected since the rise of sovereign nation-states were understood as a sign of progress, while the idea of a return to an overarching European authority was feared as a way for emperors to once again increase their power.⁹５ But the French revolution and Napoleon’s subsequent rise to emperor eventually shifted the worries of Europe’s leaders as they tried to find ways to deal with this new threat. Richard Langhorne has for instance pointed out how this international system already from the start was created as a sort of oligarchy, where the mightiest powers ruled in cooperation, and that the rise of interstate bodies therefore simply should be understood as a way of solidifying their power.⁹⁶

As we have seen, a number of different stages are usually identified within the traditional history of diplomacy: first the establishment of residential embassies and the subsequent increase of the bureaucratic state during the early renaissance, followed by the mutual recognition of sovereignty through the right of every state and sovereign to send and receive envoys. The next stage involves the gradual codification of an international law, beginning with the inviolability of the ambassador and his embassy during the sixteenth century.⁹⁷ The last stage then came with the establishment of the practice of congress as well as with the subsequent rise of international organizations. These organizations are usually seen as an attempt to counter-act the general revolutionary spirit as well as Napoleon’s time as emperor during the period of the shift between the eighteenth and the nineteenth century. If the question of the birth of diplomacy is one that has been part of at least some debate in the past, much less is discussed about the point when diplomacy has reached, with Wight’s words, its matured stage. Some, like Matthew S. Anderson, hold that diplomacy does not reach its final form until after the First World War, while others, as for instance the English School, traditionally holds the Peace of Westphalia as the determining event.⁹⁸ But nevertheless, diplomacy does reach a matured state in which historians of diplomacy usually loses interest in it, and writing the history of diplomacy during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has to a large extent consisted of writing the history of specific diplomatic relationships. ⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Ibid. p.347-348.
⁹⁷ Although, we should note, this practice was generally acknowledged from very early on, even some of the earliest handbooks on what we might call diplomacy advises against killing the envoy of another ruler, but this was the first time it was codified in an explicit system of laws and not just as a recommendation for a sovereign.
⁹⁸ See Anderson, The Rise of Modern Diplomacy, 1450-1919, pp.147-148. Amongst the former it is also possible to count Mowat, Diplomacy and Peace, pp.64-65.
II. The Rumor of My Death Has Been Greatly Exaggerated – The Reinvention of Diplomacy Studies

As we have seen, the theoretical study of diplomacy within the field of International Relations came to an end in the early 1980s mostly, at least according to contemporary diplomacy theory, due to a shift of theoretical preferences within IR-theory. This shift turned diplomacy into a field of minor interest mainly because it was conceived of as difficult to isolate from other practices and institutions in international politics, and since this was the fundamental requirement for a proper scientific analysis, IR-theory simply abandoned diplomacy in favor of other topics. Furthermore, other perils against proper diplomacy was identified by traditional scholars, such as the call of so called revolutionary diplomacy threatening the old system through forcing the diplomatic practices to be subsumed under public and democratic control (thereby overthrowing what scholars saw as a necessary premise for its success) and allowing for diplomatic policy to be subsumed under the same populism and pleading to public feelings as nation-state politics. To add insult to injury, technological advances, reaching its climax in the invention of the nuclear bomb, was also seen as threatening to end diplomacy by making it obsolete.¹ This did not, however, mean that the tradition of IR-studies came to see diplomacy as a practice that had lost its significance on the level of actual interstate politics. The fact that diplomacy was still, in the political sphere, treated as a practice of importance, is usually presented as one of the reasons why the eighties also saw the revival of diplomacy theory, most noticeably with the publication of James Der Derian’s On Diplomacy: A Genealogy of Western Estrangement in 1987.² What Der Derian represented for many of the scholars interested in the theory and practice of diplomacy was not only a new theoretical beginning but also an unhinging of diplomacy from the traditional

understanding within IR-theory, which emphasized its connection to the historical evolution of the nation state. So, in order to succeed with a disassociation of diplomacy from the nation-state, Der Derian reconceptualized the former through a shift in focus from the traditional nation-state teleology to a supposed ontological need of all human collectives to mediate between themselves and other groups.\(^3\) While the new theoretical approach made it possible to study diplomacy as a web of different practices and institutions, all with their own intertwined genealogy, the question of unhinging diplomacy from the nation-state had another purpose: it could provide an answer to those who claimed that diplomacy was becoming increasingly irrelevant. Albeit this idea of the death of diplomacy, and therefore also the death of the theoretical study of it, was limited to the Anglo-Saxon world of Diplomacy Studies this revitalization still had the effects of bringing the strand closer to other theoretical traditions of Diplomacy Studies. Thanks to among others Der Derian, the growing interest in sociological aspects, rather than a focus on rationality and \textit{realpolitik}, brought the Anglo-Saxons closer to the both French sociological tradition stemming from the work of Raymond Aron as well as the one based in anthropology, initiated by Ragnar Numelin and today most notably championed by Iver B. Neumann.\(^4\)

The newfound interest in diplomacy within the Anglo-Saxon branch of International Relations also brought with it a stronger emphasis on epistemological questions in the theory of diplomacy, something that can be seen as connected to the general trend of so called constructivism developing within IR-theory at roughly the same time.\(^5\) This lead scholars like Der Derian, using the Foucauldian concept of genealogy, and Costas M. Constantinou, using a deconstructive approach inspired by Derrida, to find new ways in which to frame diplomacy as a practice. And although Der Derian’s and Constantinou’s explicit dealing with questions from what the former calls post-modern theory have failed to create a continuous discussion regarding theoretical matters, it has still had a significant effect on the way in which scholars in Diplomacy Studies approaches problems regarding historiography, normativity, the state et cetera. The fundamental questions of Diplomacy Studies are still mainly focusing on the nature of its practices, aiming to discover why diplomacy exists and how we should define the \textit{telos} of diplomacy now when the promise of eternal peace through a network of nation-states seemed lost. Leaving the more historically oriented scholars aside, this means that the contemporary

\(^3\) Der Derian, \textit{On Diplomacy} pp.14-15. A similar distinction between the traditional focus on the state and a broader definition of the actors engaged in diplomatic practice can also be found in Sharp, \textit{Diplomatic Theory of International Relations}, p.75, especially note 2.


field of the theory of diplomacy is possible to divide into two categories: those who seek to overcome the broken connection between diplomacy and the nation-state by defining a new teleology of diplomacy and those who, like Der Derian, attempts it through defining a diplomatic ontology. The former often returns to the questions that have haunted diplomacy ever since it was pronounced dead, such as “[t]o what end does an ambassador serve?” or what diplomats do “and how they came to do it.” On the other hand, the ontological strand, in their attempt to separate diplomacy from the birth of the modern nation state and to locate the roots of diplomacy in the specific ways in which human beings relate to the world, focuses to a larger extent to questions of what it means to be human.

It is important to note that this separation into two distinct strands of theory of diplomacy is in no way exclusive; scholars which mainly focuses on the teleology of diplomacy is not necessarily opposing every attempt at ontological considerations and vice versa. This distinction is instead an attempt to draw attention to a number of common features among theorists of diplomacy today in how they understand the continuing relevance of the diplomatic system. Therefore, contemporary IR-scholar come together in asking the question if diplomacy finds its purpose in a certain lack in the organization of the nation-state or if diplomacy is a necessary practice derivative of the specific Umwelt of human beings.

1. The Teleology and the Ontology of Diplomacy

Throughout the history of Diplomacy Studies the central question to most scholars has been to understand the role of diplomacy in the evolution of the modern nation-state, in other words, to use an analogy with Aristotelian theory, just as the telos of an acorn is to become an oak, the telos of the birth of diplomacy in fifteenth century Italy was to evolve into the globalized system of sovereign nation-states we see today. The goal of diplomacy seemed to be to ensure the necessary peace and stability on a continent where an overarching authority (the Pope, the Empire) no longer existed to control the conflicts between lesser sovereigns. Hence, diplomacy was seen as a necessity in a society without a universal sovereign. In such a situation the task of the theory of diplomacy, as for instance Harold Nicolson perceived of it, was to unearth

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6 This distinction is partly based on Paul Sharp’s claim that contemporary diplomacy theory is separated into three categories: those which focus solely on nation-state diplomacy (Berridge), those that partially separates diplomacy from the nation-state (Der Derian and Constantinou), and those who radically separates it from the nation-state (Hamilton, Langhorne, and Wise-man), see Sharp, p.75, n.2.
7 Kessler, Les ambassadeurs, p.20.
8 Neumann, At home with the diplomats, p.1.
the continuities behind the fluidity of appearance in order to reach its true nature. This tale of the origins of diplomacy also coincides with the more general Enlightenment idea of the progress of history where humans developed from a natural state of *a bellum omnium contra omnes* into a modern state of a (relatively) peaceful coexistence guided by rationality and mutual recognition.

Following the two catastrophic events of the twentieth century, the capacity for diplomacy to ensure peace in the anarchic field of international relations was questioned, and the problem of the true *telos* of diplomacy once again confronted diplomacy scholars just as it had the revolutionaries of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The question they had to ask themselves was whether the establishment of an international diplomatic system of nation-states was enough to ensure the development of a sustainable peace. As we have seen, the end of the Second World War brought with it the Realist critique of the prevalent notion that the system of modern nation-states, together with international legislation, would ensure an everlasting peace, and instead they called for a return of the idea of ‘balance of power’ connected to *raison d’état*. But when the promise of eternal peace through the states-system was made impossible by the two World Wars and the Cold War, diplomacy theorists at the end of the last century were forced to ask themselves what end diplomacy possibly could serve instead. If the peacekeeping of diplomacy is not simply about installing an international system of nation-states (the system was in place but the peace did not arrive), something must be missing. The way in which contemporary diplomacy theory has phrased this questions is usually, either explicitly or inexplicitly, in the words of a proclaimed death of diplomacy. Marie-Christine Kessler writes the following in the introduction to *Les ambassadeurs*:

> Are the ambassadors a possible incarnations of human glory? Is their disappearance programmed? Do the classical ambassadors, emissaries to a State from a neighboring one, subsist in a world where the heads of state and their governments deal with the problems in a direct manner, by telephone or in “summits” where diplomacy becomes multilateral and regional, where their disappearance is often evoked? […] [H]as he [the ambassador] wasted away together with the state? What remains is nothing but an honorary title, a residual symbol of a profession sent to perish.\(^9\)

What Kessler highlights here is not only the well-rehearsed critique of diplomacy as obsolete due to technological inventions, but she is also pointing out how the very system it was destined to install appears increasingly outdated. So, it is not just that diplomacy’s roll of facilitating inter-state interaction had been taken over by different technologies, but also that the teleology inscribed in the birth of diplomacy seemed to be an impossible achievement: the states-system had not only failed to prevent wars, but the states’ position

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\(^9\) Kessler, *Les ambassadeurs*, p.11. [Translations are my own if nothing else is indicated]
as the natural foundation of international politics had been deteriorating since the end of the Cold War. Still, the issue of how to establish a sustainable peace was very much central for human kind as such, and for this reason diplomacy continued to assert its relevance to contemporary scholars in International Relations. Keith Hamilton and Richard Langhorne write:

More than thirty years ago, Lord Strang, a former British diplomat, remarked: ‘In a world where war is everybody’s tragedy and everybody’s nightmare, diplomacy is everybody’s business.’ The end of the Cold War has deprived the aphorism of neither its pertinence nor its validity. If diplomacy is important, it is also very old.¹⁰

So, the question of what separates the role of diplomacy in post-Cold War international relations from earlier periods is also what separates contemporary Diplomacy Studies from the broader strand of (classical) Realist IR-theory usually assuming that the issues of the anarchic field of international relations are the same today as they were in the world of Thucydides, the first scholar of international relations.¹¹ The exact way in which contemporary scholars define these transformations is a question we will have to return to, but one important illustration of the difference between them and the traditional form of Diplomacy Studies is that the latter’s call for a return to Old Diplomacy has been replaced by a fondness for what the revolutionaries called New Diplomacy. Many contemporary scholars of diplomacy have, therefore, come to reiterate the old division, as do for instance Guillaume Devin and Marie Törnquist-Chesnier, “between ‘old diplomacy’ – bilateral, secret and resident – and ‘new diplomacy’ – multilateral, public and itinerant.”¹² This time, however, they side with the new.

The teleology of this New Diplomacy is, therefore, not to secure peace by balancing the powers of nation-states in an anarchic field of international relations, but rather to aid in the stabilization of a new form of international politics defined by scholars as open, non-hierarchical, floating, and including a number of actors previously excluded. This stabilization is, at least partially, thought to be achieved through an increase in international policy and regulation adapted for the new situation in which solutions to problems, and therefore also power, is no longer exclusively in the hands of nation-states.¹³ In

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such a situation diplomacy can no longer just focus on questions of security and peace, but just as much with questions of trade, development, and the continued globalization in every sphere of life, from economics to human rights.\textsuperscript{14}

The other main strand of contemporary theory of diplomacy is what some have chosen to call ontological diplomacy theory.\textsuperscript{15} This strand of diplomatic studies goes back on a more radical attempt to completely separate diplomacy from the nation state. Instead of, like the teleological theory, reformulate the break between Old and New Diplomacy, which means diplomacy is still related to but not inevitably intertwined with the state, the scholars of the ontological tradition aimed at reinterpreting diplomacy’s very being-in-the-world. Rather than being limited to the anarchic field of competing sovereigns united in a general strive for peace, diplomacy is here perceived as tied to the specific nature of human existence, thereby enlarging the scope of the practices that might be labeled as diplomatic. Central to definitions of this kind is usually an idea of diplomacy as mediation:

We suggest that diplomacy plays a crucial role in mediating universalism and particularism, and that diplomacy thereby in a sense constitutes and produces international society. Each combination of universalism and particularism – whether settled in a treaty or, more commonly, continuously negotiated – represent a differentiation of political space. Each resolution specific, often implicitly, who “we” are and which competence we have (universalism), and who “I” am and which competence I have (particularism).\textsuperscript{16}

Primarily we should note that the practice of mediation is not a new concept brought into the theory of diplomacy, rather it seems to arise during the seventeenth century together with the birth of the congress.\textsuperscript{17} The change instigated by Der Derian and his use of the concepts alienation and mediation inspired by Marxist and Hegelian philosophy, nevertheless opened up for a new understanding of diplomacy in which it is tied to the creating and mediating of different group identities rather than to the representation of a sovereign.\textsuperscript{18} For some, like Hall and Jönsson, diplomacy still has a predominantly institutional character which means that it requires a certain level of organization, while others find diplomatic traces in everything from organizing a feast to two individuals having a conversation. Fundamental to these theories is an understanding of group identity that is – no matter if it is tied to the family,

\textsuperscript{16} Jönsson & Hall, Essence of Diplomacy, p.37.
\textsuperscript{17} See Timothy Hampton, Fictions of Embassy: Literature and Diplomacy in Early Modern Europe, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), p.1-10
\textsuperscript{18} Der Derian, On Diplomacy, p.8, 29.
the tribe, the city, or the state – in constant need of mediation because of the traumatic intrusion of the other, the one who is not part of the social group:

Diplomacy’s raison d’être is therefore established only when there are boundaries for identity and when those boundaries of identity are crossed. Diplomacy’s condition of possibility lies in identity/difference, but in the radical alterity of the other also lies diplomacy’s impossibility of mediating final identities. Diplomatic history offers many examples, and the post-1989 changes in Easter Europe and the former Soviet Union provides a recent exemplification of this point.19

Whether or not these theorists envision a pre-history before the Fall wherein no mediation was needed (and to which man always strives to return), or if one, like in the above quote from Constantinou, understands identity as in an eternal state of fluidity, the transformations of the practices of diplomacy throughout history is no longer due to a specific need of the state or sovereign in order to intervene in an anarchic field, but instead an effect of how the identities of a number of existing societies were confronted with each other. In other words: the form of diplomacy is based on the way in which alienation is created. The goal of a diplomat is therefore, as it was formulated by David Joseph Wellman, to understand different identities and to act as an intermediary between them:

Such social and linguistic phenomena [how community and language are formed, who is viewed as being outside] not only describe what a people need and do in order to survive, but also what the religious culture in their respective countries has taught them to believe about the origin, purpose and value of the human and nonhuman world. The diplomat who identifies and understands the Ecological Locations of his or her own nation, as well as in the country or countries with which they are in dialogue, gains an important means of communication and bridge-building.20

In this sense, anyone handling relations between two distinct identities might be considered a diplomat; from religious figures to warriors and even, in some cases, the poorest member of a society. To be recognized as a diplomat one simply has to act and be recognized as an intermediary between two already fixed identities.

Contemporary diplomacy theory is, as we have seen, approached from two different, but not necessarily opposite, perspectives. On the one hand scholars of diplomacy usually emphasize the role of diplomacy in establishing and regulating peaceful relationships, forcing diplomacy to go beyond traditional nation-state representation in order to make a difference in a world which is

19 Constantinou, On the Way to Diplomacy, p.113.
characterized as moving faster, becoming more fragmented, and being less hierarchical. The question is not what diplomacy is but what purpose it serves for globalization. On the other a more radical unhinging of diplomacy from its connection to the nation-state was achieved through reinterpreting diplomacy as an answer stemming from needs of an ontological nature rather than from issues of realpolitik. This also, as mentioned, opened up both for a new understanding of the history of diplomacy, no longer limited to the birth of the nation state in renaissance Italy, but also to a new understanding of diplomats and their practice.

2. The New History of Diplomacy and the Problem of Modernity

The field of diplomatic history has been, as we seen, guided by Whiggish accounts of the gradual development of diplomacy and the nation state into its perfect form. Although diplomatic studies in history and International Relations during most of the twentieth century shared a number of fundamental methodological and epistemological premises, they have still remained mostly separated. Therefore, since the fields of IR-studies and history had little influence on each other when it came to actually writing the history of diplomacy, the evolution of the two has taken a somewhat different trajectory. As already seen, contemporary IR-theory is usually seen as going through a major theoretical shift in the end of the eighties and the early nineties, starting, like so many other things regarding the contemporary study of diplomacy in this field, with the publication of James Der Derian’s *On Diplomacy*. The main focus of his book is, in fact, to break with IR-theory’s predominant focus on the nation state, not in order to reorganize diplomacy for the future (as is common within IR-theory), but to allow for the writing of a new history of diplomacy. In an attempt to break with the traditional focus on the nation-state as the basis of all international relations, Der Deridian attempts to expand on the disparate and fragmented origins of diplomacy, going beyond the traditional idea of a birth place for diplomacy in fifteenth-century Italy. In Historical Studies the latter third of the nineteenth century saw a rapid decline of writings on the history of diplomacy, according to some due to the general development of the field away from positivism and empiricism. Nevertheless, a critique against Whiggish accounts of the history of diplomacy still arose, although

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21 Harber, Kennedy, Krasner, “Brothers under the skin”, pp.34-43.
much later than in IR-studies, most famously through an article by John Watkins. He described the study of the history of diplomacy as “the oldest, and traditionally one of the most conservative, subfields in modern history”\textsuperscript{24}. Certainly not overlooking the problem of the nation-state, the critique from scholars of history also notes that the depiction of actual diplomatic practices traditionally has been limited to investigating treatises, negotiations, and the dominant European courts at the time, neglecting or even deeming other practices unimportant, peripheral or primitive, all in an attempt to locate diplomacy’s true origin.\textsuperscript{25} The attempt of reinterpretting the history of diplomacy has, compared to that of contemporary IR-scholars, therefore been to diversify this history in order to make it more complex and to move away from simplistic notions of progression. Another important goal has been to provide a more accurate depiction of diplomacy’s pre-history, not as an attempt to find its true origin but to portray the different forms and arenas in which Early Modern diplomacy took place as well as presenting the daily life of its many diverse actors.\textsuperscript{26} Despite the call from scholars like John Watkins for bridging the gap separating Historical Studies of diplomacy from other fields, primarily from International Relations, these critiques have actually pushed the two strands further apart, partially due to the difference in their respective aim with writing the history of diplomacy: While historians are mostly interested in depicting, as accurately as possible, the actual practices of diplomacy during a specific time period IR-scholars are much more interested in utilizing this history in order to make a theoretical argument about diplomacy.\textsuperscript{27} Thus, while we have seen a significant increase in the writings on different topics within the history of diplomacy – practically every extensive volume on the topic of diplomacy now include a section on its history – these works are also to a much greater extent divided and possible to separate into two distinct categories: works aiming at depicting a more nuanced history of diplomacy in order to say something about its theory or its nature, and works aiming at a more nuanced history of the development of diplomatic practices in order to say something about how it functioned in a specific historical time and place.\textsuperscript{28} We will, however, leave the latter in order to focus more on the place that the problem of modernity has taken in diplomatic theory after the end of the Cold War.

\textsuperscript{24} Watkins, “Toward a New Diplomatic History of Medieval and Early Modern Europe”, p.1.
\textsuperscript{27} Watkins, “Toward a New Diplomatic History of Medieval and Early Modern Europe”, p.5.
\textsuperscript{28} This line of difference still cuts through the divide between IR-studies and history, with the former exemplified by for instance Black, Der Derian, Constantinou, and Sharp, while the latter include, among others, Fletcher, Frigo, and Hampton.
In contrast to traditional diplomacy theory the contemporary field has, for the most part, advocated the idea that the nineteenth and the twentieth century actually saw comprehensive transformations in the practice of diplomacy and that, therefore, the attempt of traditional scholars, such as Watson and Butterfield, to save diplomacy from public intervention should be denounced as fruitless. Instead of siding with so called Old Diplomacy, the contemporary field hails what they see as the progressive nature of New Diplomacy, portraying the distinction as one between an old practice of kings and princes and a new based in the modern democratic nation-state. Another slight change is possible to detect in how the point of modernity is located in diplomacy. Whereas traditionally it is situated in the peace of Westphalia or in the congress of Vienna, the break is now usually placed somewhere between the late 1800s and the end of the First World War. Diplomacy is no longer seen as slowly dying but rather rapidly expanding, captured by for instance Marie-Christine Kessler who locates the pivotal point in the talks following the Second World War, which not only saw the institutionalizing of international law through the Geneva Convention, but also the rapid growth of the number of French embassies in the world. She points out that between 1918 and 1940 only five minor legation had been turned into embassies, while they, between 1945 and 1961, increased by fifty. The number of embassies has, as she points out, also continued to grow from 94 in 1961 to over 160 today. Another pivotal point is the end of the Cold War, ushering in a new era in global diplomacy. This general disposition brings contemporary diplomacy theory closer to the traditionally despised political and philosophical critique of diplomacy formulated around the time of the French revolution. Initially this critique had little impact on the actual practices of diplomacy. Instead the revolution and the following Napoleonic wars brought, as already indicated, along a new diplomatic practice of supranational unions as an attempt to protect the emerging nation states from future leaders sharing Napoleon’s dreams of commanding a European Empire. But the New Diplomacy still saw itself as the bearer of a more open and democratic notions of international relations based in trade and commerce, in contrast to the will of a sovereign. The emergence of this tradition is also contemporary with the first use of the concept of diplomacy in the


modern sense. In the English language one of the earliest examples is found in Thomas Paine’s *Rights of Man* where he perfectly spells out this critique directed at what is seen as antiquated forms of diplomatic practice:

The situation of Dr Franklin, as Minister from America to France, should be taken into the chain of circumstances. The diplomatic character is of itself the narrowest sphere of society that man can act in. It forbids intercourse by the reciprocity of suspicion; and a diplomatic is a sort of unconnected atom, continually repelling and repelled. But this was not the case with Dr Franklin. He was not the diplomatic of a Court, but of MAN.32

The idea of a diplomacy of human kind rather than of a specific court is seen as central to the globalization of diplomacy which was gradually emerging from this point and onwards, driven on not only by the leaders of the United States (from Benjamin Franklin to Woodrow Wilson), but also by France’s revolutionary government and later by the Bolsheviks in the Soviet Union. The problem that the critics had identified in the old diplomacy was, as is evident in Paine’s critique, not so much its explicit goal of creating and ensuring a long-lasting peace between, in particular, the nation states of Western Europe,33 but rather that it was usually kept secret, that it was saturated in a traditional aristocratic code of conduct, and that it was an exclusive practice of nation-states and courts. The critique of the diplomatic practices emerged first and foremost out of liberal and later also out of socialist traditions. The intellectual, political, and philosophical transformations that, at least in some texts, also explicitly criticized diplomacy, did however not change the material practices of diplomacy instantly. Rather a number of changes on a material and an institutional level, such as new forms of technology and new issues in a more complex economy, are seen as gradually bringing about changes starting from the late nineteenth century and culminating in the end of the First World War.34 By focusing on the transformations set in motion by the events in the shift between eighteenth and nineteenth century contemporary diplomacy theorists is allowed to adopt a self-image that differentiates them from earlier scholars of diplomacy. Instead of rescuing a once proud practice, Diplomacy Studies strives at developing a theory about a practice undergoing


33 The peace treaty of Westphalia gave for instance the freedom of all the princes and states then part of the Holy Roman Empire to establish diplomatic relations with others in order to ensure their own safety and preservation. One part of the treaty stated: “It shall be free perpetually to each of the States of the Empire to make alliances with strangers for their preservation and safety; provided, nevertheless such Alliances be not against the Emperor, and the Empire, nor against the public peace […].”, see Roosen, *The Age of Louis XIV*, p.13.

34 See Hamilton & Langhorne, *The Practice of Diplomacy*, pp.136-152. There has been some critique, mainly Steiner, “Diplomacy and International Theory”, p.508, for being too narrow or too elaborate in their depiction of these transformations.
radical alterations through the impacts of globalization on the diplomatic corps and its institutions. In other words: the issue is how the evolution and alteration of the global political landscape (or perhaps, to be even more specific, diplomacy’s very becoming-global itself) during the twentieth century has transformed the conditions of diplomacy. This leads to certain shared points of reference that bring together these theories in an analysis of what we might call modernity and how modernity has impacted diplomacy.

Primarily, the most recurrent aspect is, as we have already seen, the evolution of modern technology: from the invention of the steam engine and the development of the railroad system in Europe to the rise of the internet and laptop computers, the technological development is seen as transforming the pace of diplomacy to the point where diplomacy had to undergo radical changes to adapt to modern technology. Most scholars withhold that while technology undoubtedly threatened diplomacy in the old feudal form, the changes it forced upon the nation-state also opened up a space for a new kind of diplomacy. Here we come upon one interesting anomaly that we need to return to; James Der Derian, usually hailed as the instigator of contemporary diplomacy theory, still prescribes to the more traditional understanding of technology criticizing what he calls techno-diplomacy, the form of twentieth century international relations. The velocity, the technical jargon, and most importantly the nuclear bomb are all perceived as threats that turns human beings into “objects of information, rather than subjects in communication.”

Der Derian’s point is without a doubt a lot more refined than that of the traditional scholars of diplomacy, such as Watson or Butterfield, but he nevertheless pertains to the old notion of diplomacy as an impossible practice in the contemporary world. However, few would today agree with Der Derian, instead, technological inventions are perceived as critical for the development of the management of international relations.

Secondly, another important aspect in the transformation of diplomacy was the growing demands for openness and transparency that came with the modern democratic state. These demands are usually seen as altering the very foundation of diplomacy as they called for the annihilation of the secret practices characteristic of Old Diplomacy. One important factor here is usually said to be the role of the sovereign: an envoy from the court of Louis XIV had

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36 Der Derian, On Diplomacy, p.199-209. It should, of course, be pointed out that Der Derian’s book was written before the fall of the Berlin Wall. But nevertheless does his analogy between Marx’s analysis of commodity fetishism and a supposed dialectic between nuclear weapons and diplomacy not hold for a critical analysis. When used as a threat against another nation, a nuclear weapon lacks any of the characteristics of a fetish. It is rather a return to pre-capitalist direct, violent, exploitation.
only the king himself to answer to and could, and perhaps even should, therefore conduct his work in secret. But a modern day diplomat is no longer only representing, and therefore responsible to, the head of state. Instead the contemporary diplomat, representing a nation-state rather than a court, is also responsible to the public of the state, including economic interests, NGO:s, government agencies, et cetera. In turn, the emergence of a public sphere also exposed the diplomat to critical examination from for instance the media forcing their practices out in the light.37

The problem of critical examination is related to the third aspect of the change that came with modernity; the rise of a system of meritocracy rather than one of aristocracy within the diplomatic corps. The diplomats of the feudal system were above all appointed on merits of birth and the important position of the aristocracy within the corps also aided in fostering the so called diplomatic culture which is still prevalent today.38 When envoys mainly were sent to and from Europe’s courts these traditions had its apparent benefits; an aristocrat was well aware of the different codes of conduct needed to get the king’s ear in Early Modern European court life.39 But, as the history of diplomatic theory is usually told, the fall of the old monarchies, from the French revolution up until the end of the First World War, produced a demand for a new type of diplomatic subject. This demand in turn gave birth to what is referred to as the diplomatic career, studied in depth by diplomacy scholars inclined towards ethnological or sociological theory. France is usually seen as the first nation to institutionalize the diplomatic career, a process which took place during the latter half of the nineteenth century, before gradually spreading to the rest of Europe. In France it only took a few decades to totally transform the diplomatic corps the point that only one of the diplomats of the Second Empire where elected solely on the basis of his aristocratic background, while in the rest of Europe the so-called professionalization of diplomacy usually continues up until the First World War.40 The institutionalizing of the diplomatic career did not only prescribe the specific career path one would have to follow within the embassy (first secretary, then attaché, chargé d’affaires et cetera) but also that the future ambassador, for instance, had undergone the proper education (not only within the preferred disciplines, such as Law, Po-

37 See for instance Neumann, Diplomatic Sites, pp.45-72.
39 Jönsson & Hall, Essence of Diplomacy, p.41
40 Kessler, Les ambassadeurs, pp.53-81, Jönsson & Hall, Essence of Diplomacy p.42, Berridge, Diplomacy p.8. Whether or not being a diplomat is actually a profession has been the subject of some discussion, see for instance Nevra Biltekin, Servants of Diplomacy: The Making of Swedish Diplomats, 1905-1995, (Stockholm: Stockholm University, 2016).
political Science, or International Relations, but also from the preferred universities), spoke the necessary languages, and passed a specific introductory test.\(^{41}\)

The third aspect of the modernization of the diplomatic practice is, according to contemporary Diplomacy Studies, the fall of old hierarchies. Initially this referred to the continuous fall of the old Empires in Europe culminating in the end of the First World War, but the threatening fragmentation of the early nineteenth century was immediately covered over and replaced by the new antagonism between the West and the Soviet Union. The fall of old hierarchies referenced in diplomatic theory is therefore usually referring to the fall of the Soviet Union sparking an unprecedented activity in the already established forms of public and economic diplomacy. Even though trade had been a cornerstone in international relations since at least the ancient Greeks, the disintegration of communism in Eastern Europe during the end of the last century saw the beginning of a diplomacy intended to manipulate the political and economic direction of particular states. Primarily Western diplomats promised both economic aid and investments if the newly formed countries chose the path of so called liberal reform preferred in the West.\(^{42}\) This practice later came to evolve into what some today have termed development diplomacy or public diplomacy where Western diplomats are used as key negotiators and experts in the dispersion and implementation of development aid.\(^{43}\)

The fourth impact defined by Diplomacy Studies as changing the field of diplomacy is said to be the rise of new (and old) hostilities, especially the West’s relationship to so called rouge states and terrorists, exemplified for instance with how declassified documents revealed how US diplomats in Islamabad had been working together with the Taliban to find Osama Bin Laden.\(^{44}\) A diplomat of the so called Old Diplomacy always negotiated with a counterpart that was clearly recognized as such by his master, while diplomats of today might find themselves dealing with leaders who might not be recognized as such or who are even condemned by the international community. Another issue troubling contemporary diplomacy is, according to some scholars, the fact that even warfare has been transformed, not in the sense of the actual practices of war, but that wars today supposedly are to a greater degree motivated by claims based in identity, such as ethnicity or religion, rather than


in ideology or traditional state interest. These insecurities in contemporary world politics has, according Iver B. Neumann, even lead to a totally new form of diplomacy aimed at reinsuring the status quo. As already noted a fundamental aspect of the understanding of the contemporary diplomatic scene is the rise of new powers and the instability this causes in the established hierarchy in diplomacy, or as Neumann puts it: “The newness of contemporary diplomacy stems, rather, from change in the general political and social fields that surround diplomacy.” The telos of diplomacy is therefore not to create peace through mediating between the most powerful, but rather ensuring the strength of an already established order or maintain the system by hindering possible threats against the world order before they have even started to grow.

The fifth impact of modernization is the rising number of actors present at the negotiating table, a transformation of diplomacy from bilateral to multilateral or even polylateral. Following the globalization of capitalism, where capital no longer were bound to the goodwill and cooperation of a particular nation-state, the international community was forced to expand in order to include non-state actors. With global companies, having the whole world as their marketplace, they see themselves as in the need for an arena where it is possible to address lawmakers and politicians in a multitude of states simultaneously, in order to transform laws and regulations in a way that they deem beneficial. Here a difference is usually established within diplomacy theory between on the one hand traditional businesses and on the other NGO:s, such as Greenpeace or Médecins sans frontiers, which have also come to be involved more frequently in international politics. And although global companies and NGO:s differ on many points, the latter for instance usually have a strong focus on (sustainable) development and peace, their goals are still the same: to change laws and policies in a direction that appear beneficial to them.

Thus, the distinction between old and new diplomacy, as it was phrased by Devin and Törnquist-Chersnier, is based on the idea that the states-system in becoming modern transformed its needs which in turn re-constituted foreign relations. This did not only lead to an increase in the responsibilities of a diplomat, from mostly representing the king in matters of peace and war to partaking in trade discussions, handling issues in ecology or sustainable development, to treating the problem of general security, but also, as we have seen,
the idea that diplomacy went from being secret, immobile, and bilateral to being open, mobile, and multilateral. The extent of these shifts are subject to variation and some scholarly attention have been explicitly given to this particular question.\footnote{See Steiner, “Diplomacy and International Theory”, pp.493-509, Berridge, Diplomacy, p.1-5.} While some, like already mentioned Devin and Törnquist-Chersnier, Der Derian, and Neumann, seem keen on claiming that there is a clear divide between old and new diplomacy, others withhold that these forms coexist today, meaning that a contemporary diplomat must at the same time be both Old and New, resident and itinerant, secret and open, bilateral and multilateral. But regardless of if the importance of the more traditional roles of an ambassador such as functioning as a representative of the state (today most importantly in times of crises as during the war in Bosnia or the natural disaster in Haiti in 2010) and as actor in bilateral negotiations, is highlighted, no scholar of contemporary Diplomacy Studies denies that diplomacy has adapted to the modern democratic state of international relations, forcing diplomats to handle both the globalization and the fragmentation of world politics.

3. Representation and Mediation - the Art of Creating Peace?

What we might call traditional, old, or feudal diplomacy was first and foremost defined by the practice of negotiation (in which the ambassador acted as the representative of his sovereign) to the point where this concept, before the use of the word diplomacy in the modern sense arose during the second half of the eighteenth century, typically referred to the entirety of international relations, illustrated by for instance the titles of handbooks such as Callières De la manière de négocier avec les souverains. Representation and negotiation are still commonly perceived as the core practices of the diplomat, and to some extent, as we have seen, this is partly the reason why diplomacy has been pronounced dead multiple times during the last century. The goal of the art of negotiation was often, as it was declared in handbooks and theoretical works, described as creating and safeguarding peace and to ensure that the sovereign’s best interest where taken into account in the process of establishing this peace. Out of such an understanding of diplomacy grew, during the sixteenth century, theories of diplomatic immunity and extraterritoriality associated with philosophers of law such as Hugo Grotius.\footnote{See G.R. Berridge, "Grotius", in ed. G. R. Berridge, Diplomatic Theory from Machiavelli to Kissinger, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001) pp.58-64. This might however only been an idea among philosophers and scholars, see Roosen, The Age of Louis XIV, p.1.}

Besides the tasks of furthering the perspective of one’s Master a diplomat was, in practice rather than in
theory, also expected to aid and protect the Master’s subjects travelling through or working within the borders of the land of the sovereign to which the ambassador was assigned. The ambassador also had an important role to play in ceremonial matters representing the Master at events like royal birthdays, coronations, religious ceremonies, et cetera.\textsuperscript{52} In traditional diplomacy theory the variety of tasks handled by a renaissance diplomat is often presented as a proof that the diplomatic profession has not changed significantly since the sixteenth century: changes in the tasks accredited to a diplomat is only illustrating the transformed needs of the nation-state.\textsuperscript{53} The point of most of the practices of Old Diplomacy was, however, to collect and transmit valuable knowledge and information to the sovereign, here illustrated by a letter written by Louis XIV to one of his ambassadors:

\begin{quote}
You must not be afraid in such situations that you are straining too far from your subject because there is nothing which happens in the whole world that does not come under the cognizance and fall within the sphere of a good ambassador.\textsuperscript{54}
\end{quote}

As we have seen, contemporary diplomacy theory has, in opposition to the traditional idea of the invariable nature of the diplomatic profession, often claimed that the transformations of diplomacy from the early nineteenth century and onwards radically changed what diplomats actually do. These alterations, regardless of if diplomatic scholars assume that there is radical break or a gradual modification separating Old and New Diplomacy, are themselves hard to neglect. Even if the early nineteenth century saw a decrease in the number of diplomatic posts throughout Europe, the rest of the century meant, as mentioned, if not a professionalization so at least an institutionalization of the diplomatic corps, its process of recruitment, and the following expansion of the duties of the embassy. One important addition to what many claim was the democratization of diplomacy was the organization of the diplomatic knowledge in archives and publications, beginning in Britain when the first diplomatic librarian was appointed in the year 1800. The act of democratization is one of the reasons why the knowledge of the diplomatic archives was not merely organized and stored but also, from 1829 and onwards, made public through a number of journals. Initially these journals, such as \textit{Annales du commerce extérieur}, \textit{Moniteur officiel du commerce}, and \textit{Board of Trade Journal}, were mostly concerned with trade and commerce. Throughout the nineteenth century trade had come to be the new main focus of many embassies, partly because of the growing European empires in South and North America as well as the more efficient trade with Asia. Later, the focus of the publications of diplomatic papers broadened to also include other topics or to

\textsuperscript{52} Roosen, \textit{The Age of Louis XIV}, p.172-184
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid. p.129.
\textsuperscript{54} J.-J. Jusserand, quoted in Roosen, \textit{The Age of Louis XIV}, p.143
more generally portray the foreign policy of a state.\textsuperscript{55} The late eighteenth century also saw the disappearance of two practices fundamental to the preceding one: code breaking and the interception of letters from foreign powers were abandoned and the official departments in charge of these secret activities were dissolved. Some claim that the abandonment of these practices was due to public pressure directed against the secret nature of aristocratic diplomacy, but instead these underground activities were soon replaced by specialists, primarily military and commercial attachés but later also attachés in charge of cultural affairs with a greater freedom than ordinary diplomats.\textsuperscript{56} These posts were detached from the traditional diplomatic processes, producing knowledge within their respective field of expertise rather than having a general outlook on foreign relations. For instance military attachés, in charge of reporting and gathering intelligence on foreign military, were typically appointed from within the army rather than from the milieux of traditional career diplomats. Another effect of the changes during the nineteenth century was the institutionalization of trade regulation that in many cases were handled by the Foreign Ministry, in Europe most notably the Comité permanent international d’actions économique established in 1916 by France, Britain, Italy, and a number of smaller allies.\textsuperscript{57} The embassies were also given responsibility to further the linguistic and cultural agenda of the nation, organizing for instance language classes abroad as well as a more general propaganda directed at both the press (with the creation of press offices at the embassies) and at the general public. All these changes did, as already noted, dramatically raise the number of employees within the diplomatic corps at a time when also the number of embassies and consulates of the European states were starting to increase (although the most significant growth did not come until after the Second World War). An embassy could no longer, as in feudal times, be made up of just an ambassador (dealing with the questions determined by his sovereign) and the supporting staff he needed to write and copy letters and organize the different formal aspect of life at the embassy. With the professionalization embassies grew larger with a variety of staff and positions handling different questions within their respective field of expertise.

As mentioned, diplomats are still often understood as the “incarnation of the state”\textsuperscript{58} but the technical advancements and the globalization that did transform the practice, and that brought a number of new actors to the negotiation tables, did also change how the role of the ambassador in a negotiation is perceived. The peace at Westphalia has traditionally been understood as the be-

\textsuperscript{57} Anderson, \textit{The Rise of Modern Diplomacy, 1450-1919}, pp.133-134.
\textsuperscript{58} Kessler, \textit{Les ambassadeurs}, p.352.
gaining of modern diplomacy, especially since it saw the invention of congress and third party mediators. But it took until the late 1980s until the concept of mediation was generally acknowledged in Diplomacy Studies, claiming that mediation rather than representation should be seen as the basic feature of a diplomatic encounter. In this understanding, diplomacy is not a way to represent a sovereign, but a third culture functioning as a necessary bridge between two already existing cultures.\(^{59}\) Hence, here it is possible to make a distinction between, on the one hand, negotiation as representation and, on the other, negotiation as mediation. In the former, more traditional understanding of negotiation, the ambassador is seen as expressing, through the power of representation, the will of his Master and the goal of a representing diplomat is therefore to find ways of bending the wills of the other delegates so that they coincide with that of his Master. The new, theoretical transformation of diplomacy also allowed for a number of new actors, such as priests, warriors, and later also celebrities, economists, and even citizens to count as diplomats in the history of diplomacy. In mediating negotiation, invented when the Pope’s nuncio and an ambassador from Venice acted as intermediates between the congress gathered in Osnabrück and the one gathered in Münster in the middle of the seventeenth century, the position of the diplomat is different: instead of directly embodying the Master a mediating diplomat is withdrawn, observing the desires represented at the table from outside and trying to find the most profitable way of uniting them.\(^{60}\) One definition of mediation in diplomacy which is frequently referenced in the field is that of James Der Derian, here presented in combination with another of his core concepts, alienation:

First, alienation theory is highly sited for an historical analysis. It seeks to explain man’s alienation from an ‘original’ state of solidarity: as a result of certain causes, new forms of alienation develop which manifests themselves in a historical framework. […] Second, the primeval alienation of man gave rise to estranged relations which required a mediation. In the most general sense, the form this mediation takes, as estranged relations change, constitutes a theoretical and historical base for the study of the origins of diplomacy. […] The word ‘mediation’ will be used in two senses. First, in the conventional sense (which emerges coevally with the modern meaning of diplomacy), mediation means a connecting link, or for the purpose of reconciliation, an intervention. By utilizing this term, I admit to an interpretation which emphasizes the interdependent and reconciliatory nature of diplomacy yet accommodates as well forceful interventions. The other sense of the term is derived from the theory of alienation itself, as drawn from the writings of Hegel and Marx. There are two types or

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\(^{60}\) See for instance Berridge, Diplomacy, p.187, Brian Hocking, Beyond ‘newness’ and ‘decline’: the development of catalytic diplomacy, (Leicester: University of Leicester, 1995).
orders, of mediation. The first is between man (his powers) and nature (his needs). In this subject-object relationship, mediation refers to an activity, manual or intellectual, which brings man’s powers and needs together [...]. The second order of mediation is an historically specific one made necessary when man’s activity, or the products of his activity, is alienated from him.61

Der Derian posits alienation as a central ontological character of diplomacy – we humans will always experience a certain alienation in our relationships with the other since we are alienated from “an ‘original’ state of solidarity”62 – and the answer to overcome such an alienation is through mediation. Thus, almost all human relationships demand diplomacy and, as Ramsay points out, everyone is a diplomat, at least if the relationship in question is on a larger scale than between two specific individuals. Everything from the relationship between two pre-historic tribes to our bond to the gods is understood as requiring a certain degree of mediation and therefore of diplomacy. The difference here captured by the contrast between representation and mediation is, however, not necessarily expressed in terms of the choice of mediation over representation. Instead it is possible to discover in a number of other concepts throughout diplomatic studies, such as the diplomat as a technocrat, a manager, or as the entrepreneur of international relations, all capturing the same intersubjective position where a diplomat is mediating rather than representing.63

Despite a supposedly long history within the diplomatic practices, the aspect of mediation did not attract attention from scholars until rather recently. Some claim that this might be due to a certain inherent resistance from the more traditional forces of diplomacy (especially from the diplomats themselves) against the label of technocracy, possibly because diplomats prefer to see themselves as something more than faceless bureaucrats of the state, often also complaining that their views and suggestions on issues about which they consider themselves experts are not properly considered by the politicians back home.64 But, as for instance Marie-Christine Kessler noted, the question of technocracy, is really a question of how much autonomy the individual diplomat possesses: is an ambassador allowed to go against the will of the Foreign Ministry if it serves a higher purpose?65 It is around this very question that the

61 Der Derian, On Diplomacy, pp.5-7 and Adler-Nissen, “Just Greasing the Wheels?” p.22. Others who rely on Der Derian without explicitly mentioning mediation is Pouilot, International Security in Practice, pp.40-44. Mediation is also highlighted as an important part of diplomatic practice by Berridge, Langhorne & Hamilton, and Sharp.

62 It should, however, be noted that Der Derian has received criticism from within the field for his idea of an original, unalienated, state of being, see Constantinou, On the Way Towards Diplomacy, pp.110-112.


64 Coolsaet, “The Transformation of Diplomacy at the Threshold of the New Millennium”, p.2.

65 See Kessler, Les ambassadeurs, pp.225-226. See also Neumann, At home with the diplomats, p.113.
major reinvention of Diplomacy Studies took place during the mid-nineties. The fact that a transformation takes place here is partially illustrated by the increasing institutionalization of Diplomacy Studies itself; this time period for instance saw the creation of the field’s three major academic journals, *Diplomacy & Statecraft* in 1990, *Diplomacy and International Relations* in 2000, and *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* in 2006, as well as an explosion of publications aimed at constituting the field by defining and collecting central texts.\(^{66}\) An as noted, at the center of this transformation was a debate in the Anglo-Saxon world regarding the death of diplomacy. Andrew F. Cooper described the differences as follows:

What is striking about the traditional defence of diplomatic authority and raison d’être is the narrowness of its argument. Rather than a dynamic approach to the study of diplomacy, with a solid grasp of the changing context in which contemporary diplomacy must be located and a keen appreciation of the evolution in the role that professional diplomats play, the image is presented as a static one. Diplomats and diplomatic activity remain associated with a rigid state-centric international system. Such a perspective plays into the hands of those forces which view diplomacy and diplomats as increasingly removed from the real problems – and solutions – facing the world in the post-cold war years.\(^{67}\)

So instead of being the actual voice of a sovereign, the diplomat in a post-Cold War society is much more seen as the figure setting out the stage, facilitating dialogue, punishing those who do not adhere to protocol and rewarding those who do.\(^{68}\) This is for many diplomacy scholars seen as the answer to the accelerating globalization taking place since the fall of state socialism:

Today we are experiencing, firstly, a new acceleration of globalisation while, secondly, at the same time being confronted with the effects of a deliberate and ideologically motivated policy of liberalization, deregulation and exclusion of the state from economic life.\(^{69}\)

In a world where economy is global and the stage of international relations is made up of a growing number of rather diverse actors the diplomat is transformed due to the fact that power is no longer state exclusive. This has also

\(^{66}\) This is especially obvious in the numerous handbooks and anthologies on diplomacy that has been published since the turn of the century. Another publication worth mentioning is the Palgrave Macmillan book series *Studies in Diplomacy and International Relations* which also began publishing in the mid-nineties.


\(^{69}\) Coolsaet, “The Transformation of Diplomacy at the Threshold of the New Millennium”, p.3.
led many diplomacy scholars to put emphasis on the preserving and maintaining features of contemporary diplomatic practice: their aim with diplomacy is to keep status quo, to make sure that possible threats against the system is included in it as rational agents “before their consequences challenge the existing diplomatic order.” This is present also in the very definition of diplomacy which, compared to the earlier emphasis on the practices (negotiation, communication et cetera) now focus more on the laws and policies created to keep the system functioning, in other words on bureaucratization. Jönsson and Hall, for instance, hold that diplomacy is an institution consisting of “easily recognized roles coupled with underlying norms and a set of rules or convention defining appropriate behavior for, and governing relations among, occupants of these roles” and that it “constitutes and produces international society”.

Another aspect of the globalization is the expansion of diplomacy into a number of issues previously restricted to the sphere of the nation state. From primarily being involved in questions regarding war and peace the diplomatic corps became increasingly involved in matters of economy and trade during the nineteenth century known as the diplomatization of other fields. The number of question has since continued to multiply especially, as Richard Langhorne notes, since the beginning of the nineties. Now diplomacy include not only questions of peace and trade but also education and the future of the Earth’s children, the environment, human rights, issues of development and society, women’s rights and so on. Diplomats are being disseminated into the wider society, to use the words of Paul Sharp. The reason for this situation is that the end of the Cold War brought with it a new set of conflicts, terrorism, drug trafficking, environmental issues, and during the last decades also a rise of ethnic conflicts which all are perceived as simultaneously regional and global. But these new, post-Cold War, conflicts are perceived as different from all other threats confronting diplomacy, from globalization to populist politicians trying to democratize diplomacy. The reason is that while earlier threats could have meant the end of the medium and institutions specific to diplomacy, the rise of these new conflicts are often described as functioning according to a logic that in many aspects is opposed to the nation-state. Thus, if an actor refuses to abide to the logic of international politics a modern diplomat is deprived of the two counterparts between which mediation is supposed

70 Neumann, Diplomatic Sites, p.92.
71 Jönsson & Hall, Essence of Diplomacy, p.25
73 Jönsson & Hall, Essence of Diplomacy, p.30. See also Neumann, At Home with the Diplomats, p.177.
to take place. This blurring of the lines means that there is no room for international politics as such anymore if diplomacy does not violently restore the existing order.\textsuperscript{76}

III. Diplomacy as Ideological State Apparatus

We are now able to return to the initial question posed in this work: what is the nature of diplomacy? This question also opens up for the second issue established in the introduction regarding how it is possible to confront the ontology of diplomacy within the field of Rhetoric. As already noted, the scholars taking part in the subfield of International Relations known as Diplomacy Studies usually introduce their works by pointing out the significant lack of theory concerning diplomacy. One of the reasons invoked to explain this situation is how notoriously slippery the concept of diplomacy is and how it, within IR-studies, has been used in a disparate and fragmented way; sometimes simply as another synonym of the whole of international relations, sometimes as the very specific medium of interstate communication offered by the embassy and the figure of the ambassador. As we also have seen the problem regarding the concept of diplomacy refers to one of the ways to delineate between what here has been referred to as traditional and contemporary theory of diplomacy. A main issue for the contemporary theory of diplomacy has been to find a way to define diplomacy which would allow them to avoid, or to discard of, the claim that diplomacy is being made increasingly irrelevant due to the impact of modern society on the international field of politics. The battle against the imminent threat of demise has been fought both on the level of redefining the practices of diplomacy as well as through reconfiguring the understanding of diplomacy as a medium. However, the basis for the entire problem of the impending demise of diplomacy has its roots, either implicitly or explicitly, in the idea of the history of this practice. The claim that for instance technological innovation, the emergence of new actors, the declining power of the state et cetera, threatens diplomacy is founded on the idea that this practice is obsolete in modern society as a result of its emergence as an answer to the needs of a radically different social order governed by the will of a Sovereign. In other words: the New Diplomacy, called for by the revolutionaries, was still based on Old Diplomacy and as such this secret and slow practice based in an aristocratic code of conduct and secret personal relationships apparently serves no purpose in the modern, non-hierarchical, and rapidly changing world.

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1 See Chapter II.1.
The answer from contemporary scholars of diplomacy is, as mentioned, to approach diplomacy’s death sentence by, on the one hand, expanding the number of practices included in diplomacy and, on the other, to increase the number of mediums defined as diplomatic. By focusing on mediation rather than representation, scholars are able to define a number of new international actors ranging from economists to celebrities, scientists, and technocratic experts, since a mediating diplomat, in contrast to the engaged position of a classic diplomat embodying a sovereign, is much more of a withdrawn manager of politics similar to the modern bureaucrat. Since diplomacy, through globalization, also is understood as disseminating into other fields going beyond the classical issues of peace and security, the expertise required to become a diplomat broadens. The most obvious example of these transformations is the increasingly popular concept public diplomacy, primarily denoting the communication between a sovereign and the citizens of another state, understood in opposition to the traditional definition of diplomacy as interstate communication. This concept has since its inception expanded beyond the initial meaning to include communication between any international actors (no longer being reserved for the nation-state as the actor or sender) such as when NGO:s, businesses, or celebrities communicate with the population of a nation state. Public diplomacy has even gone so far as defining the communication between the state and its own citizens as diplomatic. So if diplomacy on the one hand is expanded in order to encompass every international relationship in which there is need for mediation and representation, while on the other it is enlarged to include every communicative relationship crossing a border (sometimes not even limiting diplomatic communication to being international) one is inclined to ask what diplomacy is defined against. It can no longer be claimed that diplomacy is, as Adam Watson would have it be, interstate communication, nor can it be one of several institutions of international relations since, for instance, all but one of Hedley Bull’s five institutions of international relations (warfare) would be subsumed under the heading of such a broad definition of diplomacy. So, against the more conservative tendencies of the Cold War-era scholars of diplomacy stands the contemporary scene as for the most part positive regarding the possibilities for the emergence of new forms of global communication and cooperation, “without hierarchy and built on the self-regulation of the actors concerned.”

The important concept here is globalization – going beyond the narrow economic framework to also include what we could call the globalization of humanity, of universal human rights et cetera –encapsulating an idea of rationality, cooperation, and self-government spreading across the planet. Might we therefore claim that the diplomatic forms identified by contemporary scholars are the incarnation of the New Diplomacy imagined by the revolutionaries of the late eighteenth and

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early nineteenth centuries? Or should we rather claim that the concept of diplomacy, because of the massive transformations that has taken place in the passing from Old to New Diplomacy, is obsolete, partly because it has become too broad and partly because the difference with Old Diplomacy has become too substantial? Questions like these, still haunting diplomacy theory as diplomacy is faced with new threats from actors refusing to comply with the nation-state logic, are still rooted in the idea that diplomacy has a long history, at least going back to renaissance Italy, making every transformation into a possible end to diplomacy proper. But should we really take this history for granted? Is the separation between Old and New Diplomacy even possible?

Many has pointed out that diplomacy most likely has its etymological roots in ancient Greek where the word *diploun*, meaning twofold or double, was used for the specific documents, *diplomas*, provided to religious envoys in order to ensure them a safe journey. Later, during the sixteenth and seventeenth century, the adjective form diplomatic came to denote the science of codifying handwriting in order to determine the authenticity of ancient religious *diplomas*, the meaning of which had increased since the classical era to denote any official document issued by the church to grant someone privileges on a mission.\(^3\) Diplomacy was not used in its modern sense until the middle of the eighteenth century when it was adopted almost exclusively as a critique of what was seen as the old, anti-democratic, aristocratic, and even illegal practices of the monarchs of Europe. Before this point in history the practice today known as diplomacy was mostly referred to either by its prime practice, negotiation, or by its main actors, such as the ambassador, or even as politics, as is shown in the titles of handbooks and reports ranging from the middle of the fifteenth (e.g. Bernard de Rosier’s *Ambaxiator brevilogos*) to the early eighteenth century (e.g. de Callières *De la manière de négocier avec les souverains*), as well as in the first shortlived school for ambassadors and envoys, *L’Academie Politique*, established by the French in 1712. Most scholars, as well as authors of handbooks on diplomacy, have limited the philological niceties of the concept to a historic curiosity, thereby avoiding to seriously approach the issues connected to the fact that the rise of diplomacy as a concept denoting the entirety of international relation takes place almost three hundred years after it emerges as a practice. Constantinou is one of those who has critiqued the lack of discussion regarding questions of etymology and the potential anachronisms bound to the concept. To counteract this, he attempts to paint the disparate and fragmented history of the concept of diplomacy from ancient Greece to modern international politics. One major flaw he identifies amongst those who nevertheless attempted to write the history of the concept

of diplomacy, relates to the overemphasizing of the political connotations inherent in the concept before the last decades of the eighteenth century. As opposed to this Constantinou tries to show how the adjective diplomatic relating to the overemphasizing of the political connotations inherent in the concept before the last decades of the eighteenth century. As opposed to this Constantinou tries to show how the adjective diplomatic relating to the overemphasizing of the political connotations inherent in the concept before the last decades of the eighteenth century. As opposed to this Constantinou tries to show how the adjective diplomatic relating to the overemphasizing of the political connotations inherent in the concept before the last decades of the eighteenth century. As opposed to this Constantinou tries to show how the adjective diplomatic relating to the overemphasizing of the political connotations inherent in the concept before the last decades of the eighteenth century. 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and the New Diplomacy of trade, continued to be important in the transformation of diplomacy during the nineteenth century.

In returning to the question of whether a separation between old and new diplomacy is possible we should, therefore, conclude that this separation itself emerges as a critique of earlier practices never before delimited and denoted by one single concept. In other words: to speak about diplomacy as a number of discourses involving actors, practices, regulations et cetera unified under a single concept before the French revolution and the invention of modernity appears to be anachronistic. Halvard Leira’s conclusion regarding this situation is that the emergence of the concept of diplomacy is part of what he, in the explicit following of Reinhart Koselleck, describes as the more general modern project of bringing aspects of public life from the realm of aristocratic morality into the new world of the bourgeois public sphere. But regardless of the motives behind the change, a possible understanding of diplomacy needs to take its birth in late-modernity into account. So, in order to seriously approach the fact diplomacy as a concept emerges during the time of the French revolution we also need to employ a theory and methodology explicitly concerned with the fundamental questions of late-modernity.

1. Diplomacy, Rhetoric, and Psychoanalysis

Within the subfield of Rhetorical Studies focusing on diplomacy there has been a strong emphasis on diplomatic speeches and the power of persuasion in foreign relations. Such a perspective does, however, suffer from the risk of reducing diplomacy, not only to the realm of public speeches but also to an idealistic understanding of politics where every conflict can be solved with the right choice of words and arguments at the right moment. To avoid these issues we should here follow in the footsteps of the general field of Rhetorical Studies in the US which, since the seventies and eighties, has developed a material understanding of rhetoric. In the introduction to their influential attempt to bring together the discussion on materiality in the North American field of Rhetorical Studies, John Louis Lucaites and Barbara A. Biesecker points out how this movement emerged out of a general interest in questions of ideology and power, driving Rhetoric towards performing “critique rather than criticism”7 in the political sphere. By asking these questions the discipline of Rhetoric was also brought into conversation with European Philosophy, and theories from the European continent came to influence many important rhetorical scholars from the seventies and onwards. Within this general transformation Biesecker and Lucaites identify three fundamental approaches taken

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up by rhetorical scholars when confronting the question of rhetoric and materiality. These three, constituting what is called a shift from rhetorical materialism (in a more traditionalist Marxist way) to rhetoric’s materiality, are captured by Lucaites and Biesecker under the names of three of the most well-known French thinkers of the twentieth century: Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Jacques Lacan. Moreover, the theories of both Foucault and Derrida appear as the foundation in two of the most central works in the reinvention of Anglo-Saxon studies of diplomacy: James Der Derian’s On Diplomacy and Costas M. Constantinou’s On the Way to Diplomacy. Neither Der Derian nor Constantinou do, however, explicitly employs these thinkers in order to confront the problems of modernity or materiality within Diplomacy Studies, but the fact that it already exists a Foucauldian genealogy of diplomacy (i.e. Der Derian) and a Derridean deconstruction of it (i.e. Constantinou) poses the question of which of these thinkers would be the most fruitful to connect to Rhetoric and the question of the nature of diplomacy. To answer this we should begin by taking a look at these three thinkers and their possible relationship to diplomacy.

Even if Der Derian’s methodology is, at least on an explicit level, almost obscenely eclectic, the practice of genealogy should still be considered as the most important methodological tool in his work on the history of diplomacy. In the introduction he writes:

But why a genealogy of diplomacy? […] A genealogy of diplomacy, in the sense of an interpretive history, may produce errors as well as insights. It most assuredly will not reproduce the certitude of traditional diplomatic historians who study diplomacy as an unfolding story of the past neatly creating the present. […] [T]his genealogy attempts to disabuse the history of diplomacy: it openly looks backward to discover whether there are symptoms of diplomacy’s crisis inherent yet hidden in the present depictions of its essential beginning and nearly seamless history; symptoms, as Nietzsche said about moral prejudice, ‘through which the present was possibly living at the expense of the future’.

Der Derian grounds his genealogy, for the most part, in the writings of Foucault, quoting the latter’s famous essay “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” in order to emphasizes how history must “oppose itself to the search for ‘origins’” and instead attempt to unmask the fact that historical identities “have

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10 Der Derian, On Diplomacy, p.3.
no essence”, to “maintain passing events in dispersion” and to be “parodic”, “dissociative”, and “sacrificial” against the old notion of history as reminiscence, identity, and truth.\footnote{Ibid. pp.374, 385.} Leaving aside the question of whether Der Derian actually succeeds in his ambitions or not, it is possible, when approaching Foucault’s entire work, to claim that a much more natural point of departure would have been Foucault’s own, however limited, treatment of diplomacy and foreign policy in his lectures on raison d’état held between 1977 and 1979.\footnote{See Michel Foucault, Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-1978, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) and Michel Foucault, The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-1979, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).} At a first look, his theory of power and governmentality certainly presents itself as an interesting choice for an investigation into the nature of diplomacy and how it becomes central to the workings of the state during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as one of the technoi of power employed to establish the idea of a balance-of-power.\footnote{Foucault, Security, Territory, Population, p.300. See also Der Derian, On Diplomacy, p.51.} In this sense, treating diplomacy in the same way as Foucault treated the prison, the school, or the asylum does seem like a project which could be attempted in order to understand diplomacy as an institution. With the Foucauldian methodological approach also comes a certain set of specific questions, as Foucault himself exemplifies in the first volume of History of Sexuality:

The central issue, then […] is […] to account for the fact that it is spoken about, to discover who does the speaking, the positions and viewpoints from which they speak, the institutions which prompt people to speak about it and which store and distribute the things that are said.\footnote{Michel Foucault, History of Sexuality, vol. 1: An Introduction, (New York: Random House, 1990), p.11.}

In the Foucauldian context the initial question posed in this text regarding the ontology of diplomacy (What is diplomacy?) would have to be abandoned in favor of questions focusing more on how power is exercised within this discourse, who is allowed to speak and how speaking is organized, categorized, and interpreted. These questions might explain why Foucault himself never showed any significant interest in the practice of diplomacy, since his interest primarily focused on diplomacy’s role as a technology establishing raison d’état rather than on its own inner logic. Another aspect behind the choice to not treat the institutions of diplomacy might be expressed through Foucault’s aversion for the concept of ideology and his attempt to distance himself from Althusser’s idea that historical materialism, as a science, was free from ideological biases. Important in Foucault’s critique of the concept of ideology was not only the prevalent idea of distinction between a truth and the ideological mystification, but perhaps, more importantly, his rejection of
the term repression in favor of production. For Foucault, the important functioning of the capitalist logic was not necessarily how it was repressive but rather how it continuously produces things.\textsuperscript{16} In the case of diplomacy this makes it less interesting since it, in comparison with for instance schools or prisons, does not produce a certain subject on which to profit, but rather aims at securing a territory.

The main issue with opting for the Foucauldian method is, however, related to his understanding of late-modernity, and the fact that diplomacy in the Foucauldian universe is not a concept of late-modernity. As noted, diplomacy is a concept that Foucault very much ties to the emergence of \textit{raison d’état}, something which does not really separate his depiction from the prevalent one within Diplomacy Studies. To be a properly late-modern concept diplomacy would, however, have to play some part in what Foucault came to call \textit{biopolitics}, but such a shift is hard to perform within his theory. The reason behind the difficulties is partly found in how Foucault transforms the focus of his analysis from the power-balance between states to the micro-powers – linked for instance to the ideas of \textit{homo economicus} and of civil society – in order to capture the way in which human biology becomes the object of the general strategy of power from the eighteenth century and onwards.\textsuperscript{17} But in doing this, something of significant importance for a critique of diplomacy also gets lost. The change in focus, from governmental \textit{technnot} to micro-powers, together with the abandonment of the concept of ideology brings with it a distinct kind of problematic in Foucauldian thinking as it is pointed out by Slavoj Žižek.\textsuperscript{18} In focusing on the disciplinary procedures active on the local level, wherein both the overarching sovereignty and general ideology as well as the disciplined object itself all are secondary effects, it often becomes impossible to overcome the gap separating micro-powers from the sovereign in order to explain how the latter emerges out of the former. Let us return to the already established problematic of how diplomacy at the same time can be a concept inherent in late-modernity, while still pertaining to seemingly Early Modern feudal practices and codes of conduct. In a Foucauldian universe power and resistance emerges immanently through the same process, since resistance is only made possible through the excess created by power. But this inherence of resistance to power also seems to entail that resistance, therefore, cannot seriously harm the system. This would mean that the transgression offered by the revolutionary critique of diplomacy from the end of the eighteenth century and onwards is not to be understood as seriously challenging the predominant power-practices of diplomacy established under \textit{raison d’état},

which is why diplomacy is able to survive the end of the feudal age. In this sense, the revolutionary critique of diplomacy is nothing but a ‘false transgression’ only serving to preserve the already established order of power. And is it not in this understanding that we must locate Der Derian’s own dismissal of the so called anti-diplomacy of the revolutionary years, when he writes: “[d]eprieved of its internationalist ideals, and ‘raison d’organisation’, neo-diplomacy [Der Derian’s term for the actual diplomatic practices of anti-diplomacy] degenerated into the traditional practices of Realpolitik. Before Napoleon was on horseback, neo-diplomacy was dead.”19 But at the same time, the French revolution did bring with it a new form of governmentality, and it did transform the micro-powers active in the field of diplomacy to the extent that these practices were, already a few years after the revolution, radically different, especially in terms of institutionalization and governmental control.

The first issue when choosing a Foucauldian methodology is therefore the inability to explain how we are able to pass from the governmentality of raison d’état (to which Foucault ascribed diplomacy as one of two fundamental technoi of power) to the ideology that critiques this system and thereby succeeds in transforming its fundamental core, from a relationship between different sovereigns to micro-powers organizing the relationship between state and the individual subject. The fact that diplomacy, within a Foucauldian framework, therefore appears as a contradiction, could also be captured through Žižek’s Lacanian critique of Foucault’s resistance to any kind of Hegelian notions of negativity and dialectics.20 Foucault’s well-known aversion to negative dialectics and the negativity of the unconscious, which for Lacan is the central point of Freud’s invention, forces Foucault to adopt a positive concept of the unconscious akin to for instance Deleuze and Guattari.21 But if negativity is not allowed any place within the realm of history we are left with two choices regarding our understanding of the transformations taking place within diplomacy in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century: either the critique of diplomacy is actually a negativity but, therefore, unable to introduce change (which seems contradictory to the actual historical facts, since the revolution did change several fundamental aspects of diplomatic practice) or both diplomacy and so called anti-diplomacy are two positive and yet immanent signifiers making the hybrid nature of contemporary diplomacy (transforming some, but not all, of the feudal practices) difficult to explain since an immanent resistance should not be able to transform that to which it resists. In other words: Foucault’s shift in focus from raison d’état to biopolitics, together with his aversion for negativity, seems to hinder an understanding of diplomacy as a phenomenon of late-modernity.

19 Der Derian, On Diplomacy, p.182.
The link between Derridean thinking and diplomacy is, perhaps, not as obvious as it is in Foucault’s writing. Nevertheless, Constantinou has argued that Derrida’s simile, likening philosophers to envoys, offers an opening into an investigation of diplomacy. After quoting Derrida’s speech at a congress for the French-speaking world of philosophy, Constantinou writes:

[…] Derrida seems to view philosophical discourses as acts of embassy. The practices of philosophy are proposed to be akin to the practices of diplomacy. […] It is not simply as a useful metaphor that Derrida associates philosophy with diplomacy. He specifically takes issue with the Heideggerian thesis concerning the sending of Being, which is “destined,” “sent out” from some origin in history. Derrida speaks, therefore, of an “envoi of Being” that functions as a delegation of presence, a delegation charged with the metaphysical task of collecting, carrying, and delivering spatiotemporally specific messages.

Even though Derrida explicitly evokes the diplomatic connotation when speaking about representation, for instance saying “[i]n the political domain, we can speak of parliamentary, diplomatic, or union representation,” the step from Derrida’s attempt to develop on the dissemination of the word representation into different domains to analyzing diplomacy as a late-modern concept is not immediately obvious. Let us, therefore, instead delve into the philosophical tradition implicitly invoked by Constantinou when highlighting Derrida’s claim that a letter can go astray since it has no final destination. This statement provides the basis in Derrida’s answer, published around the same time as his presentation on representation and envoys, to Lacan’s famous final statement in “Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter’.”

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23 Constantinou, On the Way to Diplomacy, p.36.
25 Ibid. pp.36-37.
26 The Purloined Letter is a short story by Edgar Allan Poe first published in 1844. The story is the third of Poe’s three detective stories featuring C. Auguste Dupin, a famous amateur detective in Paris. The novel begins when Dupin and the unnamed narrator, engaged in a discussion about Dupin’s most famous cases, are interrupted by the arrival of the Prefect of the Police. The Prefect brings with him a mystery which the police seem unable to solve: a letter containing compromising information has been stolen from an unnamed woman by the dishonest Minister D, who now has started to blackmail his victim. Despite the numerous efforts by the police to locate the letter, by for instance meticulously searching every corner of the Minister’s hotel, they have come up empty handed, and the Prefect therefore turns to Dupin in order to save the honor of the woman (who everyone, despite the Prefect’s attempts to hide it, now knows is the Queen). When the Prefect returns a month later Dupin hands him the letter in return for a check of 50,000 Francs, and when the Prefect leaves the narrator asks Dupin how he got hold of the letter. Dupin then reveals how he had visited the Minister in his apartment, and when locating the letter, laying in the open on a cheap card rack, he proceeds to investigate it more thoroughly while striking up a conversation with the Minister. Leaving a snuff box behind as an excuse to return the next day, Dupin proceeds to organizes a small riot on the street below the Minister’s window, allowing him to exchange the letter for a replica (just containing the quote “If such a sinister design isn’t worthy of Atreus, it is worthy of Thyestes”) when the Minister investigates
‘purloined letter’, nay, the ‘letter *en souffrance*’, means is that the letter always arrives at its destination.”

The first point to notice in this conflict, regarding both the similarity between Lacan and Derrida as well as the materiality of rhetorical practice, is the necessity of a structure which has to precede the letter or *envoi* sent out. But as Barbara Johnson notes, it is not here that the quarrel between the two Jacques finds its place, rather it is the letter as “that which poses the question of its own rhetorical status.”

It is, as she goes on to point out, the letter which brings about what Poe in *The Purloined Letter* calls the Prefect’s “cant of diplomacy”, a discourse traumatized by the letter which it constantly tries to hide, despite the fact that the letter is seemingly empty. In other words: The Prefect’s attempts to avoid speaking directly about the purloined letter, its contents or, at least at first, even of the involved parties, instead using diplomatic euphemisms like how the “non-appearance of certain results” tells us the thief still holds the letter and how “the paper gives the holder a certain power”, illustrate the fact that the letter, for Lacan, is nothing but a signifier, an empty place. Such an empty signifier, on the other hand, is nonetheless crucial in upholding the signifying chain, and through this central position it displaces every subject that comes in contact with it, rearranging the intersubjective relationship. This is what Lacan has in mind when writing: “My research has led me to the realization that repetition automatism (*Wiederholungszwang*) has its basis in what I have called the *insistence* of the signifying chain.”

It is the repetition caused by the insistence of the signifier that creates what Lacan calls the three glances [regard] which in turn displaces the three subjects active in the story: the subject who sees nothing (the king, the police), the one who sees the blindness of the first (the queen, the minister), and the one who sees that which the other two leaves in plain sight, allowing them to take it (the minister, Dupin). The letter only returns through the repetition of the intersubjective positions in which each subject is displaced, its truth is that the one currently holding it can only see the first but not the third glance, thereby allowing it to be put into circulation again. So, the question separating Derrida and Lacan seems to be whether or not the letter arrives at its destination, the authority versus the dissemination of the letter. Žižek’s solution to

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the noise outside. Dupin, through his plan, therefore succeeds in obtaining the letter without being caught in the act, which as he mentions might have led the Minister to kill him, but still letting the Minister know, by the clues in the replica, who actually stole it from him.


this conflict is to simply dismiss the standpoint of Derrida (and the entirety of deconstructionism) as a “primordial response of common sense”\(^{31}\): when opposing Lacan’s thesis with its opposite, that a letter actually might go astray, Derrida is supposedly taking his refuge in the commonsensical idea that letters not only might be lost on their way to the recipient, but that their content, their meaning, also might be lost on the one who reads it. Whether or not the difference between Lacan and Derrida is possible to express in these terms or, as some would claim, that this difference is actually not a difference at all, is however a question which is not possible to examine properly within the confines of this text.\(^{32}\)

We should, instead, return to Constantinou’s attempt to perform a Derridean reading of diplomacy, “exposing the dissemination of *envois* and their logos”\(^{33}\). What Constantinou provides us with, in a critique explicitly directed at Heidegger rather than at Lacan\(^{34}\), is precisely the kind of deconstructivist reading dismissed by Žižek. One illustrative example is when Constantinou claims that Derrida’s insisting on the possibility of the letter to go astray allows for a “theory that is stateless and carries no sovereign message”\(^{35}\), in other words a theory just aimlessly searching for and finding things without any specific goal or motivation. Here Derrida’s initial critique of Lacan returns in a slightly simplified form: What the psychoanalyst finds is nothing but psychoanalysis itself, because that was what the title-address of the letter said all along. This circular movement allows, according to Derrida, Lacan to claim that the letter always reaches its destination, and this premise is therefore the fundamental (psychoanalytic) principal distorting Lacan’s reading of *The Purloined Letter*. The antidote, according to Constantinou, is the stateless theory which cannot reach its destination since it has no Master. But what does this say about a possible understanding of diplomacy as a concept?

With this critique in mind one can understand why Constantinou’s reading of the birth of the concept of diplomacy gives preference to a metonymical reading: it is a constant sliding, rather than a repetition, of meaning “through *diploa, diplomas and diplomatics*”\(^{36}\) that finally takes us to diplomacy as it is used in the contemporary sense. This creates a number of issues in attempting to understand the intrusion of late-modernity into the field of international relations that Constantinou simply does not acknowledge: if the signifier diplomacy slides from one area (the study of the validity of ancient documents) to


\(^{32}\) For more on this point see instead for instance Johnson, “The Frame of Reference”.


\(^{34}\) We should note here that the critique does, however, not mean that he abandons what he sees as the Heideggerian aspects of his method.


\(^{36}\) Ibid. p.81
another (the field of international relations) it is hard to explain why this concept suddenly becomes a topic of dispute: How could this concept slowly make a metonymic slide from denoting a scientific discipline to a word used in the revolutionary critique of what was seen as a practice belonging to the old regime? The problem here is of course that it is difficult to metonymically explain the fact that the concept of diplomacy arose as a negation of an earlier existing practice, and that this practice, before the negation, lacks a proper name. In other words: diplomacy should not be seen as transferred from different levels or spheres (from science to politics or from denoting the document of treatises to the entirety of international relations) and then critiqued, it is instead radically created in the context of critique. Rather than a metonymical slide, this fact implies that diplomacy as we understand it constitutes a metaphorical cut within the symbolic texture.37

Regardless of whether Constantinou’s and Der Derian’s respective uses of Derrida and Foucault are to be considered proper implementations or not of the respective thinker, they do share the unfortunate fate of perfectly illustrating Žižek’s Lacanian critique of the two French Masters. Against the Foucauldian perspective, with its emphasis on micro-powers and the positivity of the unconscious, a Lacanian analysis, such as it was originally taken over into the critique of ideology by Althusser, takes it starting point in the Sovereign, the big Other or what Althusser called the Subject. If power and resistance is confined to only generating each other in an immanent circle the very act of transgressing the law becomes nothing but a futile attempt, since resistance is only made possible through an excess that is nevertheless part of the system. Therefore, when a truly revolutionary change occurs in history one is forced to choose between simply dismissing it as nothing but the normal continuation of the system or treating it as something inherently foreign or external to it. In other words: is the invention of diplomacy in late-modernity really only a continuation of an earlier power-complex, or is it something radically foreign? Against this Žižek posits the Lacanian concept of objet a, since “[w]hat effectively eludes the controlling grasp of Power is not so much the external In-itself it tries to dominate but, rather, the obscene supplement which sustains its own operation.”38 Hence, a Lacanian approach might allow us to perceive what has been called anti-diplomacy as neither an In-itself attacking the existing system from the outside, nor, as Der Derian seems to do, as a futile and to the existing power immanent resistance destined to be quickly absorbed and


38 Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, p.257.
forgotten. Instead, in the guise of an obscene supplement nonetheless sustaining the functioning of the system, anti-diplomacy is that which allows everything to go on as normal.

The fact that diplomacy is an obstacle inherent in, or perhaps extimate to 39, the new system obliges us to return to the critique directed against Constantinou’s attempt at a Derridean reading of the history of diplomacy. The emphasis on the constant sliding of meaning which eventually led from ancient Greek diplomas to modern diplomacy, and the fact that the letter therefore always could go astray (the claim seems to be that the usage of the term diplomatic to denote a science of determining the authenticity of ancient documents is the proof of such a possibility, the fact that there is no simply continuity between the Greek diploma and modern diplomacy) seems to undermine Lacan’s statement that the letter always arrives at its destination. But, as Žižek continuously points out, this thesis of Lacan is not an expression of some simple idea of teleology. To begin with, the problem of the Derridean reading is the possible reduction of the history of the concept of diplomacy to a chain of mere coincidences: either we might conclude that the letter actually arrived at its destination with the invention of the modern concept of diplomacy, despite the fact that it for several hundred years was en souffrance (a reading which is, perhaps, the teleological one par excellence) or we are forced to accept that this entire etymology was nothing but a game of chance, a play of the text without any significant logic except for that of différance, thereby making the analysis itself meaningless. But if we take the proposition that the use of diplomacy during the French revolution is a radical innovation bringing together a disparate and fragmented practice under the hegemony of a single signifier, the letter arriving is not, as one is inclined to think, sent out from the ancient Greeks in order to arrive in Paris in the last years of the eighteenth century. Instead it is sent out with the beginning of late-modernity. This is what truly reinterpreting the history and the theory of diplomacy must mean – to go beyond stating that history is contingent, or that it is the effect of a broken and fragmented genealogy, and instead show how history includes and requires a radical cut from which once again the trash of past events is hurled at our feet. The anti-diplomacy is not the negation of an already existing conceptual unity, it is rather the creation of this concept through the negation of negation. By negating diplomacy, so called anti-diplomacy is able to create a history where there before was none: a practice under gradual corruption due to the greedy and illegal rule of incompetent nobles nominated solely based on their status. Žižek describes this process as follows:

39 A Lacanian concepts bringing together the prefix ex from exterior with intimacy illustrating the way psychoanalysis attempts to problematize the outside/inside-distinction.
An inconsistent mess (first phase, the starting point) which is negated and, through negation, the Origin is projected or posited backwards, so that a tension is created between the present and the lost Origins (second phase).

And it is in this precise sense that the concept of diplomacy is a perfect example of the Lacanian thesis about the letter always reaching its destination. Žižek offers us three readings which are all applicable on the history and theory of diplomacy:

1. First we have the arrival through an Imaginary misreading of the letter, the fact that the subject recognizes itself in the interpellation of the letter (regardless of whether that was intended or not). This self-recognition illustrates a certain truth in the subject, i.e. that the meaning of the letter reached its destination since it was only through identifying with its interpellation that the letter reached its addressee. In this sense, the fact that the distinction established between the Old and New Diplomacy spoke not only to revolutionaries across the West, but that it has continued to play a role up until the twenty-first century, illustrates that this letter held a call that was possible to identify with: scholars and politicians alike recognized an important part of themselves through this distinction.

2. Secondly we have the idea that “there is no metalanguage”, or in more Lacanian terms, the fact that the repressed always returns. In this sense, when the letter returns to the sender it does so in its inverted, true, repressed form. Diplomatic theory, since the rise of so called anti-diplomacy, has been obsessed with the very distinction between Old and New Diplomacy, in particular the impossibility to actually maintain it. The letter sent out from revolutionary France as an attack on the old kingdoms therefore reached its destination by confronting their ideological followers with the truth of their message: the distinction between different forms of diplomacy, important in the establishment of a subjectivity through interpellation, seems to be impossible. Instead the truth lies somewhere else.

3. Thirdly Žižek presents a reading of the return of the letter under the heading of Fate: the way in which the subject relates to its object, how it understands its own subjectivity in relation to it, illustrates a debt inherent in the symbolic order often misinterpreted as fate. The fact that every tradition of diplomatic scholarship has understood itself as standing in the midst of diplomacy’s possible demise or its impending success to establish its ultimate goal, eternal peace, shows us a number of different ways in which the letter arrives at its destination in the sense of objet a. The sense of urgency driving diplomacy scholars seems to arise from a confrontation with the tiny piece of the real, the objet a, of the invention of the signifier diplomacy, just as the letter in Poe’s short-story, through its circulation, is displacing the intersubjective position of anyone taking possession of it.

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41 Žižek, Enjoy Your Symptom!, pp.12-27.
To sum up, the reason behind using a Lacanian rather than a Foucauldian or Derridean approach is grounded in the emergence of the concept of diplomacy as a radical cut (not a genealogy or an incessant sliding of the signifier) not only positing its own history but also introducing a lack which has continued to create interpretative problems during the following centuries. Hence, an investigation into diplomacy should not be focusing on the micro-practices, the discourses silencing diplomats or allowing them to speak, neither should it try to establish a broken and disparate etymology of the concept of diplomacy. Instead we should investigate the ways in which the different actors involved in diplomacy have established their respective subjectivity; that is how they have received, interpreted and understood the letter of diplomacy and how they relate to it. We should, in other (Althusserian) words, investigate the effects of the interpellation of diplomacy, primarily in the academic field of Diplomacy Studies but also, partially, in the field of literature (which is a question we will have to return to). To do this we should employ the work of the unrivaled master of a critique of Ideology indebted to Louis Althusser: Slavoj Žižek.


To begin with, let us expand on the Žižekian theory of ideology, especially in its relation to Althusser and his concept of Ideological State Apparatus (ISA), intrinsic to the latter’s theory of interpellation. Since the employment of a Žižekian critique of ideology is still relatively new within Rhetorical Studies, and totally inexistent within Diplomacy Studies, this section is also intended as a short introduction to his thought. In order to succeed in this endeavor we should partially focus our attention on an aspect of Žižek’s reading of Lacan that has received a rather limited amount of attention, even from scholars specifically working with or employing his thought: the theory of the

1 In Scandinavian rhetorical studies the work of both Jacques Lacan and Slavoj Žižek is totally absent. Since the eighties the tradition of rhetorical studies in the US has a small but consistent work on the theories of Jacques Lacan. Already in the nineties Barbara Biesecker pointed out the possibilities of employing Žižek’s Lacanian theory of ideology in rhetorical studies, but so far only a handful of works has been published, see for instance Joshua Gunn, “Refitting fantasy: Psychoanalysis, subjectivity, and talking to the dead”, *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, vol.90, no.1, 2004, pp.1-23, and Kevin Erdean Johnson, *The Unconscious as a Rhetorical Factor: Toward a BurkeLacanian Theory and Method*, (Austin, TX.: University of Texas at Austin, 2007)
four discourses. But first, let us just sketch the basics of Žižek’s theory of ideology as well as the basic differences between on Žižek and his predecessor Althusser.

In his eleventh seminar, when discussing Freud’s concept of Vorstellungenrepräsentanz, Jacques Lacan turns to the figure of the diplomat in order to exemplify its function. In Lacan’s understanding, a diplomat has the function of a pure signifier, a representative of a Master, characterized as follows:

We mean by representatives what we understand when we use the phrase, for example, the representatives of France. What do diplomats do when they address one another? They simply exercise, in relation to one another, that function of being pure representatives and, above all, their own signification must not intervene. When diplomats are addressing one another, they are supposed to represent something whose signification, while constantly changing, is, beyond their own persons, France, Britain, etc. In the very exchange of views, each must record only what the other transmits in his pure function as signifier, he must not take into account what the other person is, qua presence, as a man who is likeable to a greater or lesser degree.

Let us begin by point out two important aspects of this reading of the diplomat. Primarily Lacan focuses on the diplomat’s function as a representative, as something which stands in for something else, in the case of Vorstellungenrepräsentanz, drive, and in the case of a diplomat, the nation. Secondly he invokes the question of addressing or, what we in Althusserian term would call interpellation, both in the sense of when a diplomat is addressing a fellow diplomat (in other words when France interpellates Britain) as well as the perceived call from the Master of the diplomat (e.g. the monarch, the nation state). This brings about an interesting duality between at the same time being the placeholder, of filling in, for something absent and depending on that absent entity to uphold a certain decentered subjectivity. The duality that lies at the heart of the diplomatic subjectivity is, hence, captured by Lacan in the opposition between being the diplomat as a pure signifier (the perfect representative living only one, official life) and being the diplomat as a presence, “a man who is likeable to a greater or lesser degree.”

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does nevertheless perfectly capture the logic of what Althusser termed interpellation in his theory of ideology: It is only when the Subject officially interpellates an individual into becoming a subject (in this case a diplomat) that this subject becomes what it always already was. Thus, it is not possible to be a diplomat before perceiving the call from one’s nation, but as soon as the call is heard the subject always already were a diplomat, a representative of that particular nation-state. What is fundamental here is, as Althusser emphasizes, always a particular form of ideology: through a number of material practices it becomes possible for the nation to use interpellation in order to create a subject which will aid in upholding the existing means of productions, whether it is as a worker, a teacher, a priest or a diplomat. This diplomatic subject, regardless of if one believes in the possibility of embodying this will of the nation or not (or even believes in its mere existence or not), must consequently perceive itself in this call in order to be a diplomat. Hence, being-a-diplomat, or being any kind of subject stuck in ideology, is always a question of recognition and misrecognition [méconnaissance] and therefore of what Lacan would call the Imaginary, the realm of identity and identification.

The fundamental transformation of Marxist theory of ideology initiated by Althusser lies in his emphasis on its material aspects. Earlier Marxist theory famously conceived of ideology as an ideal construct without any historical background since ideology was seen as severing all links to the concrete material ground that made up the basis of history. In this traditional Marxist sense, ideology cannot do anything but obfuscate the truth about the reality of the relations of production, captured in Marx’s famous definition, from the first volume of Das Kapital, of ideology as Sie wissen das nicht, aber sie tun es. In this understanding, a subjects caught by bourgeois ideology cannot know that the relations of production effectively leads to the exploitation of the work force (because ideology fills its head with ideas about free individuals willingly selling and buying commodities on the market) but this is nevertheless what they are doing by controlling surplus value. Althusser accepts this radical split between on the one hand the ideal and on the other the material, but he still goes beyond the traditional Marxist definition of ideology by shifting from what he calls “descriptive theory” to “theory as such”. Althusser writes: “it is not their real conditions of existence, their real world, that ‘men’ ‘represent to themselves’ in ideology, but above all it is their relation to those conditions of existence which is represented to them here.” The split is no longer between what the subject knows (the ideas) and what it nevertheless

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5 Althusser’s distinction between Subject and subject is, at least in questions of intersubjective positions, correlative to the Lacanian distinction between the big Other and the barred subject.
7 Karl Marx, Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, vol. 1. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), pp.166-167, the English translation reads “They do this without being aware of it.”
does (materiality), but rather between what is going on and how the subject believes it fits into the whole of the picture, a move which puts the material and the ideal on the same side. In other words: Althusserian ideology is not only present in the world of ideas, even material rituals and practices are ideological.

The other important contribution from Althusser to the theory of ideology is, as mentioned, his use of Lacanian concepts in trying to establish the subjectivizing aspects of ideological discourse summarized as the theory of interpellation. Since ideology, in Althusser’s understanding, is a question of the Imaginary relationship between the subject and its Real conditions of existence\(^9\), the fundamental problem addressed by ideology is that of the place of the subject within the social order. In other words: “the category of subject is only constitutive of all ideology insofar as all ideology has the function (which defines it) of ‘constituting’ concrete individuals as subjects.”\(^{10}\) It is only through the hailing or interpellation of individuals that they become the subjects which they already are; it is when the subject recognize itself in the gaze of the Subject with a capital S (the big Other in Lacanian terms) that the possibility to behave accordingly, that is to behave properly according to ideology, emerges. In other words: it is only with reference to some big Other that we know what is right and what is wrong. By introducing the figure of the big Other, Althusser effectively turns ideology into a question of desire. But before venturing into this Lacanian territory of the desire of the Other let us first examine a fundamental problem within Althusser’s understanding of the relationship between the material and the ideal.

As Žižek has noted, one problematic point of Althusser’s reading of Lacan is that it effectively excludes the latter’s emphasis on the materiality of ideas,\(^{11}\) and that Althusser, as an effect, fails to account for the primacy of the material in ideology: if ideology, in the first instance, is just an ideal reference to a big Other in the interpellation, a reference later materialized in different rituals and institutions, how are we to account for the development of a big Other that

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\(^9\) In Althusser’s reading of Lacan this distinction is identical to that between the ideal and the material.

\(^{10}\) Ibid. p.45, italics in original.

\(^{11}\) Here one can, like for instance Robert Pfäller, criticize Žižek for insisting that a materialism of today needs a materiality without matter (see Žižek, *Absolute Recoil*, p.5), but what Pfäller is missing in his critique of Žižek’s Hegelian tendency to simply state what for instance dialectical materialism needs is the necessary passing between discourses (here obviously that of the Master) that Žižek sees as fundamental to Hegel’s final position as analyst. In other words: it is impossible to do dialectical materialism without passing through the discourse of the Master. See Robert Pfäller, “The Althusserian Battlegrounds”, in ed. A. Hamza & F. Ruda, *Slavoj Žižek and Dialectical Materialism*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p.30 and Slavoj Žižek, *Organs Without Bodies: on Deleuze and consequences*, (New York: Routledge, 2012), p.54-56. In other words: it is impossible to do dialectical materialism without passing through the discourse of the Master.
nevertheless is inconsistent in the first place? In other words: how can Althusser’s theory account for the failure of ideology, the fact that the big Other is not succeeding every time, if interpellation is wholly ideal? And although one could claim that this question is outside Althusser’s focus (at least in his text on the Ideological State Apparatuses wherein he is only interested in the “reproduction of the material conditions for production”) the critique is nevertheless of outmost importance if we are interested in also understanding the repeated failure of ideology. Žižek puts it as follows:

What remains “unthought” in Althusser’s theory of interpellation is thus the fact that, prior to ideological recognition, we have an intermediate moment of obscene, impenetrable interpellation without identification, a kind of vanishing mediator that has to become invisible if the subject is to achieve symbolic identity, to accomplish the gesture of subjectivization. In short, the “unthought” of Althusser is that there is already an uncanny subject that precedes the gesture of subjectivization.

Let us return to Althusser’s own example borrowed from Pascal about the individual who, if he or she wants to believe, only should kneel down and pray in order for belief to come. The idea is that the subject, through the very act of kneeling, is created by partaking in the ritual. Only as soon as one kneels and prays to god is it possible to actually believe in him or not. But the question that remains, the “unthought”, is how the individual (that which forgoes the subject) feels the need to believe at all in the first place? This is what Mladen Dolar pinpoints as the difference between Althusserian interpellation and psychoanalytic castration: while the former treats the subject as the successful outcome of an ideological process the latter treats it as its failure. If the production of, for instance, a diplomatic subject would be the success of the big Other, embodied in the nation, and thereby turning itself into the full

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12 See Slavoj Žižek, The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Women and Causality, (London: Verso 1994), pp.58-62, and Absolute Recoil, pp.51-66. This problem of the link between the big Other and the ISA is, however, present already in his first work translated into English, The Sublime Object of Ideology, pp.34-35. This critique is similar to that of Ernesto Laclau, pointing out that it is in the impossible necessity of closure that a meaning might emerge as ideological and not, as Althusser seems to claim, in the alienation between the subject and its Historical necessity, see Ernesto Laclau, The Rhetorical Foundation of Society, (London: Verso, 2014), pp.15-16.

13 See for instance Mladen Dolar, “Beyond Interpellation”, Qui Parle? Vol.6, no.2, 1993, pp.75-96 for a discussion on this problem of the little piece of materiality missing in Althusser’s theory.


15 Žižek, Absolute Recoil, p.64. Here Pfaller has criticized Žižek for disregarding certain aspects of Althusser’s philosophy and for reading Kant improperly, see “The Althusserian Battlegrounds”, pp.31-33. The problem, however, seems to be that Pfaller confused two different examples from Kant. What Žižek is talking about in the quote is not the subject before subjectivacion as just a subject without identification but rather the subject as radical negativity, in Lacanian terms the barred subject, see Absolute Recoil, pp.60-66.

16 See Dolar, “Beyond interpellation”, pp.75-90.
expression of the Other’s desire, it is difficult to explain why even a subject entirely consumed by a certain ideology still will fail at times. Within rhetorical studies this tendency of ideology to fail in interpellation has been interpreted as, at least in part, due to a kind of political potentiality of being wrongfully called or misinterpellated. The problem here is that such an idea of misinterpellation (that tenth person who was not the one intended, to use Althusser’s example of the policeman hailing someone in the street) commits the mistake Althusser explicitly warns us about: of taking his “little theoretical theatre” as “a sequence” or “a temporal succession” wherein a fully formed subject forgoes interpellation and can resist it. In other words: the desire of the Other is not a real existing desire, the real desire is the subjects desire to be recognized by the Other. Thus, we should locate Althusser’s failure to account for the not-all of ideology within two aspects of Lacanian theory in the specific Žižekian reading: on the one hand the uncanny presence of the barred subject and on the other the material remainder known as objet a, making up the two interconnected sides of a Möbius strip. It is at this point that we arrive at the core of what Žižek lately has labeled dialectical materialism, the question of how we are to avoid the idealist temptation of claiming that everything is rhetoric/culture/language without being left with what he calls democratic materialism ranging “from scientist naturalism to the post-Deleuzian assertion of spiritualized “vibrant” matter.” However, before going into fundamental questions like this one we need to introduce Žižek’s own thought through the practice of Ideologiekritik.

There is no evident starting point when attempting to present Žižek’s theory of ideology but one way, used by Žižek himself, might be to begin by separating the three levels of ideology, which in his Hegel-ese are known as ideology “in-itself”, “for-itself”, and “in-and-for-itself”. This division, one could say, gives us three ways or three orders in which ideology is active in a given society. The first one, ideology “in-itself”, means ideology as an explicit doctrine, a collection of ideas, concepts, believes, et cetera, aimed at convincing people that it holds a certain truth about the world. In other words, ideology “in-itself” provides the subject with an explicit worldview to follow. This is

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17 See James R. Martel, “When the Call Is Not Meant for You: Misinterpellation, Subjectivity, and the Law”, *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, vol.48, no.4, 2015, p.494-515, mistaking the relationship between méconnaissance and Lacan’s statement that the letter always arrives as it destination as one always going from the big Other to the subject (while in the case of for instance the Haiti revolution it was rather a letter which returned to its sender with its true meaning). See Slavoj Žižek, “A Prophetic Vision of the Haiti’s Past”, *LA Review of Books*, www.lareviewofbooks.org/article/prophetic-vision-haitis-past/ (accessed 2016-11-20). This also hides the problem of the supposed non-ideological gaze discussed by Laclau, in *The Rhetorical Foundation of Society*, pp.14-16.


19 See also Chapter IV.2.


ideology in the sense used by Althusser in his text on the ISA; ideology interpellates an individual which recognizes itself in its call and comes to identify with it. What the subject gets in return for subjecting itself to the Master’s call is a world, within which it is something rather than a nothing. But as Žižek, employing his Hegelian twists, usually points out, such a universality needs to entail the exception that at the same time corrupts it and, therefore, makes it impossible. It is this exception that a critique of ideology aims at uncovering through what he calls, following Althusser, a symptomal reading of the cracks, ruptures, blanks, and slips of any ideological text. Žižek’s prime example of this method of critique of ideology is Marx’s analysis illustrating how the bourgeois concept of equivalent exchange breaks down as it is confronted with the commodity of the labor force. Within an explicit liberal doctrine the notion of freedom is constituted of a number of individual freedoms supposedly exempted from, in particular, interventions from the state (freedom of press, freedom of speech, et cetera). But, in the realm of the market, the freedom here known as the freedom of exchange, of individuals to freely enter into (or refuse to enter into) contract with each other, selling and buying commodities, is turned around when faced with the commodity of the labor force. What happens is that this commodity effectively turns the normal, supposedly equivalent and free, exchange between two agents driven by egotistic interest, into exploitation. In other words: the universalization of the free market, in which everything can be sold and bought as long as both parties involved calculated that their individual gains outweighs not entering into contract, is made impossible by one commodity which is no longer freely and voluntarily sold. The commodity of labor force thus acts as a symptom and, as it is shown in Marx’s analysis, therefore represents the very negation of the universal form, a negation nevertheless arising from within the universalization of the system itself. The workers are the only ones who cannot sell their commodity freely, since selling ones labor force is a necessity for survival in a capitalist system. The symptom, the commodity of labor, exposes the specific desire (that of the property owner, the capitalist) undermining any attempt at a universal ideology by bringing it to its knees. This immanent impossibility is, therefore, what shows itself as symptoms (as ruptures, blanks, slips) in explicit ideological doctrine.

The second stage, ideology “for-itself”, is the materialization of the “in-itself” into practices, rituals, and institutions, what Althusser calls the Ideological State Apparatuses. This includes everything – in the case of religion –from for instance the practices and rituals regarding prayer to the actual buildings themselves. Ideology “for-itself” holds an important function in regulating the subjects access to jouissance, since these apparatuses, as long as

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23 As they are famously opposed to the Repressive State Apparatuses (police, military, judicial system) which functions primarily, although not entirely, through violence rather than ideology.
the subject follows their rituals (remember the Pascalian motto “kneel down and you shall believe” or how male circumcision or baptism is supposed to hold the secret to the being-together with god), are organized as if they held some hidden knowledge that could harmonize the big Other and enjoyment, to erase the necessary gap that exists between them. In other words: the ideology has here accepted the impossibility of full jouissance, for instance our mortal life is never complete happiness, it is always something which distorts our enjoyment, but through following the proper rituals (e.g. praying, acting, eating) in accordance with certain rules, we are promised full jouissance in the afterlife. Another of Žižek’s famous example of this logic is that of Starbucks’ Ethos Water: when buying a commodity the subject of modern capitalism experiences the lack of full enjoyment as, at least partly, hindered by the guilt of being a consumerist contributing to the destruction of the planet and the exploitation of other (poor) people. But by purchasing a bottle of water from Starbucks, where a certain amount of the slightly higher than normal price goes to providing water for some underprivileged group, the customer is promised to finally be able to reach full enjoyment because, so to speak, the debt for their immoral consumerism is thereby paid. The externalization of ideology in materiality is however, as Žižek puts it, later “reflected into itself”

In other words, the function as ideology is obfuscated. What was earlier a ritual, a practice, or a building with an obvious ideological connotation becomes, as time passes, self-evident or neutral. Through this process ideology is simultaneously strengthening its grip on society while the explicit doctrine and the traditional, evidently ideological, aspects of the practices and rituals seems to diminish or at least have their value as base for the social bond (or as Žižek calls it the ‘cement’ of society) reduced. But in this last stage something happens:

What we are thus arguing is not simply that ideology also permeates the alleged extra-ideological strata of everyday life, but that this materialization of ideology in external materiality reveals inherent antagonisms which the explicit formulation of ideology cannot afford to acknowledge: it is as if an ideological edifice, if it is to function ‘normally’, must obey a kind of ‘imp of perversity’, and articulate its inherent antagonism in the externality of its material existence.

So, if ideology “in-itself” worked in a symptomal mode, ideology “in-and-for-itself” is functioning in a fetishistic way and this fetishistic logic is captured in Octave Mannoni’s well-known formula Je sais bien, mais quand même (as

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27 The former is sometimes described by Žižek as “traditional”, while the latter is the predominant functioning of ideology in our, so called, “post-ideological” society. See for instance Žižek, Enjoy Your Symptom!, p.x.
for instance in fetishized liberal ideology: I know very well that market is not a neutral institution, but nevertheless I believe it is) based on the Freudian concepts of disavowal and denegation. In Lacanian psychoanalysis the fundamental disavowal at work in establishing a subject is always that of the symbolic castration (i.e. of the thing the subject retroactively experiences as having lost, the price to be paid in order to enter into the symbolic order, the reason behind the loss of full enjoyment). Therefore, another psychoanalytic concept becomes central for Žižek’s critique of ideology: fantasy. So, besides attempting to find the symptoms of a given ideology, any critique of ideology should also try to discern the fundamental fantasy at work, since it is the fantasy that allows us to accept reality ‘as it is’. What Žižek means is that the materiality of ideology exposes the inherent antagonisms which the fantasy then attempts to cover up, all the way from the Pascalian “kneel down and you shall believe” to the supposedly innocent references to the utility of a thing. This is, referring to a thing as simply useful is one of the ways in which it is possible to avoid the inconsistencies in which it is caught (it might not be perfect, but at least it is useful) and still be able to enjoy it. Here we should once again turn to Marx to exemplify this logic, this time with the concept of commodity-fetishism. In commodity-fetishism, the bourgeois subject, effectively knowing that money is a simple expression of social relations (particularities creating a universality), still acts or believes as if money is the embodiment of wealth as such (a universality embodying itself in particularities). As Žižek puts it: “What they ‘do not know’, what they misrecognize, is the fact that in their social reality itself, in their social activity – in the act of commodity exchange – they are guided by the fetishistic illusion.” He then continues:

To make this clear, let us again take the classic Marxian motive of the speculative inversion of the relationship between the Universal and the Particular. The Universal is just a property of particular objects which really exist, but when we are victims of commodity fetishism it appears as if the concrete content of a commodity (its use-value) is an expression of its abstract universality (its exchange-value) – the abstract Universal, the Value, appears as a real Substance which successively incarnates itself in a series of concrete objects.

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31 Ibid.
The same holds true for both Pascalian kneeling and the usefulness of everyday objects. Whether we believe or not that kneeling down has the power to make us believe, effectively doing so is an expression of the belief that there is someone else who believes; the Other. It does not matter if the religious subject think it knows what god wants from it or not (just as it does not matter if the bourgeois subject think it knows that money is just a particularity creating a universality or not), the very act of going to church and kneeling down (or buying and selling commodities in the market) proves that the system, the big Other, believes. Or, as, as Žižek puts it, the ‘material sincerity’ of the act reveals that belief is not a part of our inner lives, instead it is part of an external structure which in turn makes it fetishizing.

In Lacanian psychoanalysis the fantasy is captured by an algebraic formula ($\Diamond a$)\textsuperscript{32} representing the relationship between the barred subject and the objet a. The bar cutting through the S signifies the impossibility of the subject to ever achieve full self-consciousness, thus indicating the existence of the unconscious, the a represents the enigmatic desire of the other while the symbol $\Diamond$ captures the relationship between the two as one of “envelopment-developmen-conjunction-disjunction”.\textsuperscript{33} The fantasy therefore regulates the subject’s relationship to the enigmatic ‘object-cause of desire’ retroactively constituted in order to cover up its inexistence. What we have in the Lacanian concept of fantasy, if we return to the Althusserian terminology that introduced this section, is the problem of ideology: it should not be understood as a veil covering the eyes of the subject in order to hide the functioning of the material world behind it, but it is rather a screen regulating the subject’s relationship to the world which unravels before it or, to be more specific, regulating the relationship to its desire in that world. It is here we also find the earlier point regarding the difference between Althusser and Žižek regarding the question of why this regulation is necessary. For the former, the ideological regulation seems to be surpassed as soon as the subject has undergone misrecognition and wrongfully perceived itself in the call of ideology. Therefore, as Dolar pointed out, the creation of the subject represents, in Althusserian interpellation, the success of ideology. For Žižek, however, this regulation is a constant feature of ideology since the subject is a sign of its failure rather than of its success: it is only because the externalization of the subject in a signifier is constantly failing (the subject cannot be fully represented by a signifier), created a barred subject, that ideological fantasy always breaks down as the subject is confronted with this failure through its own counterpart in objet a. In other words: the subject is born decentered and through a constant attempt to return to this lost center it breaks up its own ideological fantasy. In Althusser this problem, in


\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
the end, comes down to the functioning of the big Other since if ideology were either erected as an ideal construct managing our relationship in regards to our Real conditions of existence, or as embodied in practices and rituals, the only way for us to explain the inconsistencies and failures of ideology would be to presume some kind of Kantian noumenal thing which constantly disturbs this relation, i.e. as a problem of the limit of knowledge in regard to reality. This is also, we could claim, why Althusser choses to state that everything is ideology, that there is no outside (or, if there is an outside, that it is unknowable, forever beyond our reach). Žižek’s answer here is to, through negation of negation, move from the field of epistemology to that of ontology.³⁴ But why this emphasize on the possibility of the failure of ideology? This relates to the point by Dolar already highlighted: that Althusser’s subject of ideology is the latter’s success, while Žižek’s subject of ideology is its failure, a sort of by-product of its machinery. To once again use Dolar’s distinction: an Althusserian critique of ideology is that of the clean cut, while a psychoanalytic critique, in the style of Žižek, is one of the remainder, of objet a.³⁵ The choice cannot be a clear one between truth (success) and failure, instead there is failure in truth and truth in failure.³⁶

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³⁴ See Žižek, Absolute Recoil, pp.51-55.
³⁵ See Dolar, “Beyond Interpellation”, pp.77-78.
³⁶ The complete opposite of Pfaller’s accusation that Žižek prefer the philosophical solutions of explaining everything through theory over the Althusserian materialist method of making a halt at the demarcations between idealism and materialism without trying to formulate an all-encompassing theory, see Pfaller, “The Althusserian Battlegrounds”, pp.24-25
This brings us to final point in this section, one which unfortunately has not received that much attention in the contemporary reading of Žižek, but that will form the foundation of this analysis: Lacan’s theory of the four discourses which were initially introduced in his seminar The Other Side of Psychoanalysis held in 1969-1970. The introduction of the four discourses is usually perceived as marking a turn in Lacan’s use of the concept of discourse.38 His earlier work often highlighted the intersubjective nature of discourse (as opposed to for instance speech) something which, at the point of the seventeenth seminar, still is an integral aspect to this concept, but Lacan also moves in a slightly different direction by emphasizing the social bond or “fundamental relations” that discourse provides for the subject that partakes in it.39 Of these four discourses the discourse of the Master is the fundamental one upon which the other three are based. We find them by turning the Lacanian algebraic formula for the Master’s discourse \( (S_1 \rightarrow S_2) \) clockwise one step whereby we first encounter the discourse of the Hysteric, then the discourse of the Analyst and finally the discourse of the University.40 As we can see the figures of the mathème of fantasy is here located on the bottom half of the formula of the Master, representing the barred aspects of this discursive relationship, that is the decentered or barred subject and its relationship to the object-cause of desire. Following this, the role of fantasy is to act as a stand in for the blocked relationship between the barred subject and objet a.41 The discourse of the Master therefore provides us with the formal schema in which ideology operates: the Master (S₁) represents the subject ($) for the chain of signifiers (S₂).

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39 We should note that this is an understanding of discourse in total opposition from what a rhetorician like Christian Lundberg presents it, see Lacan in Public: Psychoanalysis and the Science of Rhetoric, (Tuscaloosa, Ab.: The University of Alabama Press, 2012), pp.4-5.


41 Or as Lacan himself puts it “The first line \([S_1 \rightarrow S_2]\) comprises a relation, indicated here by an arrow, which is always defined as impossible. […] [A]t the level of the second line \([S \rightarrow a]\) there is no suggestion of an arrow. And not only is there no communication, but there is something that acts as a block. What is that is blocking? It is what results from the work. And what a certain Marx’s discovery accomplished was to give full weight to a term that was already known prior to him and that designates what work occupies itself with—it’s called production”, Lacan, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII, p.174.
thereby producing a certain excess, objet a. This failure of representation then needs to be accounted for in the form of an ideological fantasy. This duality of fantasy is captured by Žižek in the concepts symbolic fiction and spectral apparition: one the one hand stabilizing the subject’s identity by the dream of a perfect state in which the subject and its signifier can reach full identity, and on the other destabilizing this relationship by accounting for that which disturbs this state. 42

This finally brings us back to the original question of the letter always reaching its destination and opens up the problematic with which we will deal in the following sections. Understood as a signifier representing a metaphorical cut, the concept of diplomacy was established as the letter returning throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century and around which it was possible to organize different kind of subjectivities, in other words, different kinds of ideologies. In order to understand this transformation, set in motion by the distinction made by the revolutionaries between new and old diplomacy, it is therefore necessary to now treat the diplomatic theory of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as ideologies trying to come to terms with the impossibility of this concept. In one sense an ideological analysis is what already Martin Wight attempted in his division of international thought into three schools – Machiavellian, Grotian, and Kantian43 – although he would not have identified them as ideologies. The issue with Wight’s classification, as with his historical method in general, is his treatment of these theories as simply formal constructs without taking into account the actual historical situation in which they arose, nor how they function as systems of thought. In the same sense as the system of education, in its role as an Ideological State Apparatus, provides the subject with a certain identity in order to uphold the existing means of production, diplomacy seems to have provided different ideological standpoints within the field of Diplomacy Studies. The reach of diplomacy as an ISA is of course not only limited to the world of academic studies: it is without a doubt possible to discern within the diplomatic corps itself as well as in media, politics, and culture. We shall therefore, before venturing into the specificities of the ideologies at work in Diplomacy Studies, end this section by following Lacan’s commentary on his own choice of material from the introduction to his seminar on Poe’s The Purloined Letter:

This is why I have decided to illustrate for you today a truth which may be drawn from the moment in Freud’s thought we have been studying – namely, that it is the symbolic order which is constitutive for the subject – by demonstrating in a story the major determination the subject receives from the itinerary of a signifier.

43 See Chapter I.1.
It is this truth, let us note, that makes the very existence of fiction possible. Thus a fable is as any other story shedding light on it – provided we are willing to put the fable’s coherence to the test. With this proviso, a fable even has the advantage of manifesting symbolic necessity all more purely in that we might be inclined to believe it is governed by the arbitrary.\textsuperscript{44}

An interesting contrast shows itself between the ambassador or diplomat of the real world, traditionally only remembered when considered a hero (for example Raoul Wallenberg), and that of fiction, usually portrayed as a dubious, smooth-talking, and pompous figure ranging from Proust’s self-righteous Marquis de Norpois to Tolkien’s wretched and nameless ambassador of Sauron, cowering behind his diplomatic immunity. The world of literature therefore provides us with another perspective of this subjective formation, and no other work of fiction about ambassadors seems to have had a political impact comparing to that of André Brink’s \textit{The Ambassador} as it caused a scandal and a diplomatic crisis in the South African embassy in Paris because of the precision with which Brink, totally unaware of the real situation, had painted the ongoing secret arms negotiations between South Africa and France.

IV. A Woman in Paris – the Symptom of Diplomacy

One could claim that diplomacy plays a secondary role in André Brink’s novel *The Ambassador*,¹ that it merely has the function of a scene allowing the author to elaborate on yet another version of a love story as old as time. In the novel we get to follow the events of a Parisian love triangle wherein a young man is thrown between love and despair for girl that does not seem to love him back; wherein an old man feels born again through the carefreeness and juvenility of the same young girl; and wherein the young girl is torn between her love for a boy who does not understand her and her feelings for an old man that cannot be with her.² Another way to read the novel is as a tale of the overwhelming power of bureaucracy and how it slowly crushes the subject stuck within it, reducing this subject to the point where every possible identity is entirely deprived of meaning.³ But should we really take the ominous title of Brink’s novel so lightheartedly? Could the novel just as well have been given the title *Love in Paris* or some other similar romance novel cliché? Or could it just as well have been a story about two tax fraud agents or some other generic subject of bureaucracy? Probably not. So, in order to avoid such readings we should not forget that there is no possible separation between the stage and what is played out on it; the scene is the symbolic network within which all the actors and their acts is inscribed with a specific meaning. The real title of the novel should therefore, perhaps, be located in the abstract element escaping both the original title in Afrikaans, *Die Ambassadeur*, and the title under which it was first published in Britain, *File on a Diplomat*, as something like *On Diplomacy*. Because the messy love story that is played out on this

¹ Originally published in 1963 in Afrikaans as *Die Ambassadeur*. The first, and according to Brink himself, horrible English translation appeared a year later in South Africa with the title *The Ambassador* and in 1967 in Britain as *File on a Diplomat* before the version that is quoted here was published in 1985.


specific stage, the Ambassador against the young diplomat, could not have been performed if it were not for the huge backdrop provided by modern diplomatic culture. And maybe could we therefore claim that we, through the two male characters in Brink’s *The Ambassador*, are shown a kind of radical ambiguity at the heart of modern diplomacy. This proposition will here act as our guide as we delve into the story itself.

1. André Brink’s *The Ambassador*

Let us begin with a short presentation of the story itself. Brink’s novel is divided into five sections (*Third Secretary, Chronicle, Ambassador, Nicolette, and Mosaic*) of unequal length. In the first one we are following what appears to be some sort of diary written by Stephen Keyter, a 23-year-old Third Secretary at the Embassy of South Africa in Paris. When we meet this ambitious young man for the first time he is about to write a report to the Department in Pretoria regarding the Ambassador’s scandalous affair with a young South African girl (whom Keyter incidentally also had been romantically involved with). The anguish related to writing the report leads Keyter to reminisce about his life, his time at the Embassy, and how it all culminated in the difficult choice between writing the letter to the Department and letting this transgression of the moral code continue unnoticed. What is obvious from Keyter’s own recollection of his back story is that he, on the one hand, sees himself as a very ambitious young man. He clearly nurtures a dream of one day becoming successful in his field, preferably by rising in the ranks in order to finally be appointed ambassador and to, through this success, prove his own worth, especially to his father. On the other hand we can also see that he is a young man troubled by his incapability to attract women, especially his inability to understand what to him appears as their mysterious ways of thinking and doing things. Keyter tells us about a specifically choking experience that occurred when he, still a young boy, found the psychic evaluation he was put through when his parents tried to find the root of his bad behavior. This diagnosis contained, as he describes it, “all the clever references to ’intelligence above average’, to ‘neurosis’, ‘impulsiveness’, ‘emotional repression’, ‘mother-fixation’, ’tendency towards morbid introspection’, the revolting phrase, ’masturbation since early puberty’; and finally the prosaic revelation of everything he’d so slyly cajoled out of me: how, as a small boy, I’d been terrified to sleep alone; how I’d often crept into my mother’s bed at night; how my father had reluctantly come to accept this – except on Sunday nights, which I could never understand, until one Sunday night I’d slipped to their room to find out for myself.”

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4 Brink, *The Ambassador*, p.15.
Despite this important experience Keyter claims that the only thing he really remembers from his childhood was the day his mother died; in the morning him and his mother were involved in an argument and when Keyter later returned home from school his father told him that his mother had accidentally shot herself cleaning the father’s revolver. This inability to remember anything clearly from his own childhood leads Keyter to focus his thoughts on his time at the Embassy which, at the beginning at least, is rather successful. When he arrives his colleagues quickly identifies him as a young boy lacking some important experiences in life and one of them therefore organizes his “rite of passage”. But despite the initial chock brought on by the darker aspects of the Parisian night life, Keyter immediately proves his worth to the South African Ambassador and he rises quickly in the ranks. Simultaneously he is also developing a hatred for many of his new colleagues, especially what he sees as their lack of professionalism and ambition. So, one day, comes the arrival of a new ambassador, Paul Van Heerden, to Paris. Keyter believes that his current success will continue if he keeps working in the same manner as he did under the predecessor, Ambassador Theunissen, but he immediately learns the hard way that the two Ambassadors are nothing alike. Already on the third day of Van Heerden’s arrival he calls Keyter to his office in order to reprimand him for working with classified documents, a task which the former Ambassador regularly entrusted him with. After this incident Keyter is also stripped of all his former responsibilities and demoted to the boring tasks fitting for a Third Secretary. Keyter, who already could discern a post as ambassador on the horizon, takes this demotion as a personal failure and he begins to question his own future at the embassy, while also developing a noticeable resentment towards the new Ambassador. Simultaneously he also meets a young South African girl who arrives at his office to renew her passport. Initially, Keyter dismisses the girl (Nicolette) as boring and not attractive enough, but when she is about to leave he is struck by a sudden urge to ask her out. This is the beginning of a stormy relationship which takes up the majority of the first part of the book in which Keyter is constantly trying to understand if Nicolette loves him or not. More than one time Keyter tries to awkwardly confront her, either not provoking her at all or ending up overdoing it, until one night, at a party in Keyter’s apartment, he grabs her arm and asks her if she is avoiding him. She screams at him that he should let her go, then she proceeds to slap him in his face before leaving the apartment.

Shortly after this incident Keyter tries to repair the failure resulting in his demotion by going out the young daughter of the Ambassador. By this he hopes to prove that he is a man fit for the lifestyle of a diplomat. Although his advances with the young girl are fruitless, she tells him almost instantly that she will not marry a diplomat, the third secretary instead develops a bond with the Ambassador’s wife, a women silently suffering from a neglecting husband and a daughter who is breaking free to become an adult. Late one night she (Erika) arrives on Keyter’s doorstep asking for a cigarette and a drink before,
as Keyter puts it, she gives way to hysteria and cries in his arms telling him about her unbearable situation, before admitting to him that she is planning to leave Paris for a long vacation in Italy. Before leaving the apartment they kiss, “[a]nd then she went away.”

One day, a few weeks after the incident at the party where Nicolette stormed out, Keyter spots her as she is about to enter the Ambassador’s office without going through the usual screening by the receptionist. Curious about Nicolette’s behavior this incident marks the start of Keyter’s investigation into the relationship between the Ambassador and Nicolette. He starts to follow them around to gather evidence about their secret meetings, an activity which eventually ends up with him sending his report to the Ministry in South Africa.

The following two chapters of the novel focuses on Ambassador van Heerden, and the first of them is characterized by the change of style in comparison to the first chapter of the novel: this shift of narration is one from the engaged, often very emotional, first-person perspective of the first section to a withdrawn narrator that nonetheless knows what our male protagonist is thinking and feeling at every point. Initially the Ambassador is faced with the threat of new violent strikes amongst mine workers since a peaceful demonstration had taken an “unexpected turn” and with the massacre in Sharpeville just a few years back van Heerden is given the task to secure the support of the French in an attempt to keep foreign soldiers out of South Africa. Early on, Ambassador van Heerden illustrates his cynical attitude towards his work: he does not believe in what he is doing, every act of work is a fight against the meaninglessness that plagues his existence. Nevertheless van Heerden is an excellent ambassador, securing the needed support of the French and making sure that the African nations eager to intervene will be halted in the UN. When working in his office late after the successful meeting with the French Minister of Foreign Affairs a knock on the door disturbs his activities. It is Nicolette who, wet from the rain, enters his office in search of someone to help her since, as she tells him, her boyfriend had thrown her out of his apartment. At first the Ambassador is annoyed by the disturbance, but when she tells him that it was Stephen Keyter who threw her out he decides to give the young girl a ride home. During the ride through the Parisian night van Heerden finds the girl somewhat familiar, and when returning home he realizes that she reminds him of an old girlfriend who tragically committed suicide during their time together. The Ambassador gradually becomes obsessed with the young girl, taking every opportunity to see her, and when his wife leaves Paris his efforts to spend time with Nicolette intensifies even more. It is at this point, before their relationship has taken any physical form, that Keyter writes his report to the Department in Pretoria. So, one day the Ambassador receives a letter from the Department asking him to explain the situation in order for them to withdraw Keyter from his post, but instead of feeling relieved that they already

5 Ibid. p.50.
from the outset assumed that he was innocent (which he technically is at this point), van Heerden is once again struck by the meaninglessness of his work. Instead of finishing his answer explaining the situation the Ambassador starts walking around Paris before eventually ending up at Nicolette’s door. When she is not there to be found the Ambassador waits in the shadows to see her return late at night with a young man on his arm. When the man later leaves the Ambassador, now furious, forces himself on Nicolette. Afterwards, van Heerden is overtaken by a feeling of guilt over his acts, but after Nicolette consoles him he tells her that he loves her, then waits until she falls asleep by his side before quietly leaving and returning to his office to finalize the letter to the Department, this time with the answer “No Comments”.

The third section, bearing the title Ambassador, is once again characterized by a shift in the narrative perspective back to the engaged first person view, this time of van Heerden himself. In this, by far the longest, section we are allowed to follow the events in the relationship evolving between the Ambassador and Nicolette, his love and fascination for the young girl. His wife and daughter also leaves for Italy and Nicolette eventually moves into the Ambassador’s residence so that they no longer have to meet in her small apartment at Rue de Condé. At the same time the Ambassador himself acknowledges that he is spending an increasing amount of time thinking about his old girlfriend Gillian, of whom Nicolette reminded him the first night they met. At the same time the Ambassador now feels free when Nicolette drags him with her to clubs, restaurants, and Christmas mass at Notre Dame. Ambassador van Heerden is completely overcome with a new sense of freedom that previously was lacking in his life and that she now provides him with.

The fourth, and shortest, section entitled Nicolette follows the incoherent and rambling thoughts of the young girl as she lies in the bath tub in the Ambassador’s residence. Her considerations wander from her love for eating apples in the shower to the men in her life, her first experience with boys, and her relationship to her father. She is constantly expressing a double desire of both wanting her lovers to protect and to hurt her, and how she feels split towards her feelings for Keyter (and also a student named Marc) whom she loves but who cannot understand her, and the Ambassador, who protects her but does not seem to desire her as strongly as the younger men. This short section is abruptly ended as Nicolette gets out of the bath, and the following section begins just as the telegram from the Department in Pretoria arrives on the Ambassador’s desk. After reading the verdict van Heerden calls Keyter into his office, but the young man’s reaction to the news that he is immediately called back to Pretoria is not what the Ambassador had expected. Keyter simply reads the letter, nods, and asks if he can keep it. After calmly rejecting van Heerden’s every attempt to help him, Keyter leaves the office in order to prepare for his return to South Africa. Puzzled by the event of the morning van Heerden leaves the embassy to look for Nicolette, but when he finally finds her, she is not able to offer him any peace of mind. Instead van Heerden
once again leaves, this time to visit Keyter at his apartment. Once there, after no one answering the door and a neighbor passing by complaining about the smell of gas, van Heerden breaks into the apartment to find Keyter dead on the kitchen floor. A few days later the Ambassador receives yet another letter, this time informing him of a commission arriving from London to investigate the death of Keyter, and when he leaves the office to see Nicolette he is informed that she has cleaned out her apartment and left. Finally, after wandering around Paris, the Ambassador returns to his residence being informed by his night guard that Nicolette had passed through and that she, when he spoke about the tragic death of Keyter, had stormed out screaming at him. This knowledge seems to give van Heerden some comfort as he, now smiling and humming a tune, once again returns to his reading room since “[t]here was still work to be done.”

2. The Discourse of the Master and the Discourse of the Hysteric – the Case of Stephen Keyter

The aim of this literary exercise is, as already stated, to analyze diplomacy as an Ideological State Apparatus. To do this we should investigate the different kind of subjective positions and intersubjective relationships established by the interpellation that the subject experiences from the big Other we call diplomacy. But before we initiate the analysis of Brink’s *The Ambassador* let us first return to the already quoted passage from Lacan’s eleventh seminar in which he uses the diplomat as an example of Freud’s concept Vorstellungsrepräsentanz:

> We mean by representatives what we understand when we use the phrase, for example, the representatives of France. What do diplomats do when they address one another? They simply exercise, in relation to one another, that function of being pure representatives and, above all, their own signification must not intervene. When diplomats are addressing one another, they are supposed to represent something whose signification, while constantly changing, is, beyond their own persons, France, Britain, etc. In the very exchange of views, each must record only what the other transmits in his pure function as signifier, he must not take into account what the other person is, *qua* presence, as a man who is likeable to a greater or lesser degree.

Implicit in Lacan’s analogy is a relatively traditional understanding of diplomacy as a practice exercised within what he would call the discourse of the Master, an understanding which we also find in for instance the writings of

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6 Ibid. p.288.
Foucault. As mentioned, Lacan’s theory of the four discourses was introduced in his seventeenth seminar held in 1969-1970, starting just a few months after the events of May -68. Despite being formulated five years after Lacan’s use of the diplomat as an analogy the connection between Vorstellungs-repräsentanz and the four discourses still allows for some interesting conclusions regarding diplomacy. Let us begin by pointing out that the discourse of the Master, the primary discourse in Lacan’s theory, is modeled on Hegel’s famous Master-slave dialectic from *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, and in his presentation of the four discourses Lacan also highlights what is perhaps the most important of Hegel’s claims in this passage: the truth of the Master is located in the slave.\(^8\) The fact that the Master does not possess his own truth makes the Master not-all, a distinction captured by Lacan in the difference between *the subject of the enunciated* and *the subject of enunciation*.\(^9\) This gap introduced in the Master –diplomatic or otherwise – captures a necessary split in the Master as barred Other (represented in Lacanian algebra as \(A\)) through the difference between this Other as a subject uttering a statement (with a certain intention, from a certain position, et cetera) and the grammatical subject of the actual statement (uttering its truth). In other words: it is impossible for the Master to establish a complete coincidence between what is said and what is actually heard or understood in what might have been said. In Hegel’s dialectic this split is embodied in the slave as pure negativity, through which the Master must mediate his relationship to the things (the slave has to produce them for him) leaving a fundamental antagonism in the Master himself. Since the four discourses all captures a different form of interpersonal relationship we need to point out that the actual subject caught in these relationships can identify itself in all four different positions (actor, other, truth or product/remainder), but what it cannot avoid is the discourse’s uncanny truth and its intruding remainder. In the Master’s discourse the most common position of a subject is, nevertheless, that of the slave (a \(S\) represented by \(S_1\), a God, a Monarch, a Nation, or a (M)Other, to the signifying chain, \(S_2\)), but since the Master is not-all, since the representation always fails, a fundamental anxiety is attached to this discourse. This anxiety arises in the meeting with the *objet a*, the unintended product/remainder of the Master’s discourse and the object-cause of desire captured by Lacan in his famous formula “desire is the desire of the Other”\(^10\). As a way to cover over the impossible relationship between the barred subject and its object-cause of desire (i.e. the not-all of the Master) the subject creates a fantasy, a screen through which the absent core is covered

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over and its effects domesticated. To be able to do this every fantasy needs to take on two forms: *symbolic fiction* and *spectral apparition*. The former presents the subject with an ideal state in which the Master’s representation is complete, and wherein enjoyment thereby is full, while the latter domesticates the troubling remainder by introducing it into the symbolic order. This functioning of fantasy is also, as Žižek notes, the reason why Lacan seems to hold on to two contradictory views: on the one hand that the Master’s discourse aims at repressing fantasy, and on the other that fantasy is integral to the survival of the Master. This takes us back to the split between the Master as subject of the enunciated and subject of the enunciation, in other words, the Master as speaking subject must always attempt to repress fantasy since it overtly states its failure, but on the other hand, on the level of the enunciation, it needs fantasy to cover over the unavoidable gaps in speech. Fantasy is necessary to cover over the hystericizing effects of the Master’s failure to fully represent the subject, an attempt to counter-act the existential doubt in the self-understanding of the subject that is the effect of the Master.

With this in mind let us return to the text, and more specifically the role of Stephen Keyter as an exemplary case of this kind of dialectic between the discourse of the Master and that of the Hysteric. Primarily it is important to take into account the three levels of identification that Lacan elaborates by introducing distinctions between the Freudian concepts of *ideal-ego*, *ego-ideal*, and *superego*. As we know, Keyter’s first time at the Embassy in Paris is rather successful: he takes great pride in his promotion to Third Secretary, especially since he reached this post before his fellow cadets with greater experience, and he takes comfort in the promotion making up for the fact that he was the last of his class to be sent abroad on a mission. What Keyter is experiencing here is identification with his ideal-ego, an imaginary “identification with the image in which we appear likable to ourselves” in the guise of a successful diplomat and future ambassador. But identification on the imaginary level cannot come without its symbolic counterpart, introducing castration through what Lacan called *noms-du-père*. Keyter makes this problem obvious as he states: “Even my father will have to admit, one day, that I have made it to the top –in spite of all his snide remarks in the past whenever my future was discussed.” Hence, this is the symbolic side of identification as

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14 This point has been elaborated on in detail in relation to Lacan’s seventeenth seminar by Geoff Boucher, see “Bureaucratic Speech Acts and the University Discourse”, pp. 274-291.
ego-ideal, “identification with the very place from where we are being observed”\textsuperscript{19}. In other words: Keyter does not only identify himself with the image of a successful diplomat but also with the place from which it is decided if he is a successful diplomat or not, the passive gaze in front of which his actions are performed to be judged, here embodied in his father. This brings a certain antagonism into identification, captured through the issues Keyter has with most of his colleagues (and their spouses). Because, even though Ambassador Theunissen seems very pleased with Keyter’s performances, promoting him and entrusting him with tasks and responsibilities going beyond those of a normal Third Secretary, Keyter cannot stop complaining about the incompetence of his fellow diplomats: “Douglas Masters, the First Secretary, who is correctness himself […] yet I doubt whether he’ll ever become a great diplomat.”\textsuperscript{20} The issue seems to be Keyter’s incapability of accepting that his ego-ideal, the passive gaze from which he and all the other aspiring ambassadors are scrutinized, is incoherent since it is not only promoting and compensating those who show promise but also, as in the case of Masters, those that completely lack talent. The constant failure of his Master to only reward those who succumb to the symbolic law of the embassy, to the law of the ego-ideal, therefore leaves Keyter anxious: how is he supposed to know how to succeed if not even his Master adheres to its own laws? It is obvious that Keyter already is stuck in the Master’s discourse, trying to deal with the problem of the necessary failure of the Master, the Department in Pretoria and the Ambassador, (S\textsubscript{1}) to represent him ($) to the chain of signifiers (S\textsubscript{2}) that is a proper diplomatic life. The gap between what the Master officially desires in a diplomatic subject, captured in Keyter’s depiction of van Heerden as “the great perfectionist, the imposing man-of-influence, and probably the most efficient diplomat to represent South Africa abroad in decades”\textsuperscript{21}, and what the Master actually conveys to him when promoting his, as he see it, incompetent superiors, constitutes the ground for his anxious questioning.

The problematic nature of the Other’s desire is what sparks the hysteric question Lacan captured in the Italian phrase Che Vuoi?\textsuperscript{22}, and as we can see it haunts Keyter even when he seems to be on the path to success. However, the first traumatic impact of diplomacy in his life, the painful demotion that is part of the punishment from a recently arrived van Heerden, is the first point where we can see how this question begins to engulf the entirety of Keyter’s


\textsuperscript{20} Brink, The Ambassador, p.13.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{22} Roughly translated as: “What do you want?” The phrase is used by Lacan to express the hysteric questioning the subject is forced to when confronted with the impenetrability of the Other’s desire, see Jacques Lacan, “The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious”, p.690.
life. Since he, up until this point, seems confident that he will one day “have made it to the top”, this demotion presents itself as a huge setback for his future career plans and he directs his resentment against the new ambassador:

What made it [the demotion] so hard to stomach was that the Ambassador evidently had every right to do as he did and that he was really much more than just a competent administrator. In diplomatic circles he was generally regarded as a man of considerable stature; and within two months of his arrival in Paris there was an appreciable change in the attitude of members of other delegations towards us. But whereas Theunissen [the former ambassador] had never been a diplomat, only a human being, it is practically impossible to imagine Van Heerden – His Excellency – reduced to the state of ‘merely’ a man. Unlike other diplomats he does not appear to lead two lives – official, and private – but only one.  

Could we not claim that Keyter here expresses the problem of the antagonism active in the field of diplomacy, formulated by Lacan as one between the diplomat as a pure signifier (only representing his country) and the diplomat as presence (merely a man, someone who is likable to a greater or lesser degree)? We should note that this antagonism is not Real but simply a fantasmatic way of dealing with the necessary split in the big Other: what Keyter is dealing with is fantasy as symbolic fiction, a screen on which it appears to be a simple choice between a proper diplomatic life and a life mislead by the desires and defects of the more simple minded. Hence, Keyter’s anxiety arises at the point at which this fantasy breaks down, where his ordinary life fails to present a world which adheres to the fantasmatic screen. As Žižek often points out, in order to function in a society a subject needs to know which laws it is necessary to follow and which ones it is possible to disobey. A proper diplomat is, therefore, not someone who follows every rule, but who knows exactly which rules to follow and when. At first Keyter seems to understand this, he is well aware of the fact that he is breaking the law when working with classified documents (“the Ambassador evidently had every right to do as he did”), but experienced this law as possible to transgress in order to show signs of ambition and integrity, two important traits of a good diplomat. So, the fact that Keyter now is punished for a transgression that did not present itself as a crime illustrates once again the inconsistencies in Keyter’s diplomatic Master. And the problems with his fantasy only continues to intensify as he finds out about van Heerden’s affair:

If the present Ambassador’s predecessor, Jan Theunissen, had been involved [in the affair with the girl] […] I might have chosen to let a sleeping St Bernard lie. He never tried to hide his essential, flawed humanity. But now Ambassador Van Heerden: the great perfectionist, the imposing man-of-influence, and

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probably the most efficient diplomat to represent South Africa abroad in decades. Not the slightest slip or oversight is tolerated in the Embassy, for the simple reason that he himself never makes a mistake. I have heard diplomats from hostile missions refer to him with nothing but respect, and sometimes with awe. Bonnard of the French Foreign Service recently made it quite clear that Paul van Heerden was the only South African the Quai d’Orsay still cared to listen to.  

The discovery of the Ambassador’s affair with Nicolette therefore accounts for the final strike – the spark that initiates the whole novel – against Keyter’s attempt to establish a fantasy in the guise of a symbolic fiction presenting the Master as a coherent Other. As Lacan pointed out in the seventh seminar, the desire of the Master’s law is formulated to the subject as “Enjoy as little as possible!” and the subject is therefore supposed to regulate its desire in accordance with the law, adhering to its interpellation (this is the equivalent of abstract guilt in Althusser’s theory of interpellation) by attempting to live by it (in diplomacy to live one public life, even in the most private of relationships). This is the reason why Keyter experiences a difference between Theunissen and van Heerden, the former never even attempting to adhere to the law, hence also allowing him to break it without any significant consequences. But, as noted, this is the final blow to Keyter’s fantasy as symbolic fiction, giving birth to the opening scene of the novel. When formulating his letter to the Department in Pretoria Keyter references a weird sense of duty which forces him to write it. He points out that in formulating the report he is actually breaking one of the laws of his Master, referencing the great 20th century handbooks on diplomacy (“I suppose Douglas Masters, in turn, would cite long passages from Satow or Nicholson to argue that a Third Secretary should not stoop to such behaviour”), and he is also well aware that other young diplomats in his situation has found their own careers destroyed when reporting the improper actions of a superior. Nevertheless, he feels the need to confront his Master with this question (“[…] I really believe I have no choice left.”). This is the point when Keyter is finally taken over by his hysteric questioning, experiencing a need to expose and confront the inconsistencies of his Master. Alenka Zupančič describes the condition as follows:

[T]he hysteric likes to point out that the emperor is naked. The master, this respected S1, admired and obeyed by everyone, is in reality a poor, rather impotent chap, who in no way lives up to his symbolic function. He is weak, he often doesn’t even know what is going on around him, and he indulges in “disgusting” secret enjoyment; he (as a person) is unable to control himself or anybody else.

24 Ibid. p.13
27 Ibid.
It becomes obvious, as the story unfolds, that Keyter experiences a weird form of enjoyment from his twisted sense of duty, which means that we at this point have reached the final concept in the Freudian trio: superego. Because, with the castration of the symbolic, the Master’s law is stuck in the split between enunciated and enunciation, in other words, the law comes with its explicit demand to enjoy as little as possible, to follow its decree, but also with its superego injunction to enjoy as much as possible, that is, to transgress the law. Lacan described superego as follows during his first seminar:

The super-ego is at one and the same time the law and its destruction. As such, it is speech itself, the commandment of law, in so far as nothing more than its root remains. The law is entirely reduced to something, which cannot even be expressed, like You must, which is speech deprived of all its meaning. It is in this sense that the super-ego ends up being identified with only what is most devastating, most fascinating, in the primitive experiences of the subject. It ends up being identified with what I call the ferocious figure, with the figures which we link to the primitive traumas that the child has suffered, whatever these are.29

Keyter’s urge to report the Ambassador can therefore be categorized in terms of superego as volonté de jouissance, as the incarnation of pleasure-in-pain or surplus-enjoyment which urges the subject to enjoy by transgressing the Master’s law in order to, in the case of the Hysteric, expose the inconsistencies of the Master.30 Hence, what Keyter is experiencing is the underside of the law, the obscene superego injunction to enjoy and to go against the written letter of diplomacy, its codes of conduct, doctrines, and social rituals handed down through handbooks, the diplomatic schooling, and hours of work at embassies, in favor of its underside, the “clandestine ‘unwritten’ code”31 necessary to accept in order for the subject to be able to introduce a distance to the law.32 The coupling of superego/anxiety is the very thing that allows him to keep functioning, driven forward by his need to find more proof of the dubious relationship between van Heerden and Nicolette. The point of this distance is to open up a space for ‘something more’ beyond the law; that beneath the official, law-abiding subject there is also a ‘real’ human being.

Keyter’s hysteric questioning does, however, not only arise in an explicit relation to his diplomatic Master. Rather it is, to an even greater degree, related to women and sex, not, as Keyter notes regarding the Second Secretary Koos

32 This can be captured in Žižek’s distinction between written word and voice.
Joubert, too much of it, but rather not enough, his continuous inability to attract women and to perform sexually. But here we should begin by asking: Are these two realms really separated? In the section of the novel focusing on the thoughts of Keyter he appears as a young man entirely consumed by women and sex to the point where he never actually reflects on his own work at the embassy, unless it is in the context of a woman, such as when he recounts his first meeting with Nicolette arriving in his office to get a new passport. Still, nothing of his recollections of his earlier life, from the traumatic reading of his therapist’s report on him to his mother’s tragic and mysterious death, evokes the question of sex. Could we therefore not claim that this deadlock, showing itself in the field of sexuality, is not something brought along by a childhood trauma (for instance being witness to his parents’ intercourse) but rather as a symptom intrinsic to his new symbolic position within the embassy? His relationship to Nicolette is, already from the beginning, plagued by his hysterical questioning: already as she first walks into his office he feels the need to explain why he does not find her attractive:

In the beginning she was only a fairly attractive if somewhat angular, almost gawky girl who came into my office in the Embassy basement in connection with a lost passport. She wore huge dark sunglasses, a scarf round her darkish-blond hair, a blouse with one button missing, a skirt and open sandals. Strange, that almost professorial air about her, especially when she removed the sunglasses: something myopic about the way she blinked against the light.

But he still panics when confronted with the question of her desire:

She went to the door. Something like panic surged up in me. Suppose she left – and never came back? There was such an elusive quality about her.

This duality becomes characteristic of their continued relationship wherein Keyter is thrown between on the one hand a need to confront her in order to expose her contradictions and on the other the anxiety arisen from this confrontation. After their initial dates Nicolette begins to take advantage of Keyter’s luxurious apartment by visiting him to, for instance use his bath tub (since all she has in her tiny home in the 6th arrondissement is a red plastic basin from Monoprix). One morning when she arrives Keyter is overtaken by the uncertainty of their relationship: he thinks that he loves her, and that the feeling at

[^33]: Lacan points out the following relationship between man and woman in the seventeenth seminar: “[T]he male is and is not what he is with respect to jouissance. And thereby, also, woman is produced as an object, precisely through not being what he is, sexual difference, on the one hand, and on the other through being what he renounces by way of jouissance.” *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII*, p.78. In other words: Keyter’s problem with women arises through the jouissance he has to renounce for his Master.

[^34]: Brink, *The Ambassador*, p.21.

least to some degree is mutual, but at the same time he experiences her as
distant and always flirting with other men, even when he is around. So, in a
desperate attempt at a provocation, implying that she just hangs around him
and other men in order to get gifts and money, he lashes out at her: “Or perhaps
they pay you enough? Is that it?”36 But instead of being provoked by his in-
sinuations Nicolette takes the money he sarcastically offers her and continues
to prepare her bath. Keyter, still desperately searching for a way to interpret
Nicolette’s desire, cannot decide whether her actions means that he should
join her in the bath or not:

Should I? Dare I? Suppose she meant it? Suppose she didn’t mean it -? On the
other side of the door the water was splashing over the sides of the bath.37

But Nicolette is neither the first nor the only girl with which Keyter expe-
riences these issues. Already when he, young and innocent, arrives in Paris
and his colleague Joubert introduces him to the decadent night in Paris we can
see the same structure repeating itself. After an evening beginning with a din-
ner and continuing on through dark alley night clubs and dirty motel rooms
Keyter finally finds himself sitting in his bathroom reflecting on the night. The
Biblical metaphors illuminates the significance of this night:

Later that night I found myself sitting on the edge of the bath in my apartment,
staring into the mirror at my own skinny white body, thinking: God, I’m re-
volting. I come from a past of Sunday nights and I’m still caught in that spell.
Nothing will ever set me free. And I want to be free! No I don’t. Why not try
to be philosophical and conclude that the Tree of Knowledge bears shriveled
fruit; and sometime or other one has to taste it? It brings no revelation either
of angels or of devils, and there is no god who nowadays rounds up offenders
in the evening breeze. Perhaps this is the greatest letdown of all. Adam and
Eve could at least count on punishment, which gave them something against
which to measure, as it were, the extent of their achievement. But if there is no
punishment because there has never been any sin to start with, one can only
feel duped.38

Keyter here expresses a kind of despair similar to the one we encounter in
Jesus’ final words on the cross (“My God, my God, why have you forsaken
me?”39), a desperate call from the subject in order to get the Master to confirm
its symbolic identity. In other words: the ominous Che Vuoi?, the question of
the desire of the Other that Keyter, in the same way, confronted when sending
his report regarding the Ambassador’s transgression. In his desperate call for

36 Ibid, p.40
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid, p.20
39 This analogy between Keyter and Jesus only holds some partial truth since the death of the
latter can be read as the necessary sacrifice in order to bring forth the true revolutionary poten-
tial in Christianity, see for instance Žižek, The Plague of Fantasies, pp.170-171.
a Master who might at least punish him for his sins Keyter is perfectly illustrating what Žižek has pointed out as one of the most fundamental characteristics of the ideology of our contemporary capitalist society. To understand this point we must begin by taking a look at Lacan’s reversal of the old saying echoing in Keyter’s speech: If God is dead, everything is permitted. Perhaps the most central transformation that society has undergone in capitalist modernity is the breakdown of old structures and authorities, but the fact that God is pronounced dead does not mean that he ceases to have effects. The true formula of modernity should, as Žižek points out, not be that God is dead, but that God is unconscious, and that everything still is permitted. What Keyter, therefore, is experiencing after his night in the back-alleys of Paris is nothing more than his own superego, as we can see by the conflicting feelings that overcomes him as he leaves a night club together with Joubert:

Afterwards all possible shades of emotion broke loose inside me: humiliation, anger, resentment, shame. But at that moment, standing there, convulsed, there was only one senseless thought turning over and over in my mind: It’s Sunday night. It’s bloody well Sunday night again. Paris or Pretoria, no matter, it’s Sunday night!

So, Keyter’s superego bombards him with the injunction to enjoy, to use the Sunday night to live out the necessary underside of the symbolic identity of a diplomat: the night where it does not matter if you, as a successful diplomat, might be likable to a lesser rather than a greater degree. Keyter receives the command that he now can taste the shriveled fruit without it interfering with the position as pure signifier. This injunction, as we can see, haunts him every Sunday night, “Paris or Pretoria, no matter, it’s Sunday night!” although he cannot properly enjoy the transgression it orders from him without being overcome with feeling of shame, resentment, and humiliation. Once again we see Keyter’s incapability to create a fantasy through which he is able to break the law of diplomacy: he can distinguish the effect gained from breaking it, retrieving a piece of his own freedom, a piece of himself existing outside the law, but he still cannot go through with it which is why his first sexual encounter with a prostitute in a dirty motel room ends up “a flop”.

This is what separates Keyter from his colleagues, their ability to enjoy the transgression, as with his fellow Third Secretary Theo Harrington who Keyter describes as “something of a windbag who is much too conscious of his attraction for women despite the fact that he is already married to a strikingly beautiful but

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41 Brink, *The Ambassador*, p.18.
42 Ibid. p.19.
very reserved young girl; but he undoubtedly has a flair for his work.”43 Keyter’s problem is, in other words, connected to his overzealous attachment to the law.44 What Keyter is actually experiencing in these moments of despair is the symptom appearing in the breakdown of fantasy, in the slips, cracks and ruptures of the official ideology of diplomacy. This takes place, as Žižek explains, due to the relationship between symptom and fantasy, since they are “structurally incompatible.”45 Symptoms are, as we know, the return of the repressed of the Master’s official speech, the necessary effect of the fact that the Master is blind to his own truth, which initiates the dialectical change undergone by Keyter when moving from the Master’s to the Hysteric’s discourse.46 Žižek writes: “In our daily existence, we are immersed in ‘reality’ (structured or supported by a fantasy), but this immersion is disturbed by symptoms which bear witness to the fact that another repressed level of our psyche resists the immersion.”47 What Keyter is experiencing in all of his hysterical moments, from deciding whether or not to send the report to his numerous fights with different girlfriends, is the breakdown of his fantasy as it is confronted by its own symptom, and his following incapability to interpret the symptom in order to enjoy it, that is, to create a fantasy as spectral apparition. This failure, as well as the connection between his symptom and his symbolic identity as a diplomat, is perhaps most obvious in his failed attempt to date the Ambassador’s daughter Anette. After being humiliated by the new Ambassador, Keyter attempts to transform his life in order to prove that he still might be a successful future ambassador. So, when hearing that the Ambassador’s wife is looking for eligible bachelors to go out with her daughter Keyter identifies a path back into a proper diplomatic life. Despite the fact that he at first feels a bit hesitant, he nevertheless decides to ask the girl out: “Moreover, if something did develop between Annette and me it might compensate for the position of inferiority which her father had relegated me.”48 Here we can see how Keyter once again tries to mold himself into the perfect diplomat, to adapt himself to what he sees as the desire of the diplomatic Master and to follow his law. Going out with Annette appears to him as a way to focus on his career after having recently ended his stormy relationship with Nicolette. Hence, his desire for the Ambassador’s young daughter is not primarily sexual, as opposed to the desire he previously has expressed for Nicolette or Jill (a British model he meets at a New Year’s Eve party for diplomats in Paris). Instead it

43 Ibid. p.43.
44 For more on the, as Žižek calls it, inherent transgression of ideology see The Plague of Fantasies, pp.25-36 and The Metastases of Enjoyment, pp.54-85. Remember here also the example often evoked by Žižek about the father who tells his son not to get involved with girls. The truth of that statement is, however, that the son should do it discretely, where his parents cannot see it.
47 Žižek, Less Than Nothing, p.689.
48 Brink, The Ambassador, p.49.
is purely professional, a way for him to live up to his symbolic identity, proving his skills as a diplomat by tying the necessary social bonds and showing, with his interest in the ‘right’ kind of woman, that his private life can be public. His earlier romantic relationships had, up until this point, all ended in disasters and according to Keyter this is mainly because of the women he meets are nothing but “tarts and teases”\textsuperscript{49}. But with Annette things are different. Although short, the relationship is no longer characterized by Keyter’s sexual frustration but by a certain “fascination” that eventually tips over in irritation. Already on their first night out she explicitly makes it clear to him that she will not marry anyone, especially not a diplomat, and despite Keyter’s attempts to change her mind she continues to resolutely dismiss him: “As soon as anything more intimate than a kiss was at stake, she became as vicious as a cornered ferret.”\textsuperscript{50} In a final attempt to “break her in”, to get her out of what he sees as her stubborn yet innocent dismissal of him, Keyter decides to take Annette to a shabby night club. Incidentally this is the same night club as his colleague Joubert takes him to when he first arrives in Paris (in order to introduce him to the true joys of life). But Annette’s reaction to Keyter’s attempt to break her in was not the one he intended. Instead, after an evening of impeccable grace at a greasy bar, she furiously ends the relationship with him. Keyter does, however, not react as we would suspect from a young man in love, for instance begging the girl to take him back. Instead all he can think about is how the breakup might affect his position within the Embassy:

\begin{quote}
We were silent all the way to the Embassy. I wanted to plead with her, to grasp her hands and beg her not to tell anybody about it. But I couldn’t. And at the same time I was furious about yet another failure.\textsuperscript{51}
\end{quote}

The issue for Keyter is never the girl or her potential desire, as he also points out regarding the possible risk of getting caught while gathering evidence on the relationship between Nicolette and the Ambassador: “If Nicolette found out about my activities, \textit{tant pis}. Confronted with the Ambassador, I would be down the drain.”\textsuperscript{52} Instead it is the impossibility of the Other’s desire that returns in the woman as symptom; the fact that he does not know who he is to his Master returns as his incapability of establishing a proper romantic relationship.

Keyter’s overzealous identification with the law of diplomacy, which, through the inconsistencies of the law, hystericalizes his discourse, is also what finally brings him to commit suicide. This is why his suicide is supposed to

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid. p.21.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid. p.50.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid. p.66.
be read through what Lacan calls a *passage à l’acte*. Instead of his constant ‘acting out’, trying to provoke Nicolette or Annette to show him what he is to them, that is, what he is reduced to an *objet a* (the relationship between his own barred subjectivity and the object which they desire in him) Keyter’s symbolic position has, at this point, been transformed through the return of the letter. The difference between an ‘acting out’ and a *passage à l’acte* is dependent on the position of *objet a*. In the former a subject acting out is always directed at his Master, an attempt, arising out of anxiety, to discern the Master’s desire and to know what it is that he wants from the subject. This is how Keyter acts throughout most of the novel, as even van Heerden notes when comparing the young man to himself: “Keyter was more impulsive, plagued by a restlessness which seemed to have no outlet.” But confronted with the returning letter Keyter simply admits defeat and asks the Ambassador not to pity him since he was only driven by greed and jealousy. What Keyter understands when reading the letter is, therefore, the answer to the question he continuously asked: his Master does not want to remove his colleagues, those who sin against his law by enjoying the transgression, but instead it is Keyter himself who needs to be eradicated. This revelation transforms his entire subjectivity: he does no longer search for the object of the Others desire, instead he becomes the *objet a*, the thing he needs to expel in order to restore the utopian community, a fantasy as symbolic fiction. The desire of the Law of the Other is, therefore, to get rid of those who are, like him, threatening this utopia by not being able to enjoy in the proper way.

3. The Discourse of the University and the Discourse of the Analyst – the Case of Ambassador Van Heerden

In the case of Stephen Keyter it was possible to analyze his ideology through a symptomatic reading of the hysterical discourse of the Master, explaining his numerous ‘acting outs’ against girlfriends and colleagues alike.

53 Lacan separates between *l’acte*, *le passage à l’acte*, and ‘acting out’ in an attempt to differentiate between the symbolical positions at stake. The act is always part of the chain of the signifier, it initiates a rupture after which the Subject finds another symbolic position in the form of an *après coup*. ‘Acting out’ arises out of anxiety, it is opposed to a *passage à l’acte*, since it is the subject that tries to show itself to the Other in order to find *objet a*. It tries to show something that it does not know, in hope of, at the end of this act, find it out. Attempted suicide is, however, always a *passage à l’acte*. It is a confrontation with desire and the Law and wherein the subject identifies with *objet a*, the object-cause of desire in regard to the Law of the Other. A *passage à l’acte* tries to expel this *objet a* from the scene. See Jacques Lacan *Le Séminaire livre X: L’angoisse*, (Paris: Seuil, 2004) see especially the seminar of the 23rd of January 1963. See also Marie Terral-Vidal, “L’acting out ou l’échappé sur la scène du monde”, *Figures de la psychanalyse*, no.19, 2010, pp.229-234

54 Brink, *The Ambassador*, p.97.
As a subject of diplomacy Keyter appears unable to cope with the fact that his Master is inconsistent, which is why he constantly tries to provoke the Master into showing his desire. When moving on to the second main character of the novel, Ambassador van Heerden, we might start off by noting his own distinction between Keyter and himself describing the former as more impulsive and restless. The move between the two characters is also signaled by a shift in the narrative perspective: instead of Keyter’s engaged and hysterical first person narration we get a distant and cynical narrator:

The Ambassador [Van Heerden] had on several occasions in the past made it clear, in no uncertain terms, that the Minister should rely more on his diplomatic advisers and less on his emotions.\textsuperscript{55}

If we return to the initial question posed when confronting Keyter regarding the Master of diplomacy it is obvious that there is a fundamental difference between how he and van Heerden relates to the Master of diplomacy. In opposition to Keyter’s constant questioning van Heerden does not seem to hold any illusions about the Master: he is well aware that his Master is impotent, but this cynical attitude does not seem to have any negative impact on his ability to perform his duties, rather the opposite:

The Ambassador showed no outward signs of either irritation or stress. He did all his work systematically, gave audience to all his visitors, calmed the nervousness of some and the belligerence of others. He had the advantage of thirty years’ experience in the Service, which enabled him to cut through superficialities to the essence of matters as he formulated his opinions.\textsuperscript{56}

Together, the shift in narrative perspective, the explicit denial of a Master, and the effectivity with which Ambassador van Heerden execute his function, all points to the fact that we find ourselves in a different form of intersubjective relationship and therefore in a different discourse. As a diplomat Ambassador van Heerden does not seem to be affected in any way by his task, instead he simply embodies the hidden machinery of diplomacy but without being fully integrated into it. In other words: what is at stake here is a shift from the Master’s discourse, one of explicit domination (the big Other represents the subject for the chain of signifiers), to the University discourse, wherein domination remains hidden and knowledge occupies the position of actor working on objet a in order to extract value.\textsuperscript{57} As for instance Geoff Boucher noticed,

\textsuperscript{55} Brink, \textit{The Ambassador}, p.82.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{57} Lacan, \textit{The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII}, pp.174-179. See also for instance Žižek, “Four Discourses, Four Subjects” pp.74-80, and Zupančič, “When Surplus Enjoyment Meets Surplus Value”, pp.169-170 especially her reading of Lacan’s University discourse as the discourse of capitalism in which waste counts, where the possibility to incorporate surplus value (this waste of labor) is turned into its principal goal.
the shift occurring between these two discourses is possible to explain as one between the Master and the Bureaucrat. This new bureaucratic rationality (S₂) born according to Lacan at a specific historical point in time, functioning as the realization of the discourse of the University, is important in order to provide ideology with a performative of interpellation. The hailing of a subject, to use Althusser’s terminology, is not any longer, as within the classic discourse of the Master, performed by an explicit Master (the subject is no longer slave of or subject to a king, a prince, or some other feudal lord) but by a hidden and potentially ideal Master identical to the speaker himself. We can see the perfect example of this discourse at work in the meeting that the Ambassador organizes with the French Minister of Foreign Affairs in order to secure France’s aid in the UN to hinder countries to intervene in the ongoing strikes in South Africa:

[...] the Ambassador offered, in his inimitable way, an exposé both clear in outline and crisp in detail of the delicate situation in his country within the context of Government policy, of race relations, of history and motives and goals. At the end of the interview there was no perceptible hint of any positive result. Except a thin smile round the Minister’s mouth and a cryptic goodbye: ‘I appreciate your explanation. I shall discuss it with my Government. If necessary, I’ll contact you again.’ But this in itself suggested a possibility of success, and the Ambassador knew exactly how to react to such nuances.

The Ambassador provides the Minister with a seemingly objective account of the so called situation in South Africa, but hidden beneath this exposé is nevertheless a concealed Master; the implicit goal of securing the aid of France. This is a main characteristic of the University discourse wherein the truth of its apparent lack of interest is the necessary performative act of the hidden S₁ inaugurating the discourse. In other words: there can be no objective account of the situation without the Master creating the diplomatic space in which it can occur. An interesting point to notice here, strengthening this understanding of the Ambassador’s intersubjective position, is the Minister’s faint smile and cryptic goodbye. The difference between the Ambassador and Keyter here becomes obvious: instead of Keyter’s hysteric questioning of every possible ambiguity (does Nicolette want him to join her in the bath?) the Ambassador finds no difficulties in subjecting even the slightest hint of a smile or an unusual way to phrase a goodbye to a certain meaning, that is to

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59 Lacan writes, in The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII, p.63: “The myth of the ideal I, of the I that masters, of the I whereby at least something is identical to itself, namely the speaker, is very precisely what the university discourse is unable to eliminate from the place in which its truth is found.”
60 Brink, The Ambassador, p.98.
interpret it, since he “knew exactly how to react to such nuances.” The signifying chain (S2) allows the Ambassador, the self-effacing manipulator of this knowledge, to incorporate anything into the diplomatic system, forcing it to undergo signification in order to turn into meaning and value (the smile tells him that he has succeeded in his task). The change of discourse can at first seem peculiar since it might be expected that the art of representing a Master abroad also would be part of the Master’s discourse, treating the Ambassador as an extension of the Master’s voice and body. The discourse of the University is simply not as self-evidently diplomatic. But a look at how and why Lacan formulated this discourse might provide us with the necessary clues. When introducing the theory of the four discourses in the aftermath of May 68 Lacan pointed out that the University discourse (which he initially was hesitant to name) is one “that is highly relevant today”\textsuperscript{61} and as many Lacanians have noted since, this discourse was a way for him to explain what he saw as the protesters call for a new Master: they did not really strive for freedom, instead the hysteric wants to be the Master of the Master, i.e. the true Master. The discourse of the University is, therefore, Lacan’s attempt to understand the intersubjective structure of modernity with its decline of overt Masters and its simultaneous failure to produce any significant change. The need forcing him to formulate it also stands for, as Lacan points out, the return of psychoanalysis in politics.\textsuperscript{62} Taking as our point of departure the thesis that diplomacy is a concept invented by modernity as a practice aimed at regulating trade (i.e. the flow of capital), van Heerden’s role as an actor in the discourse of the University becomes more understandable since the fundamental problem for any discourse is the question of jouissance or surplus-enjoyment explicitly modeled on Marx’s theory of surplus-value. Thus the University discourse, and diplomacy as one of the fields in which it is practiced, becomes not only the discourse synonymous with what we might call late-modernity but also with capitalism.\textsuperscript{63} The difference between Keyter’s discourse of the Master and van Heerden’s discourse of the University therefore lies in how they relate to jouissance: the subject in the former, as noted by for instance Zupančič, is always confronted with jouissance as original loss or waste coming out of the inherent split that overthrows the position of Master (captured for instance in

\textsuperscript{63} Lacan, 	extit{The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII}, pp.175-17. See also Zupančič, “When Surplus Enjoyment Meets Surplus Value”, p.155. Here we should not that there is a difference between the discourse of capitalism and what Lacan later terms the discourse of the capitalist. This idea is never fully developed by Lacan and we will therefore leave it to the side here, see instead the critique against Žižek from Levy R. Bryant in “Žižek’s New Universe of Discourse: Politics and the Discourse of the Capitalist” and the discussion on this concept by Samo Tomšič in “Psychoanalysis, Capitalism, and Critique of Political Economy: Toward a Marxist Lacan”, in ed. S. Tomšič & A. Zevnik, 	extit{Jacques Lacan: Between Psychoanalysis and Politics}, (New York: Routledge, 2016), pp.156-162.
Keyter’s problematic relationship to women) to which the subject reacts by either constructing a fantasy or through hysterical questioning. And although a subject caught in the University discourse also might be plagued by a hysterical questioning, such as the medical subject confronting the physician as if he or she were a real Master capable of producing an unambiguous diagnosis, it does not arise in relation to jouissance.\(^{64}\) In the discourse of the University the place of jouissance is instead that of the other, the objet a on which S\(_2\) works in order to create value, that is as an object for consumption produced for the market. What remains hidden here is, as mentioned, the inaugurating and performative act of the Master and the remainder in form of the split subject. We must, of course, tread lightly since, as Žižek notes, the subject produced “is not simply the subjectivity that arises as the result of the disciplinary application of knowledge-power, but its remainder, that which eludes the grasp of knowledge-power.”\(^{65}\) Alenka Zupančič describes this subjectivity as follows:

Yet what at the same time drops out below [as production in the mathème] is precisely a pure negativity: the death drive as incarnated in the subject who is in no way the master of knowledge and value accumulated in this discourse, and even less the master of enjoyment, but who is their fall-off, excrement, the refuse of his or her own (ideological) value, refuse of the very value so generously attributed to the subject in this discourse (I am referring of course to the ideological celebration of free subjectivity).\(^{66}\)

Instead of a hysterical subject confronted with the question of the desire of the Other, the objet a, the discourse of the University produces an alienated subject, the free-floating and every-changing multiplicity of identities hailed in modern society.\(^{67}\) The same sense of alienation that Marx elaborated on in his Paris manuscripts therefore also plagues the work of the Ambassador:

It was all remote, transformed into language, codes, officialese. Everything had to be accepted in good faith, taken for granted; his whole life depended on some magic if: the assumption of a Government, a Head Office in Pretoria, thousands of kilometres away. As if he were some toy operated by remote control. […] what was it all about?\(^{68}\)

The only possibility for van Heerden to battle this feeling of purposelessness and futility seems to be by giving way to the material processes of the signifying chain:


\(^{65}\) Žižek, “Four Discourses, Four Subjects”, p.78.


\(^{67}\) See Žižek, “Four Discourses, Four Subjects”, p.78 where he exemplifies this remainder with the alienated laborer as well as with the hysterical medial subject.

\(^{68}\) Brink, The Ambassador, p.139.
Nothing could be left to chance. And in spite of the deep sense of futility he had to overcome – there seemed to be so little chance of success – he was conscious of a feeling of power, of being, somehow indispensable. A kind of passion, dark and muted, channeled into argument after argument, paragraph after paragraph.  

So, on the one hand the Ambassador knows very well that this Master is impotent (“He wasn’t thinking about his country as he sat there working”, but on the other he nevertheless acts as if he believes that the Master is potent (“Each word that took shape in black letters on the white paper under his hand was a small creative act against meaninglessness.”). This is the fetishistic logic through which ideology works in the discourse of the University, allowing for the subject to deal with the alienation arising from the split subjectivity that is the remainder of this discourse. Following the logic of fantasy within the Master’s discourse, a fantasy in the discourse of the University is not aimed at regulating the relationship between $ and $ but rather between $ and its remainder, $? As we saw, the goal of the fantasy of the Master is to account for his failure without making the utopia impossible, something which is often achieved by locating the failure in the foreign intruder. In other words, the fantasy is necessary to explain how the relationship between $ and objet a should be organized and why it is constantly failing. This would mean that a fantasy of the University discourse should account for the failure of the S to completely include jouissance in the chain of signifiers (a failure producing the split subject) by explaining both how the relationship between Master and barred subject should be organized, and why it is failing. But as already pointed out this duality, fantasy as symbolic fiction and as spectral apparition, is no longer found on the level of explicit speech, but rather in the gap between material practice and official doctrine. In the material practices the subject supposed to believe must return as a ghost haunting the official cynical doctrine in which belief is explicitly renounced. Žižek writes:

Cynical reason is no longer naïve, but is a paradox of an enlightened false consciousness: one knows the falsehood very well, one is well aware of a particular interest hidden behind an ideological universality, but still one does not renounce it.

On the one hand we have, on the explicit level, the Ambassador’s knowledge of the falsehood: there is no perfect diplomatic Master and it cannot express a coherent desire. Instead it is up to the Ambassador himself to

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69 Ibid. p.83.
70 Ibid.
71 This is why Žižek usually defines anti-Semitism as the zero-level of ideology, wherein the Jew takes on the position of objet a, the thing that disturbed the formerly harmonious society, see for instance The Sublime Object of Ideology, pp.48-50.
formulate this desire for it. But nevertheless he kneels down as if he believed, that is, he continues to fulfill his duties as if there were a subject who actually believed in it. The Ambassador could be read as expressing this split between knowledge and belief in a comparison between the diplomat and the religious fanatic:

The system itself operated and existed only to the extent in which it was remote, invisible. It was present only in its absence – like God, he thought, in the mind of a good Christian who might commit the most atrocious acts in the pious conviction that it was sanctioned by a Being whose existence was, per definition, unprovable.\footnote{Brink, \textit{The Ambassador}, p.139.}

The mistake of the Ambassador is, of course, that he gives priority to the unprovable belief in an invisible being when the proper way is to see the atrocious act as the foundation making both the belief and the doubt possible. Not only is the believer a spectral apparition rising up as the après-coup of the act, explaining that such a heinous act could only be rationalized by a fundamentalist belief, but so is also the “enlightened false consciousness”, the position claiming to take a distance, grounded in knowledge, from such acts. The subject supposed to believe needs to be there in order for the fantasy to account for the remainder of the split between knowledge and jouissance, the split subject.

However, at one point in the novel the Ambassador’s daily emergence in fantasy is broken by the intrusion of Nicolette, knocking on his office door during a stormy autumn night. At first he treats her as simply a minor nuisance, an “incongruous presence in his important world.”\footnote{Ibid. p.85.} Nevertheless, when she tells him that the boyfriend that kicked her out from his apartment was his own subordinate Stephen Keyter, the Ambassador decides to offer her to drive her home in his car rather than paying for her taxi:

‘I see. His voice was still calm and unwavering, but his next words revealed the change inside him: ‘If you’ll wait here in the reading room I’ll get the car.’\footnote{Ibid. p.85.}

As soon as they get into the car something about the young girl starts to incite his interest: “There was something about her which touched almost forgotten memories in him?”\footnote{Ibid. p.86.} but still he is not able to discern from where these memories originates. He drives her home, trying to understand why these thoughts are coming back to him, and this feeling of uncertainty remains long after he leaves the girl on her doorstep:

\footnote{\textit{\footnotemark[73]} \footnotemark[74] \footnotemark[75] \footnotemark[76].}
And yet there was a faint echo lingering in his mind, an ancient memory he couldn’t trace. And all the time this feeling persisted that she was not really a stranger, although he didn’t even know her name.77

Nicolette seems to carry with her some truth about himself that he cannot decipher, something that the Ambassador cannot incorporate into his system of knowledge.78 As soon as this faint echo disturbs his emergence into fantasy his reaction reveals the connection to the University discourse: he immediately attempts to subject her to a meaning (“an unconscious gesture, a little curl at the corner of her mouth, something indeterminable.”79). However, this “something indeterminable” that awakens his interest is also the thing which keeps him from totally incorporating her into his system of knowledge. It is not until he finally remembers an old girlfriend named Gillian that he believes that he has found the thing arousing his interest. But still, even this realization is infected by a certain uncertainty: “And now that he’d found it, he couldn’t understand what resemblance there was between her and this night’s stranger. Gillian had been dark. Gillian had been shorter.”80

Nicolette’s intrusion therefore signals a shift in the discourse of the Ambassador, not because he is interested in her, but rather what the failure to interpret her, turning her as an objet a into value, tells him about himself.81 At their second meeting Nicolette arrives at his office to ask for money. Initially he refuses her, but very quickly he gives in and hands her 100 Francs before, once again, pointing out his own inability to incorporate her desire into the signifying chain: “Hopefully, he thought wryly, the Government would never instruct him to enter into negotiations with miss Nicolette Alford.”82 The shift occurring here is, therefore, one between the discourse of the University and that of the Analyst. When Nicolette takes on the function of objet a, inciting his desire and therefore hystericizing his discourse,83 The Ambassador gets increasingly troubled by the anxiety she incites in him, and he keeps trying to

77 Ibid. pp.90-91.
78 This is related to Lacan’s point regarding putting S2 in the position of agent in the University discourse, it is not a knowledge of everything [savoir de tout] but all-knowing [tout-savoir], that is, there is nothing that could not be included into the signifying chain, see The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII, p.31.
79 Brink, The Ambassador, p.86.
80 Ibid. p.91.
81 This is why we should avoid a reading of The Ambassador as treating the alienation created This is the interpretation of The Ambassador offered by Costas M. Constantinou in the introduction to his On Diplomacy, p.xi, claiming that the Ambassador, through the affair he is “seduced into” by a promiscuous young woman”, realizes how “he is an other” and that he is “regimented by protocol” from this bureaucratic machine. It is also this mistake that forces Constantinou to resort to vaguely religious terms in order to explain why the Ambassador always returns to work: “a mysterious sense of duty leads him back to the embassy, seats him at the ambassadorial desk to complete – yet again – the diplomatic business of the day.”
82 Brink, The Ambassador, p.105.
find excuses to see her, without ever crossing the border of making their relationship physical, which is why he does not even consider that Keyter, seemingly by chance finding him in a café close to her apartment, might know something about the Ambassador’s rendez-vous with Nicolette.

The arrival of the letter from the department therefore comes as a shock to the Ambassador, not only because he thought he kept his meetings with Nicolette a secret but also because he tells himself that he has not done anything wrong. Nevertheless the arrival of the letter sparks the return of the troubles of alienation which their meetings seemed to keep at bay. But now, the thought of the young girl presents itself as the only possible way out:

But tonight’s agony was more subtle, worse than ever before: the discovery that one can be satisfied with a life like his – the acquiescence in a pattern, the acceptance of a system, the resignation to a predestined existence. In reality he had long ago ceased to be, not only for himself, but for his Minister, his Government, his country. […] But what could he do about it? Reject the system? – he had nothing else! It was very late. He had to go back to Nicolette. Finding her had become even more urgent than before. It was she who, that first night, had stepped from the outer darkness into his life to set everything in motion.84

The Ambassador reads the return of the letter as fate, the third interpretation of Lacan’s saying elaborated by Žižek. The reason for her intrusion into his life finally becomes clear to him, which explains the sense of urgency which drives him to look for her: she was there to free him from the antagonizing alienation that haunted his Ambassadorial life, it is only through taking possession of her that his own intersubjective position can be displaced. This is another reason why Nicolette can be seen as introducing the Ambassador to the Analyst’s discourse, taking on the function of an objet a confronting the Ambassador with his own desire. And just as the analyst she must, in the right time, disappear from the scene in order to illustrate that the objet a only covers over a void. Hence, when the letter arrives from the department with news of Keyter’s report Nicolette takes on the function of a vanishing mediator, revealing to the Ambassador that the place of the objet a really is empty. But van Heerden does not realize this, instead, caught by an even stronger agony than before, refuses to provide the answer that the letter demands and instead immediately leaves his office to search for her. Hence, the problem is that the new Master necessarily produced by the Analyst discourse turns the Ambassador’s discourse into perversion.85 As Žižek notes apropos Hegel, the Analyst discourse is not stable in comparison to for instance the discourses of the Master or the University, instead the possibility for it emerges in the dialectical movement between different discourses.86 As such it is deeply reliant on

84 Brink, The Ambassador, pp.140-141
86 See for instance Žižek, For They Know Not What They Do, p.263.
*Kairos*, a moment of an opening wherein, to use the words of Protagoras brought to life through the mouth of Socrates, it is possible “to go from a lesser to a better state”. But why is this change possible to define as perverted? The pervert, as Lacan noted already in his eight seminar, have the tendency to organize its fantasy as the upper part of the discourse of the Analyst (*a ◊ $*) and in the eleventh seminar Lacan said the following apropos perversion:

Strictly speaking, it is an inverted effect of the fantasy. It is the subject who determines himself as object, in his encounter with the division of subjectivity. I will show you […] that the subject assuming this role of the object is precisely what sustains the reality of the situation of what is called the sado-masochistic drive, and which is only a single point, in the masochistic situation itself. It is insofar as the subject makes himself the object of another will that the sado-masochistic drive not only closes up, but constitutes itself.87

The pervert is therefore related to the Master discourse and the Analyst discourse, in the first sense through inversion of the fantasy, in the other as a fantasy which makes the impossible linking of *objet a* and the barred subject possible. In one sense the Ambassador, when confronted with the letter seems to realize not only that the position of the Master is empty, but that his life has been caught up in a fetishized ideology:

Keep wailing, he thought. Keep moving your arms; talk aloud if you must. He was playing a part; that of a voyager; an ambassador, delegated from death into this foreign country, life – and all the time he was aware that he was playing.88

He is aware that he simply acts as if there was a Master, without actually believing in his existence, and that this specific constitution is not only aiding the current system but might even be a necessity for its continuation. Finally he ask himself what he should do with this knowledge:

Reject the system? – he had nothing else! It was very late. He had to go back to Nicolette.89

This is the point at which he makes himself into the object of the Other, he fully assumes a perverted discourse as “a subject identifying itself as the object of *jouissance*.”90 As we have seen already with Keyter, *jouissance* is enjoyment that goes against life and that endures beyond the pleasure principle, in other words: it drives the subject to continue, to repeat even the most counterproductive behavior, since the subject finds pleasure in pain. The Ambassador, on the other hand, now choses the path he so perfectly described with regards

89 Ibid, p.141.
to a religious extremist. His new God, the one who permits everything, is the superego underside of the diplomatic Law, that injunction that Keyter found so unbearable. Therefore he returns to Nicolette’s apartment, waits for her, and then forces himself onto her.

Sometimes perversion has been hailed as a political strategy of subversion: that the subject of perversion through action undermines the present system and opens up for other possible ways of being. This perspective does, however, overlook the important functioning of super-ego law in the logic of the pervert. It is this injunction to transgress the Law that appears in the Minister’s letter to Van Heerden apropos the investigation. In it we find, besides the Minister’s openly stated demand to Van Heerden urging him to write an explanation, an implicit underside:

He [the Minister] would like to emphasize that the Department was regarding the conduct of the Third Secretary in extremely serious light; and it could be anticipated that as soon as the Ambassador’s expected commentary was received immediate steps would be taken accordingly.

Between the lines it is simple to read the super-ego injunction from the Master: Enjoy! The problem in the eyes of the Department is not the accusation directed against the Ambassador in the report, nor is the Department interested in what the Ambassador’s commentary actually will say (or what really happened). The Ambassador is free to enjoy whatever it is that he enjoys, without any restrictions (remember that the Master of the Law urges the subject to enjoy as little as possible), as long as he follows the orders of the Department. Hence, it is because of this letter that the Ambassador can think that he knows what it is in him that the Other desire, what they see as his agalma, and which therefore turns him into a pervert. The most obvious illustration of this is how, as the Ambassador returns to his office, now calm and pleased with himself after having first forced himself on Nicolette and later, overcome with shame for his horrible acts, being comforted by her, the novel once again alters the narrator’s point of view: from the distant narrator the novel returns to the engaged first-person perspective. The focus is still on the Ambassador, but not as a political agent but as a subject falling in love, fascinated with every single detail of the young woman. Everything from the way she talks

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91 In the quote the Ambassador shows himself to be a rather good Lacanian analyst following Lacan’s reversal of the old motto that if God is dead everything is permitted. The true version is rather, according to Lacan, that if God is dead, nothing is permitted. It is only under the sign of a Master that people can commit the most horrifying acts. It should also be pointed out that the logic of the religious extremist is that of the pervert, of a Subject who is imagining itself as the objet a, see Žižek, How to read Lacan, pp.105-120.

92 Brink, The Ambassador, p.132.

93 Superego is, in this sense, on the side of S2, not S1, see Ronan de Calan & Raoul Moati, Žižek: Marxisme et psychanalyse, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2012), pp.57-58
and acts to the scent of her shampoo or how she examines her nails is scrutinized by him. He is overcome with feelings of jealousy, ecstasy, and panic as she takes him through every aspect of the Parisian life: bars, museums, restaurants, parks, night clubs, and cathedrals. But the most important feeling for the Ambassador is one of having obtained the (her) freedom that he previously had found so provocative:

Was it really necessary to spend a brief night with a girl in an uncomfortable little bed in order to come to this? But the how and why were scarcely relevant. What mattered was the simple fact. And how elementary it really was! Her sort of life had always been there, undetected, on the periphery of my own. The only difference was that, now, I had discovered it, I’d become aware of that disturbing freedom surrounding the predictability of my own routine. No; even that was simplifying the issue. Of course I’d ‘known’ about such freedoms: it was just that I’d refused to acknowledge them as options for myself.  

The Ambassador now believes that he has given way to freedom and that he, through being with Nicolette, might retain a part of an authentic life outside the narrow and strict life at the Embassy. This second, free, life is something that takes place on the side while the life at the Embassy goes on as normal: “[B]ecause no one, not even myself, seemed to find anything strange in it [the new relationship] everything in the office has gradually returned to routine.” The Ambassador was surprised by this, especially the fact that neither Keyter, nor his wife and daughter, now returned from Italy, seem affected by the events. There is, as he concludes, “no essential, obvious change in my routine, much to my own surprise. (Why should it surprise me?)” But in one sense the Ambassador notices a change. By enjoying this other life, a life outside the Embassy, his former life seems even more devoid of meaning. But still he must “handle its affaires” and represent the country that he belongs to, even though it does not any longer “form part of my world.”

Lacan often returns to two aspects concerning jouissance: primarily that it functions through repetition and as such it always produces a failure, and secondly that it is linked to the surplus constructed in every attempt to link the inner and the other world, in other words, the Symbolic and the Real. And just as Keyter is plagued by the repeated failure with women, the Ambassador continuously repeats his search for Nicolette as soon as his symbolic universe threatens to collapse. The failure of his repetition is connected to the impossibility to ever reproduce the symbolic position which he experienced that first night he spent in her bed. In other words: what is impossible (or what the failure stands for) is pure repetition itself. When struck by nervous doubt about

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95 Ibid. p.181.
96 Ibid.
97 Ibid. p.183.
who he is for the Other, usually by provoking Nicolette, he becomes destined to end the night in her little apartment in an attempt to repeat their first night together. Without such a repetition it would be impossible for the Ambassador to withhold the thing that keeps his ideology working: that little piece of himself that he himself thinks eludes ideology, his “disturbing freedom”99. As Žižek pointed out already in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* this point of “that which escapes ideology”, the inner or true self that always pertains, is not the true self of the subject but the kernel that upholds the whole system. This is why it is of such importance to van Heerden to keep his freedom (and to keep Nicolette that goes with it): he is ready to lose everything for it, his wife and daughter (who moves back to South Africa), his job (he thinks that he still might get fired if the Department finds out), only if he can keep his little piece of freedom. Therefore the repetition in Van Heerden’s life is the return of the discourse of University, which is why he is always able to return to work, even when his young protégé committed suicide and his young lover disappears without a trace.

### 4. The Four Discourses of *The Ambassador*

The question that remains to be answered is the one regarding what we might learn from reading André Brink’s *The Ambassador* regarding the possible subjective position within diplomacy. The point of this analysis has not been to give a final answer about what diplomacy is, but rather, following Lacan’s reading of *The Purloined Letter*, through the help of literature, capture possible subjective formations in relation to the signifier known as diplomacy. Primarily we should point out a fundamental difference between the ideologies at work in the two male protagonists of the book: not only that Keyter and van Heerden was possible to read through two different dialectical movements between two discourses (for Keyter Master and Hysteric, for van Heerden University and Analyst) but also that these ideologies adhered to two distinct logics. The truth of Keyter’s hysterical discourse was his symptom, the thing that provoked him to question the consistency of his diplomatic Master, while the truth of van Heerden was possible to find in his fetishized disavowal of this same Master. Following Žižek’s distinction between ideology as in-itself, for-itself, and in-and-for-itself, it is possible to claim that the fact that Keyter’s discourse is plagued by its symptom defines it as ideology in-itself, while the logic of disavowal characterizing van Heerden constitutes his discourse as an ideology in-and-for-itself. Another central aspect bringing them both together is the perverted dislocation they both undergo, in the former case ending in a suicide while the latter is enacted through the Ambassador’s relationship with the young Nicolette. What the perversions nevertheless signals is their role in

the return to the starting point as an impossible repetition. Keyter’s suicide, this *passage à l’acte*, tells us about his commitment to the explicit law of diplomacy which reintroduces a Master, this time perverted, showing its true message in the returning letter: The threat against the law of diplomacy comes from Keyter himself, not the Ambassador or any of his other incompetent colleagues. He was all along the objet a his diplomatic Master attempted to repress. For van Heerden the perverted dislocation brings him back into the discourse of the University, but this return was only made possible through the little piece of himself that remains free in and through his relationship with Nicolette. Each of these two characters therefore pertains to a certain discourse (Master and University) organizing their intersubjective position, but when these structures are disturbed (through hysteria or alienation) a dialectical transformation is initiated. This dialectical move does, however, end for both these characters in a displacing repetition through the return of the letter. In order for us to connect this to the signifier of diplomacy, it is important to initially elaborate on some of the theoretical grounds for this understanding.

Žižek has for a long time claimed that the current pervasiveness of cynical distance and fetishism (in opposition to an idea of ideology as engagement) still needs to be considered as a form of ideology because of the inherent split in knowledge. He writes: “Knowledge was not –cannot be – really subjectively assumed, it did not occupy the place of truth (as in Lacan’s formula of the analyst’s discourse).”100 Hence, the Analyst’s discourse is the only one where knowledge (S2) is found in the position of truth, that is, when knowledge is put into question – something which, as Lacan points out, leads to disastrous consequences for the subject.101 This is the reason why the discourse of the Analyst can have such a profound impact on the subject, but placing knowledge in the hidden position of truth is also the reason why this discourse is so unstable, why it always produces a new Master. Žižek’s point here is that the relative stability of the other discourses is due to how they organize the inherent split of knowledge through a certain ideology.102 In the Master’s discourse, the split of knowledge appears in the guise of the radical negativity of the subject, the Master’s knowledge is not complete since the remainder, objet a, cannot be completely integrated into how the subject is represented in the signifying chain. This is the point where belief emerges as a way to cover over the non-All of knowledge, the fact that the subject cannot fully know forces it to belief, a belief which in the Master’s discourse takes

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100 Žižek, *Absolute Recoil*, p.52.
102 Mannoni writes: “Because, the ‘*but nevertheless*’ is not unconscious. It explains itself through desire or fantasy which act as from a distance, and it is truly here that we finally has to arrive. But not directly, and this does not allow for any simplification.”, *Clefs pour l’Imaginaire ou; l’Autre Scène*, p.13.
on the form of a fantasy. In fetishized ideology this relationship between the split in knowledge and the belief that covers it over is, however, of a different nature. What separates contemporary society from all previous once, wherein the discourse of modernity par excellence is the discourse of University, is that belief can be externalized, which allows for the subject to fetishize knowledge. In other words, ideology in the late-capitalist society needs what Žižek calls a subject supposed to believe. But if the Master’s discourse was plagued by the question of the subject’s relationship to its objet a, meaning that the hystericizing split appears as a problem of the Master, the split in the University discourse appears to be in knowledge itself (its incapability to incorporate the radical negativity that is the subject into the chain of signifiers). Hence, the only way to deal with this split is by externalizing it since the subject experiences this lack in the value produced by the work of knowledge, a radical negativity resists beyond it, the subject reduced to a void. Here we should point out that Mannoni distinguishes between three levels of disavowal, but only refers to the final as fetishistic. As Žižek notes, the first level, “normal” disavowal, is related to the every-day functioning of the symbolic order separating the actual thing from its symbolic position: this is a disavowal that Keyter is incapable of going through since he cannot establish a distance between the miserable human being, full of flaws, incapable of being one with its symbolic mandate, and its position as ambassador. For Keyter these two have to coincide. Secondly we have the “manipulative” disavowal of “falling into one’s own trap”: this is the disavowal that the Ambassador catches himself in, of initially consciously manipulating a naïve other before regressing into the same imaginary identification with true belief. Here it is important to remember how Mannoni’s elaboration on disavowal is elaborated against the backdrop of an imaginary, direct identification illustrated by the small child’s pure belief, la croyance infantile. When caught in this second level of disavowal the Ambassador first organizes a ritual in which other, to him, naïve believers are caught, but what he realizes, after being confronted with the letter, is that he also believes in them (we could imagine the same scene taking place in Poe’s The Purloined Letter when the Minister opens the letter Dupin left in his apartment, realizing he now is in the position previously

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103 An illustrative example of this is how Žižek characterizes the transformation that takes place between Judaism and Christianity: the former is simply the religion of anxiety, of pure Che Vuoi? while Christianity covers over this void in the Other by the love that God shows through letting his son die on the cross. Only by believing in Jesus Christ can we be sure that the Other loves us, i.e. that we know what the Other desires in us, see Žižek, The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003), pp.122-125.

104 See for instance Žižek, The Sublime Object of Ideology, pp.xxi-xxii. See also Calan & Moati, Žižek, p.73.

105 This is his inversion of Lacan’s sujet supposé savoir, the subject supposed to know, see for instance The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI, pp.224-227.

106 See also Chapter III.2.


taken by the Queen). Finally we have fetishistic disavowal proper, explained as followed by Žižek:

The third mode brings the paradox to its extreme: there is knowledge of how things really stand, this knowledge is assumed with no distance or disavowal, and then there is the fetish-object, its mute presence totally external to the subject’s knowledge. As such, a fetish can play the very constructive role of allowing us to cope with the harsh reality: fetishists are not dreamers lost in their private worlds, they are thoroughly ‘realists’, able to accept the way things effectively are – since they have their fetish to which they can cling in order to cancel the full impact of reality.\(^{109}\)

Hence, the precise point when van Heerden’s ideology becomes fetishistic is also the one when he becomes perverted: only when he fully accepts the risk of losing everything, his title, his family, even Nicolette, fully accepting the harsh reality, is he truly stuck in fetishistic ideology since what he nevertheless believes is that he possesses a little piece of freedom within himself that the system never could take away. Mannoni writes:

> [W]hat we should retain from this is that the establishment of a fetish evacuates the problem of belief, magic or not, at least in the terms we have posed it in: the fetishist does not seek any credulity, for him, the others are ignorant and he leaves them there. It is no longer about making believe, and in the same stroke it is no longer about belief… We can see clearly that the place of credulity, of the other, is now occupied by the fetish itself. If he loses it the loss produces confusion […].\(^{110}\)

What Mannoni is describing is the externalization of belief that grounds ideology in the University discourse, wherein the place of the other is the place of fetish (the objet a in the upper right position). This externalized belief is not necessarily conscious – remember Marx’s analysis of commodity-fetishism in which the bourgeois subject thinks he knows that money is just an expression of social relations while his actions nevertheless reveal a belief in money as an object magically endowed with value – but when the subject enjoys the objet a as the other it can only be done through knowledge, that is, through the same discourse that it claims to have escaped. To illustrate let us point to another example from Marx invoked by Samo Tomšič when discussing the University discourse. The difference between it and the Master’s discourse can be captured by the difference between the miser and the capitalist:

> The miser’s lust for money is still his private obsession, whereas the capitalist embodies the social externalization of the drive for profit, and the drive for generalized social indebteding, an imperative that is imposed on all and places

\(^{109}\) Žižek, *Disparities*, pp.174-175.

\(^{110}\) Mannoni, *Clefs pour l’Imaginaire ou; l’Autre Scène*, p.32. This quote also appears in part in Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do*, p.249.
everyone in the object position (a commodity that is said to be equal to all other commodities). The difference between the premodern miser and the modern capitalist is this that the latter manages to externalize the unsatisfiable drive for enrichment, making it the central component of the capitalist social link.\textsuperscript{111}

The difference is the one between the Master’s fantasy, where the object of enjoyment is the remainder, which does not necessarily need to interfere with the Master’s representation of the subject, and what we might call the fantasy of the University discourse,\textsuperscript{112} where the fetishized object always, by necessity, is reintroduced into the system. And is this difference not also the fundamental difference between Keyter and van Heerden? Not that the former is in any way a miser, since his incapability is precisely to enjoy in private, but that he nevertheless is stuck in the impossibilities of the explicit law of diplomacy as it was formulated in the time of the French revolution. This is why the antagonism keeps returning to him in the form of symptoms stirring his anxious ‘acting outs’. He is unable to go through even the first level of disavowal which is why his naïve imaginary ideal, the ideal-ego, brakes down rather than integrates into the symbolic order. It is impossible for Keyter to confront castration. Van Heerden, on the other hand, has no problem of accepting the harsh reality, like the modern capitalist he can forsake anything to drive enrichment since the external belief on which it is based is always-already included in the system. He can, as the letter also implicitly states, enjoy as much as he wants, not due to the fact that his enjoyment cannot interfere with the process of the University discourse but rather because it was part of it all along.

\textsuperscript{111} Tomšič, “Psychoanalysis, Capitalism, and the Critique of Political Economy”, pp.154-155.
\textsuperscript{112} Jody Dean, in “Fascism, Stalinism and the Organization of Enjoyment”, p.37, points out that Žižek’s depiction of cynicism is related to the lower level of the discourse of the University. The move suggested here has already been suggested elsewhere in a more elaborate manor by Levi Bryant in “Žižek’s New Universe of Discourse: Politics and the Discourse of the Capitalist”, but then in the form of a critique of Žižek.
V. The Smudge on the Painting – The 
*Objet a* of Diplomatic Studies

The most famous representation of diplomacy in Western history is without a doubt Hans Holbein the Younger’s painting *The Ambassadors* completed in 1533. The reputation of the painting, which now can be seen at the National Gallery in London, is not only due to its painter – Holbein is regarded as one of the greatest renaissance portraitists and during his life he both illustrated the manuscripts of Erasmus and was awarded the honor of royal painter to Henry VIII – but also because of the mystery and uncertainty surrounding the depicted objects and the title.¹ Naturally, Holbein’s painting has enjoyed a great deal of attention from Diplomacy Studies, not only due to its title but also because it was painted during a period when modern diplomacy just had become a question of interest for the entire Western Europe.² The identities of the two men depicted in the painting has for a long time been a topic of discussion, but since the beginning of the twentieth century they are said to be the Bishop of Lavaux Georges de Selve and his friend Jean de Dinteville, Seigneur de Polisy and Bailli de Troyes. It is thought that they were portrayed by Holbein when being on a joint diplomatic mission to England. The two men are depicted standing on either side of a table filled with objects often assumed to represent both diplomacy in general and the specific interests of the two ambassadors. The most famous aspect of the painting is, however, the anamorphic skull which, when looked at straight on, is distorted into an indistinguishable smear on the forefront of the paining, only showing its true form when looked at from awry. Diplomacy scholars have, throughout history, attached very little significance to the skull – despite its central role in the painting as well as the academic discussion surrounding it – usually either completely neglecting it or simply pointing out that it is there as a *vanitas* or *memento mori*.³ So, what might this unwillingness to deal with the most central aspect of the most famous depiction of diplomacy, painted just after the perceived birth of this practice, tell us about the failures of diplomacy theory?

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Even the most thorough and in some sense also the most critical reading of *The Ambassadors* is performed by Costas M. Constantinou, but despite his efforts to interpret the painting he still pays very little attention to the skull, making him into a perfect representative for diplomacy theory as a whole. Despite references to Heidegger, Derrida, and in particular to Lacan, Constantinou chooses to focus on what he terms the double function of the painting: on the one hand, it needs a certain frame to enable us to see a so-called diplomatic culture in it (wherein the objects acquire a certain, diplomatic, meaning) but, on the other, as soon as this frame is adopted the painting itself works as a frame allowing us to see our perception of diplomatic culture. The issue when interpreting the painting is therefore, according to Constantinou, the artist’s intentions since the painting probably never were meant to portray the men as ambassadors, nor an understanding of diplomacy. Remember that diplomacy is not at this point distinguished from other related concepts such as politics or negotiation. Constantinou also points out that the title was given to the painting long after it was finished and neither Holbein nor its commissioner seem to have had anything to do with its christening. Despite this, the frame (used in the metaphorical as well as in the concrete sense) allows us to infuse the still life objects with a certain meaning and Constantinou illustrates how it is possible to perform a number of different interpretation once the diplomatic frame is adapted: the globe could be seen as representing the globalization of politics, The Order of St. Michael could be seen as alluding to the knights and nobility employed in the diplomatic services et cetera. All these possible readings are, as Constantinou emphasizes, not merely there as an effect of the perceived diplomatic frame established by the title, but they supposedly tell us something about how diplomacy in a larger sense is framed. His point here is that diplomacy emerges together with a theoretical frame limiting how we might perceive it:

The study of the Holbein panting in general and of its frame in particular stands for a theory of diplomacy. The conclusion it paints for us is that lack (the absence of diplomacy) forms the frame of theory required to trap the presence of diplomacy. It is a framed view, spatially bounded presence that in turn inaugurates and justifies a system of sovereign representations.

Hence, the aim of a diplomatic theory should, in Constantinou’s understanding, be to focus its efforts on the question of the frame itself, thereby questioning the very framing of diplomacy, the process by which “our gaze is trapped”. The use of the concept of gaze here is an explicit reference to Lacan’s reading of Holbein’s painting presented in the eleventh seminar under

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5 Ibid. p.16.
6 Ibid. p.17.
the heading of *anamorphosis*, focusing on the gaze as *objet a* (the French edition edited by Jacques-Alain Miller even has Holbein’s painting on the cover). Here Lacan works out the specific relationship between the gaze and castration, the real, and to the remnant of the real known as the *objet a*. Without acknowledging neither the function of the skull nor the negativity of castration Constantinou choses to describe the gaze as a positive element seeing something where there in fact is nothing. He writes: “the apprehension of a world is not a simple question of the perceiving eye, it always involves, rather, the ‘eye of desire,’ the eye that seeks the entity and establishes the identity”. Desire, in this understanding, is a desire which, in its quest for an object adds something to reality in order to reach an identity, and since it is, by this, simply blindly representing a world it also produces “the presence of its [diplomacy’s] perpetual absence.”

Two issues arises in Constantinou’s reading of Lacan and the painting. Primarily we should note the undisclosed idealism at work in his interpretation: where there is only absence (the real world) humans have the power to produce presence by the means of our concepts. Only through perception, which includes an ‘eye of desire’, can we establish meaning in a world which is nothing but a lack. Secondly, when Constantinou, after giving an account of every possible diplomatic interpretation of each of the objects in *The Ambassadors*, finally reaches the skull his symbolic universe seems to disintegrate: “What can this [the skull] mean? What did the artist intend?” He then continuous by asking thirteen questions, some directed at the painting, others concerning diplomacy, the intention of the painter, or the painting’s possible contemporary interpretation, before letting these questions, without even providing a preliminary answer, mark the end the section discussing this so called frame of diplomacy. Here it is obvious that Constantinou, in his reading of both the painting and of Lacan, effectively tries to avoid something which nevertheless disturbs his writing: this thing is quite literally the Lacanian *objet a*, the skull or the little piece of the Real. Žižek describes its logic as follows:

This is *objet a*: an entity that has no substantial consistency, which in itself is ‘nothing but confusion’, and which acquires a definite shape only when looked at from a standpoint slanted by the subject’s desires and fears – as such, as a mere ‘shadow of what it is not’. *Objet a* is the strange object that is nothing but the inscription of the subject itself in the field of objects, in the guise of a blotch that takes shape only when part of this field is anamorphically distorted by the subjects desire. Let us not forget that the most famous anamorphosis in the

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9 Ibid. p.20.
10 Ibid. p.15
history of painting, Holbein’s *Ambassadors*, concerns death: when we look from the proper lateral angle at the anamorphically extended blotch in the lower part of the painting, set amongst objects of human vanity, it reveals itself as a skull.¹¹

It is obvious that the skull, to Constantinou’s diplomatic gaze, still only present itself as nothing but confusion, and that he therefore fails to adopt the look from awry and through which the subject is faced with its own desire. His obsession with the frame enclosing the object to which our gaze is directed makes it impossible for him to see the point which is at the same time outside and in the center of the painting: death. We could therefore claim that Constantinou’s attempt to put diplomacy in the place of the skull, as the object-cause of desire which appears to our gaze, illustrates a more general truth within diplomatic studies. The fact that he effectively equates the skull with the immanent death of diplomacy and of the ambassadors (the “the ‘dead stare’ of these ‘emissaries of death’”¹²) points out a failure similar to that of Keyter: the inability to properly interpret the objet a and to handle its hysteri-cizing effects. But where has the object-cause of desire returned in the history of Diplomacy Studies?

1. Saving Diplomacy from the People

The impossibility to confront the objet a appears as something which returns, not only for Keyter and van Heerden in Brink’s *The Ambassador*, but also in scholarly works on diplomacy. But here a few questions remain: primarily we should ask at what point this failure emerges in order to illustrate any similarities in the failure of the diplomatic subject and the discipline of Diplomacy Studies, but we should also ask how this failure is rationalized, making it possible to describe the specific ideology at work in these texts. As we have seen, the time of the French revolution, the birthplace of the concept of diplomacy, established diplomacy as part of a critique of the same practice it gave birth to. Diplomacy was, in short, seen as a feudal remnant, secret, aristocratic, and unlawful, and therefore consequently at odds with the utopian dream of freedom, brotherhood, and equality formulated by the revolution. During the century following the French revolution diplomacy also passed through several comprehensive institutional transformations. Some of these changes were understood as more conservative, such as the birth of interstate organizations perceived as a return to an overarching authority regulating the interaction between states, first by introducing the practice of congress and later, after the end of the First World War, through the League of Nations and the United

Nations. Other transformations, such as the institutionalization of the diplomatic education and the process of nomination of diplomats as well as a more transparent mode of practice at the embassy were hailed as more progressive. Despite the many, and sometimes rapid, changes that the diplomatic corps went through during the nineteenth century the call for a new diplomacy were still voiced throughout the most part of the twentieth century, not only in the inter-war period, but also during the post-war era and the following Cold War. Stuck in between the disappointing reality, the failure to bring peace to Europe in the twentieth century, and the ideal of diplomacy as the only possible way to actually bring about an eternal peace, scholars of International Relations during the fifties and sixties seemed like they were up against an inevitable dilemma: either they had to accept that warfare was an inevitable part of the states-system, or they had to find another form of diplomacy capable of bringing a stable peace to a war-torn continent.

With the emergence of the Cold War, the theorists of diplomacy tried to counteract the obvious failures of diplomacy and the modern states-system with a call for a return (at least partial) to a more traditional, pre-revolutionary, diplomacy. This return was intended to counteract what was perceived as a devastating call for an open and democratic diplomacy focused on trade still echoing over the Western world. For someone like Hans Morgenthau the problem of pre- as well as post-war diplomacy was how it had forgotten the very foundation of its own existence: the power-struggle intrinsic to the anarchic nature of international politics. Others, such as Herbert Butterfield, claimed that diplomacy had fallen into the hands of populist politicians whose only aim was to please an increasingly vocal public. The issue, for both of them as well as the rest of their contemporaries, was in other words that diplomacy had forgotten it roots. But the conservative nature of what we here have termed traditional theory of diplomacy is present also in the very formulation of the problem. Quoting George F. Kennan on what he calls the failure of the diplomatic dialogue which brought about the First World War, Adam Watson writes:

‘It was borne in on me that what overwhelming extent the determining phenomena of the inter-war period [...] and indeed he Second World War itself, were the products of that first great holocaust [...] This I came to see the First World War as I think many reasonably thoughtful people have learned to see it, as the great seminal catastrophe of this century, the event which more than any others, excepting only perhaps the discovery of nuclear weaponry and the development of the population-environmental crisis, lay at the heart of the failure and decline of this Western civilization.’ That is how I also saw the tragic scene.  

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13 Watson, *Diplomacy*, p.10
Diplomacy, or rather the diplomatic dialogue, is here described as undermined by the failure of its most important defenders (the West) to uphold its values. The prosperity of “legalism and power-blindness”, “the absence of serious participation”, and “the grisly sides of the new totalitarianism” are presented as the root of the crisis not only of diplomacy, but of the entire Western civilization. This analysis also implicitly returns as Watson attempts to define diplomacy:

It [diplomacy] is an activity which even if often abused has a bias towards the resolution of conflicts. It is a function of the diplomatic dialogue to mitigate and civilize the differences between state, and if possible to reconcile them, without suppressing or ignoring them. Conflicts of interest are a major subject of diplomacy, which can function effectively only when the necessary level of understanding exists between the parties to the dialogue about the maintenance of the system as a whole and about the rules for the promotion of their separate interest within the system.14

His final words on the nature of diplomacy once again reveals the conservative tendency of traditional theory on diplomacy, highlighting not only how diplomacy has been distorted to serve other purposes than resolving conflicts (the innate tendency of diplomacy to create and preserve peace) but also how diplomacy is the only way to maintain a system which is always under the threat of being distorted by violence arising out of the particular interest of its members. Without diplomacy “[e]ach would have to stand alone against a more powerful and aggressive neighbour.”15

Following Žižek it is possible to claim that these ideas, in fact, capture the very nature of conservative ideology in the sense that it has a point, without it being the point. In Žižek’s analysis of the political thinking of Carl Schmitt he presents us with the following definition of modern conservatism:

[Mod]ern conservatism, even more than liberalism, assumes the lesson of the dissolution of the traditional set of values and/or authorities – there is no longer any positive content which could be presupposed as the universally accepted frame of reference. […] The paradox thus lies in the fact that the only way to oppose legal normative formalism is to revert to decisionist formalism – there is no way of escaping formalism within the horizon of modernity.16

Thus, the return sought after in modern conservatism is not that of a return to a specific content (a lost morality, doctrine or virtues) but to authority as such defined by decisionist formalism. What Žižek means, and the reason why the conservative seems to have a point, is the fact that, in this case, Schmitt succeeded in identifying the primary weakness of liberal normative thinking: the repressed act. What is forgotten in liberalism is the impossible task of

14 Ibid. p.20.
15 Ibid. p.22.
moving from the normative law to actual practice without the foundational act intervening in between. Let us take the prevalent myth of origin of diplomacy usually retold by diplomatic theorist as an example of the intrusion of such an act: since humans are social beings – that is, we come together to create groups, tribes, and societies – we are also necessarily interactional beings meaning that as soon as we have established a society it must, as an entity, interact with other, neighboring, tribes and peoples. Initially, as humans are still stuck in a natural state, these interactions are predominantly violent, but in the natural evolution of human society we are believed to eventually reach a historical stage in which our language and capability of rational thinking supposedly allows us to break out of this destructive circle of violence. Through this tale it is not only possible to pinpoint the conservative nature of diplomatic theory, but also why it is specific to late-modernity: in it, the invention of diplomacy is not understood as a thoroughly rational act (although it is based in our ability to think rationally) wherein a number of societies comes together in order to establish a normative law accepted and followed by all. Instead, diplomatic theory traditionally understands it as a radical act, as a point in history where one human society, or rather its leader, had the bravery and the power to make the radical decision to speak to rather than to kill their neighbor, and thus diplomacy was born. As Žižek shows, the problem of modernity is partially made up of the introduction of an impossible divide between the Master’s content and its form, precisely the same issue Keyter is dealing with in The Ambassador – deprived of the actual contents of the law all he is left with is its formal super-ego injunction. We can also see this problem returning in most of the traditional writing of diplomacy when discussing why diplomacy during the Cold War was in decline. Regarding the diminishing importance of diplomacy in international relations Hedley Bull writes:

Nicholson’s writings present the view that the decline of the Old Diplomacy has been a deplorable development. He sees the principle that there should be ‘open covenants’ as an advance upon the Old Diplomacy, in so far as it makes the possible parliamentary control of foreign policy and provides a safe guard against secret treatises of sort that were concluded before and during the First World War. But the principle that covenants should be ‘openly arrived at’ he holds to rule out all negotiation, which is inherently secret or confidential, and to have led directly to the era of confrontations between the fascist and communist powers and their opponents, in which diplomacy gives place to ‘political warfare’.  

Bull’s critique of Harold Nicholson emanates from the former’s attempt to provide the space for this foundational act (to approach the enemy to speak with rather than to kill him), since the problem of New Diplomacy is, as he continues, “the intrusion of public opinion and democratic legislatures into the

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sphere of foreign policy, is the political activisation of previously inert masses of people in most of the countries of the world, making the public justification or rationalization of foreign policy mandatory for all governments, to both domestic and international audiences.”18 Democracy, with its call for an open discussion with rational and justifiable decisions, is a threat against what traditional diplomacy theorists sees as the need for a Master to reorganize the current situation in order to make peace possible. The central antagonism here is, therefore, the one between the balance-of-power and international society. Traditionally these concepts have come to indicate the separation between the Realists and the English School, but in reality they have both served the function of opening up a space for the foundational act. As for instance Martin Wight notes, the ultimate end of the Hobbesian natural state will be that the strongest power eventually has “subordinated all its rivals.”19 This situation is what the English School tried to avoid through the introduction of the term international society representing a minimal degree of communal order in the anarchical field of international relations. Establishing such a communal society does, however, require an initial intrusion of force by the instituting Master able to perturb the continuous flow of the symbolic network (such as it was captured in the foundational myth of diplomacy). In other words: to break the violent every-day life of the natural state of power struggle between states someone needs to disturb it by the brave act of attempting to negotiate rather than to kill. This intrusion in the normal flow of things, captured in the Schmittian notion of exception and in the idea of an international society, is as Žižek notes inherently ambiguous since both these concepts needs to simultaneously presuppose the intrusion of the Real in the symbolic order while at the same time representing the Sovereign’s constitution of a new symbolic order. So, on the one hand the Master must state his desire from a position outside the law, a full desire not based in the current symbolic network, or as Morgenthau puts it, negotiations has to be “started by each side with maximum demands”20. But this desire must also, on the other hand, “be defended and reimposed by force”21. Here the conservative nature of the traditional diplomatic theory reveals itself most clearly, since this solution to the diplomatic crises is not, as noted, a return to Old Diplomacy as a specific set of values or laws on which the international society is based, but rather a return to “the act as such, independently of its content”22. The alternatives to diplomacy, without a space for this act, seems to be peace without freedom, exemplified by the Roman and Chinese empires, or freedom without peace, as a self-regulating anarchic chaos.23

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18 Ibid.
19 Wight, “Western Values in International Relations”, p.103.
20 Morgenthau, Politics among nations, p.553.
21 Wight, “Western Values in International Relations”, p.103.
22 Žižek, “Carl Schmitt in the Age of Post-Politics”, p.20.
23 Watson, Diplomacy, pp.22-25.
The explicit identification with the foundational act as objet a, as an intrusion of the Real, does illustrate the point of Constantinou’s failure: what he seemingly cannot include in his symbolic network is the fact that his own desire shows itself in the painting, that there is something in a depiction of diplomacy which seems to be non-diplomatic. But, where traditional diplomacy theory nevertheless fails is in their identification of this act with the Master. The most extreme formulation of the duality between Master and objet a is possible to find in the early writings of James Der Derian, especially in On Diplomacy and Anti-diplomacy, which are both based on his use of the Hegelian-Marxist concepts of mediation and alienation. For him, the history of diplomacy is a history of international antagonisms mediated in order to usher in a new era, explaining for instance how the initial mythic mediation between humans and God (termed mytho-diplomacy) becomes the mediation between the Holy and the secular, or Empire and pope, in the following proto-diplomacy.24 It is no longer the Hobbesian natural state but a “primeval alienation of man [that] gave rise to estranged relations which required a mediation.”25 Primarily we should note that the radical cut that Der Derian has come to represent in the field of Diplomacy Studies is, from an ideological point of view, not possible to uphold. The reason for this is found in the hysterizing effects of the Master’s discourse also plaguing Stephen Keyter. Born out of the failures of the First and Second World Wars, as well as the following Cold War, traditional diplomacy theory, just like Keyter, fantasizes about a new Master that might revive diplomacy, benevolent enough to distribute power but potent enough to restore it by force if threatened. A Master which can punish and reward in accordance with a clearly defined desire; for diplomatic theory a prosperous peace and for Stephen Keyter successful diplomats. But just as Keyter, the traditional diplomatic theory is repeatedly confronted with the impotence of their Master through the emergence of hysterizing symptoms. As we have already seen from Watson’s description of the failure of diplomacy there is one thing that embodies this terrifying abyss more than anything else: the nuclear bomb. Der Derian writes:

In the twentieth-century contest between East and West, we can detect some parallels, but with some major qualifications. Ultimately, raison d’état (or optimistically, raison de système) is still the common currency, the intelligence by which states preserve and strengthen their power. But how the diplomacy of states at present goes about that has been radically altered by technological innovations. […] There is one development that stands above all others: that is, nuclear weaponry, which has, in its very capacity to end diplomacy, displayed a power to transform it. This is not the place to discuss the morality or

25 Ibid., p.6.
even the tenability of nuclear deterrence. My interests are guided by the subject, that being the relationship between nuclear weaponry and modern forms of alienation, and its part in the emergence of a techno-diplomacy.\textsuperscript{26}

The theme of nuclear weapons threatening to end diplomacy as such is prevalent in most of the traditional writings on diplomacy and it is also referred to as one of the main reason behind diplomacy’s declining role in international relations. The idea is that the invention of the nuclear bomb radicalized the power struggle to the point where the Master’s violent intrusion is capable of putting an end to the entire history of humanity. Or, as Der Derian himself, puts it: “that diplomacy has a potential historical end, and that (among other lesser functions) it is failing to mediate our estrangement from a nearly infinite yet entirely real power of man’s own making.”\textsuperscript{27}

These issues perfectly illustrates the modernistic conservatism of traditional diplomacy theory: without a network of actually existing mores that diplomacy could return to, the possibility of a Master with the power to obliterate humanity as such, appears to be a diplomatic Master made impotent through the technological hubris of the modern sciences. Without this power of instigating a transformation of the existing system of the symbolic network, diplomacy is, at the end, left without any real power. What traditional diplomatic theory represents is the dream of a new, potent Master that would have been able to intervene in the diplomatic crisis between East and West, between communism and capitalism.

2. Saving the People with Diplomacy

Contemporary Diplomacy Studies is, to a great extent, established around the idea that the field underwent a pervasive transformation during the late eighties which in many aspects revived the theoretical study of diplomacy, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world. But it is also possible to establish another history by introducing a distinction related to the relationship between diplomacy and democracy rather than between distinct theoretical positions. Up until the early nineties the threat against diplomacy was perceived as emanating from the power of the masses, a rabble which through their call for openness and transparency threatened the very place where the diplomatic Master, by necessity, had to enact the constituting of diplomacy as a process for peace. This threat met its own symptom in the nuclear bomb, the embodiment of human hubris and the possibility of people destroying both themselves and the rest of the world with the press of a button. The fear of the masses, of democracy and openness, is one of the main characteristics of modern conservative ideology, an interpretation strengthened by the call for a return to a formalist

\textsuperscript{26} Der Derian, \textit{On Diplomacy}, p.205
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid. p.199.
decisionism, of the grounding act of the Master, as the only way to save diplomacy. Against this conservative tendency stands the evolution of diplomacy theory that begun in the 1990s. As already mentioned, the fact that a transformation takes place here is partially illustrated by the increasing institutionalization of Diplomacy Studies through a number of different publications, journals, and anthologies attempting to define the field. Another indication of this transformation is that the debate concerning the death of diplomacy restarted again in the mid-nineties. On the topic, Brian Hocking wrote:

Diplomacy is no stranger to continuous debate. That it is in decline – whether as an institution of the international system or in terms of the profession to which that institution has given birth – is a well rehearsed proposition. But you readers might be forgiven for succumbing to some confusion having read two articles in the last issue (autumn 1997) under the banner ‘The end of diplomacy?’ For, in different ways, the contributions from Joe Clark and Paul Sharp are celebrations of diplomacy – or, at least, their own versions of it.

Hocking goes on to characterize these celebrations as denouncing one aspect of the diplomatic practice while celebrating another. Although this is true, perhaps the most important displacement took place in the formulation of the problem itself. What has previously been understood as an external threat – the intrusion of democracy leading to the people undermining the possibility of the Master to perform his act – is transformed into something inherent in diplomacy: any failure of diplomacy has to do with managerial issues. Paul Sharp writes:

Failures of diplomacy in places as different as Maastricht, Mostar, and Mogadishu involved over-ambitious attempt at international management for which no consensus existed in the great powers expected to supply the resources. Either this consensus has to be strengthened, a labour of Sisyphus given recent disappointments, or the ambition of those who wish to manage the international system have to be scaled back.

Diplomacy is no longer threatened by the shrinking space in which the initiating act can remain hidden, instead the problem is when the ambition among those who manage international relations (another important change to note within the diplomatic field is that diplomats no longer should be seen as representatives but as managers) exceeds that of the states from which their credibility emanates. Joe Clark seems to share the analysis when he claims that the diplomats of Canada must focus as much on “managing political and security challenges” as they do on treating issues of trade and economy. The

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28 Se chapter II.3.
29 Hocking, “The end(s) of diplomacy”, p.169.
argument against those who state that diplomacy is made irrelevant as a consequence of a more fragmented international community is usually focused on how diplomats are the only professionals capable of mediating between a growing number of interests taking part in international politics. In this situation it seems as if most theorists of diplomacy perceives the main issue for a globalizing world in the increasing needs for regulations in the field of diplomacy, since the “ever increasing number of industrial, social and technological matters were perceived as having an international, and therefore a diplomatic, dimension.”

This focus on law as the feature designating modern diplomacy is even more obvious in Hall and Jönsson’s definition of the essence of diplomacy:

Diplomacy, we posit, should be seen as an institution, understood broadly as a relatively stable collection of social practices consisting of easily recognized roles coupled with underlying norms and a set of rules or conventions defining appropriate behaviour for, and governing relations among, occupants of these roles.

The traditional insistence that there exists explicit goals for diplomacy (such as creating peace or defending the interest of a sovereign) is at this point gradually disappearing and emphasis is instead put on the formal network defining diplomacy and its functioning. Simultaneously the issues of contemporary diplomacy seems, as already implied, to be understood as arising from individual mistakes. Iver B. Neumann writes:

Diplomatic practice is embedded in general social life and social life is conflictual. Diplomats do not have the ground to themselves. Different groups will, in various ways and to different extents, attempt to access and shape diplomatic sites. […] In this case, the job of the diplomat is, as always, to mediate between the different actors involved. From the diplomat’s point of view, what is at stake is how to lay out the site so that it is optimal for others to use.

The role of diplomats is seen as one of creating policies, rules, and regulations which allows for a multiplicity of worldviews and ways-of-life to co-exist by mediating their unavoidable clashes through the shared institution of diplomacy. The diplomat here takes on the role as the self-effacing manipulator of the system, the one who knows the desire of all parties involved and who is capable of adjusting these desires into creating sustainable policies.

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33 Hall & Jönsson, The Essence of Diplomacy, p.25, italics in original.

34 Neumann, Diplomatic Sites, p.6.

35 See for instance Constantinou & Der Derian “Sustainable Global Hope”, p.6-7, and Neumann, At Home with the Diplomats, p.122.
If we briefly return to Brink’s *The Ambassador* it is possible to see some obvious similarities. The understanding of the formal intersubjective position of the diplomat seems to be identical when comparing van Heerden with the ideal of the sustainable diplomat: they are both supposed to function as the manipulator making desire (whether it be geopolitical, religious, economic, et cetera) into value through the chain of signifiers. We are, in other words, within the discourse of the University. Although van Heerden eventually ends up in the final, fetishistic form of disavowal (when he is ready to lose everything because he is certain of always keeping the little piece of himself outside of ideology) he is nevertheless at first part of the “manipulative” disavowal that also returns in diplomatic theory. Fundamental to both of them is how the impossible gap, and unavoidable failure, of knowledge is externalized in the subject supposed to believe, in the case of van Heerden through his countless meetings with politicians and diplomats in which he directs their desire in whatever direction is the most profitable for South Africa. And is it not the same with the understanding of the contemporary diplomat aiming at “combining divergent positions into a joint decision”? What in traditional diplomatic theory was a question reduced to the economic, military, and sometimes even psychological power of the Master to change the existing network of an antagonistic situation (thereby offering an opening for peace) is today mainly depicted as the diplomat in the role of self-effacing manipulator bringing the desires of the subjects supposed to believe (experiencing their own desire as at odds with that of the other) together in a shared policy. As for instance Paul Sharp notes, diplomats do not explicitly believe that they are the incarnation of the will of their country, but we should note that they still act as if they believed it as soon as we invite them “to public events, interrogate them at press conferences, or kidnap them and hold them hostage.” The diplomat, embodying rationality, knowledge, is supposedly able to perceive the situation from above, a position which allows for the organization of the scene in a way that allows for the local or individual desires of the actors to see a way to come together.

The fantasy of contemporary diplomacy theory is, therefore, that of an outside position allowing for a subject to critically assess the situation and to undertake the right actions in order to create a desired outcome (regardless of whether it is for the good of global ecology or of a specific nation-state). Paul Sharp captures this dream as he writes: “Diplomats pride themselves on being able to avoid or solve problems when given the chance because they have a better grasp of how to handle what is going on than do governments, experts, interested parties and ordinary people.”

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37 Sharp, *Diplomatic Theory of International Relations*, p.60.

within contemporary diplomatic theory\textsuperscript{39}, could be said to capture the \textit{objet a} of contemporary Diplomacy Studies: the irrational desires attributed to the numerous actors of the international society (those who do not know but only believe) appears as the inconsistent blotch in the center of the painting when perceived by the gaze emanating from this theoretical position. The ideological position prevalent is, therefore, that of a cynical distance.

The only way for van Heerden to get out of the failure of “manipulative” disavowal was to fetishize his relationship to the \textit{objet a}, believing that he knew what he was for the Other. And is not something similar going on within the field of Diplomacy Studies? The focus of diplomatic theory has been on the task of diplomats to structure the disorganized desire of an increasingly diverse international society, but not, as we have seen, without also noting the fact that not even diplomats are capable of becoming one with the disinterested gaze from above. In other words: the manipulator will eventually get caught in his own trap, a diplomat will probably fail despite good intentions.\textsuperscript{40} As a way to deal with this problem diplomacy theory has, during the last few years, seen a growing interest in ethical questions sometimes captured under the heading of \textit{sustainable diplomacy}.\textsuperscript{41} Costas M. Constantinou and James Der Derian’s introduces the problem in their introduction to the anthology \textit{Sustainable Diplomacies}:

Perhaps the first step towards a sustainable diplomacy is to restore diplomacy as a virtue. If we are to follow Aristotelian terms, to be a diplomat \textit{ab initio} entails the notion of being a ‘good diplomat’ (the two are inseparable). The ethical imperative is not to take diplomats as they happen to be but as they ought to be if they are to realize their telos or functional excellence. The virtuous diplomat should not be an obedient servant but potentially a challenger and modifier of policies, including of the policy one is called to serve.\textsuperscript{42}

The envoy has for a long time been closely associated with questions of ethics and virtue, not surprisingly since the honor of being an envoy mostly has been awarded men from an aristocratic background. One important aspect of these virtues, as they were established by feudal ambassadors, was a distinction between the individual and his status as representative: if a man, in serving his

\textsuperscript{40} This disavowal is captured by Mannoni through the example of Casanova see \textit{Clefs pour l’Imaginaire}, pp.16-17.
\textsuperscript{42} Constantinou & Der Derian, “Sustainable Global Hope”, p.3.
prince, was forced to lie or commit any other atrocious act, it would not interfere with his personal honor. But despite the long history of a connection between ethics and diplomacy, as well as the prevalent image of this practice as, following the French revolution, immoral and corrupt, very little interest have been directed at the question of ethics in the field of Diplomacy Studies. The ones that do exist has, however, every characteristic of a fetish. In relation to Seneca and the stoics Constantinou attempts to portray the ethical diplomat:

Leisurely or introspective negotiation benefits this greater commonwealth by reflecting on what it means to be a citizen of the cosmopolis and by that promoting ‘interests’ that transcend those defined and assigned by the accident of birth, namely, city-state or imperial interests. [...] By cultivating the mind, instilling the virtues of the greater commonwealth and bringing forth a realization that human affairs and problems are not independent of the mind but ‘born from nothingness they go back to nothingness’.  

The method for diplomacy to deal with the threat against the international order posed by terrorism, global warming, and new ethnic conflicts is not, as Constantinou points out, treated with policies based in “total truth and total evil.” Instead the antidote is spiritualization, only by turning into ourselves we can “mediate the ‘stranger within’” which will allow for diplomacy to finally save humanity, to be the heroes diplomats themselves always thought they were. The issue here is of course the same as the one continuously pointed out by Žižek apropos what he calls Western Buddhism: in turning to the spiritual realm in which every antagonism is dissolved, we are effectively turning to a fetish. Just like the Ambassador could keep a little piece of his own freedom, a sustainable diplomat can, through spiritualization, retain the idea of being an ethical agent, while still allowing for the system of diplomacy to keep its frantic pace.

3. The Hidden Antagonism

In Brink’s novel the failure of the diplomatic subjectivity is connected to the failure of the state, more specifically state diplomacy, as the big Other. In

45 Ibid. p.82.
46 Ibid.
48 Žižek’s use and critique of so called Western Buddhism has been heavily criticized and perhaps we should here read it as denoting the self-help and management literature inspired by Buddhist thinking rather than the actual religion itself (regardless of it is in its Western or Eastern form).
the case of Stephen Keyter this failure, the necessary hystericizing of the Master’s discourse, finds its outlet in Keyter’s constant ‘acting out’. But, as soon as the letter returns and he is called back to South Africa, allowing Keyter to finally see himself in his Master interpellation, what he finds out is that he is objet a: the hysteric remainder that had to be removed to save the Master. For Ambassador van Heerden, on the other hand, the failure of state diplomacy is shown through the alienation in work: he serves a Master that does not exist, follows policies he does not believe in, and deals with troubles that are not his own, making him feel, as he puts it, like a remote-controlled toy. Therefore, the intrusion of the young Nicolette into his life presents him with an opportunity to break out of this vicious circle. But the return of the letter brought him, just as Keyter, back by (mis)recognizing him in the objet a: the letter’s implicit injunction to enjoy made him believe he knew what he was for the other. Both Keyter and van Heerden therefore falls for a certain perversion in their ideology and it seems that this perversion is the only thing capable of bringing them back into their primary discourse, once the hysteria or the alienation becomes too overwhelming. But what does it tell us about diplomacy that it was capable of producing two so fundamentally different subjects? In other words: how should we understand the antagonism at the heart of diplomacy?

As Althusser noted regarding the Ideological State Apparatuses, the goal of any ISA is to uphold and to reproduce the existing means of production through molding the subjectivity of individuals in correspondence with the needs of the symbolic machinery. The problem with this aspect of Althusserian theory reveals itself through the fact that the vast number of subjects which fails to perfectly serve the ideology (they have not been successfully hailed by interpellation, illustrated in different ways by Keyter and van Heerden) still does not pose any radical threat to the established order. Žižek’s solution to this problem is, one might claim, to rephrase the entire functioning of the ISA: the goal is not to mold subjects into workers, capitalists, managers, et cetera, instead subjectivity arises in the very failure of the dominant ideology, subjectivity goes from being the primary goal of the ISA to being its remainder, its byproduct. This is, for instance, the reason why every fantasy must, at first, be repressed by its Master, only to later arise as a scene that simultaneously entails the dream of a full jouissance and provides the reason for why it is prohibited. The subjective positions taken by both van Heerden and Keyter is therefore not to be seen as external to diplomacy, but rather as answers to diplomacy’s own impossibility, to the antagonism at its heart. One way of reaching this antagonism has been to go through the extimate kernel that the failure of contemporary diplomacy theory revolves around. In the form of modern conservatism, traditional theory of diplomacy experiences this obstacle in the gap which separates the people’s call for a democratic, open, and justified foreign policy, and their awareness that any successful implementation of a law (in this case to preserve peace) presupposes the violent
and non-justifiable inaugurating act performed by the Master. In other words: a conservative democratic society must be founded on a lie hiding the true fact of the origin of power. The contemporary diplomatic theory is to a greater extent stuck in liberal institutionalism, engaging the antagonism between the local and conflicting desires embodied in the different actors of international politics (e.g. states, NGOs:; ethnic groups, businesses) and the general law upheld by diplomats. But if ideology is based on a repression of some more primary antagonism, from where does this repressed in diplomacy stem? Or, to put it in a Žižekian terminology, if we have unearthed the objet a as the object-cause of desire, as the excessive element, what remains to be located is the underlying, repressed antagonism illustrating the impossibility of the One, that is, objet a as absent Cause.49

Through this distinction, it is possible to reach, in a sense, the point where ideology enters: as soon as the absent Cause of desire is associated with some positive content (proletariat, Jew, rabble) we enter into ideology as it gives structure to a whole society around it. Ideology is therefore ingrained in the human lifeworld, but it nevertheless exist a position, that of radical negativity, from which it is possible to perform ideologiekritik. What remains is, therefore, to pinpoint this radical negativity as it is handled in and through diplomacy. In his analysis of Carl Schmitt’s challenge to contemporary politics Žižek, following Rancière, identifies four forms of disavowals of politics proper: arche-politics, para-politics, meta-politics and ultra-politics. Finally, complementing these four forms of disavowal, Žižek defines post-politics based in foreclosure rather than in repression:

Politics proper thus always involves a kind of short circuit between the Universal and the Particular: it involves the paradox of a singular which appears as a stand-in for the Universal, destabilizing the ‘natural’ functional order of relations in the social body. The political struggle proper is therefore never simply a rational debate between multiple interests but, simultaneously, the struggle for one’s voice to be heard and recognized as the voice of a legitimate partner: when the ‘excluded’, from the Greek demos to Polish workers, protested against the ruling elite (aristocracy or nomenklatura), the true stakes were not only their explicit demands (for higher wages, better working conditions, etc.), but their very right to be heard and recognized as an equal partner in the debate – in Poland, the nomenklatura lost the moment it had to accept Solidarity as an equal partner… 50

This understanding of the political is crucial to what Žižek has come to call dialectical materialism, highlighting the fact that only the remainder is capable of standing in for the Universal: in the negative dialectics of the signifying chain (individual signifiers are separated from each other by what they are not) an object will always drop down, or out. This is what is captured by the

49 See for instance Žižek, Absolute Recoil, pp.408-409.
50 Žižek, “Carl Schmitt in the Age of Post-Politics”, p.28.
lower right position in the structure of the discourses: the remainder or the product as radical negativity is impossible to include in the signifying chain. This means that politics proper is the situation in which the repressed returns to claim its status as the universal: the proletariat or the demos standing in for the pure negativity, illustrating that the current division of the Whole in to particulars is not complete, that something (class-antagonism as radical negativity) was left out. It is this political level that is disavowed through the five different ideological formations aiming at repressing or foreclosing the horrifying truth that returns in the excluded. So, in the context of the four forms of disavowal, we should begin with the one Žižek explicitly connects to modern conservatism. Ultra-politics, “the most cunning and radical version of the disavowal”\(^1\), is considered the most extreme since it transposes the class-struggle of capitalist society via a direct militarization of politics itself. Through establishing an ‘Us’ and a ‘Them’ the ultra-political disavowal can repress what is truly an internal struggle by reformulating it as warfare between enemies “where there is no common ground for symbolic conflict”\(^2\). And is not this violent antagonism (or estrangement to use the terminology of diplomacy theory) the very basis of diplomacy as it has been understood within traditional diplomacy theory? Traditional Diplomacy Studies puts an emphasis on the anarchical field of international relations in which sovereigns struggle for power, illustrated by the concept of balance-of-power. This characterization is then taken as the basis for turning the question of survival into the most fundamental one for every nation state, as if it was its natural desire. The social group, whether it be a tribe, a kingdom or a nation-state is taken as a natural, homogenous, entity, and it is its first in the meeting with other groups that a certain tension or antagonism is introduced into the social body. The subsequent need for diplomatic representation, as opposed to warfare, arises out of the fact that nations are not evenly matched in terms of military powers, which forces sovereigns to resort to other forms of warfare in order to survive, therefore making espionage, coercion, negotiation, sabotage, and bribery into fundamental parts of the diplomatic arsenal.\(^3\) So the fact that the radical claim of traditional diplomacy theory stating that this practice needs to be at least partly secret to be functioning (carving out a space in which the Master’s inaugurating act can take place away from the prying eyes of the public) is nevertheless not radical enough, since it disavows the properly political antagonism of class-struggle. It is radical by including the Master’s founding act in theory (the very thing forgotten by liberal political theory), but it still fails because of the idea of balance-of-power as the ground for social conflicts. When the revolutionaries of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries called for a new di-

\(^{1}\) Žižek, “Carl Schmitt in the Age of Post-Politics”, p.29.
\(^{2}\) Ibid.
\(^{3}\) See for instance Der Derian, Antidiplomacy, pp.19-39.
plomacy, focused on trade and commerce, as the future of international politics something remained unspoken: the fundamental gap of nation-state politics found in class-struggle. Therefore, we might claim that traditional diplomacy theory is the diplomatic call of the French revolution returned in its true form: the new diplomacy of trade and commerce cannot also be placed under democratic control, since it has to exclude the people in order to allow for the diplomat to represent one will or, as Thomas Paine put it, to be a diplomat of MAN. The people, in this case, is the thing standing in for the radical negativity of class-struggle illustrating that the will of the nation (that the diplomat is set to represent), the very basis upon which the division between ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ is based, is in fact not-All.

On the other hand we have contemporary diplomacy theory which often explicitly acknowledges the people as one of the many desires active in the multilateral world of international relations. With the explicit turn against any attempt to proclaim diplomacy irrelevant to the contemporary international system, and the decline of the earlier emphasis on the need for more secrecy, contemporary Diplomacy Studies stands for something entirely different in relation to its forerunners: It is characterized by a focus on mediation and on the diplomat as a manager, serving greater purposes than only the desire of the individual nation-state he or she is set out to represent. At a first glance the situation which is here described might appear as part of what Žižek defines as the para-political paradigm, in which the originary antagonism is disavowed through the depolitization of politics, turning the political sphere into a competition between a community of already identified political agents. But one crucial aspect of para-politics is missing in this depiction of diplomacy, the agents must be allowed to the “(temporary) occupation of the place of power” through, for instance, winning elections. Although it is still possible for agents of international politics to perceive of themselves as victors in a specific negotiation, it is from the perspective of diplomacy theory nevertheless the managers of international relations, the diplomats, who control the field. Contemporary diplomacy theory should therefore instead be understood in terms of post-politics, characterized by foreclosure rather than repression, and described by Žižek as follows:

> In post-politics, the conflict of global ideological visions embodied in different parties who compete for power is replaced by the collaboration of enlightened

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54 Žižek, “Carl Schmitt in the Age of Post-Politics” p.28.
55 Žižek is here using foreclosure in the specific sense worked out by Lacan in the fourth seminar which in some aspects differ from his earlier use. Here foreclosure is separated from repression by the fact that the object in the former is not found in the unconscious but rather returns in the Real, and therefore it is not something which the subject constantly deals with through repetition but rather a terrifying thing impacting the subject in a “quasi hallucinatory” way, see Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire livre IV: La relation d’objet*, (Paris: Seuil, 1994), p.415.
technocrats (economists, public opinion specialists…) and liberal multiculturalists; through a process of negotiation of interests, a compromise is reached in the guise of a more or less universal consensus.\textsuperscript{56}

And does this not perfectly capture the idea of diplomacy in contemporary diplomatic theory, in which the desires of rational political agents are managed by diplomats aiming at creating an international society “without hierarchy and built on the self-regulation of the actors concerned”\textsuperscript{57}? The continuous expansion of what is possible to define as diplomatic also captures this logic. Paul Sharp writes:

If the insights of the diplomatic tradition can no longer be made effective by restoring the degree of insulation diplomats previously enjoyed, then the only, but not unattractive, alternative is to disseminate them more widely within societies. In fact, this may already be seen to be occurring. […] The debates about humanitarian military intervention provide a clear example in this regard. “How can we possibly do it” collides with "how can we possibly not?" If difficult issues like these and rogue state diplomacy are to be handled effectively, then the distance of the diplomats from the content of international relations or, at least, a sensitivity to that distance and the reasons for it, needs to be more widely disseminated.\textsuperscript{58}

The dissemination of diplomats into new spheres of society, i.e. the globalization of previously local or national issues, is one of the ways in which the primary antagonism of politics is foreclosed. As Žižek notes, globalization – not only in economic terms but also the universalization of humanity (of universal human rights et cetera) – is here used to exclude the intrusion of universality proper into politics through striving towards establishing a rational consensus by negotiating between already established agents. In this matter a post-political diplomacy is not very different from the ultra-political form, apart from two aspects: in post-politics there is no need for a hystericizing Master, while in ultra-political diplomacy, since the antagonism is repressed and not foreclosed, the people could return as a stand in for the absent universal, for the antagonism as such, upsetting the functioning of the system. In the post-political situation this is impossible since any group aspiring to take part in negotiation (that is to be a political agent) must express its desire in rational terms and present it as one local interest among others. Foreclosure does, however, not entirely prohibit the antagonism to return, instead it returns, as mentioned, in the Real. This means that the foreclosed antagonism returns as an irrational and unintelligible violent mess undermining the very foundation of the symbolic order. This is the underside of globalization, on the one hand it establishes a global system of laws enabling negotiation between established actors, but in order to protect it from the intrusion of the Real, it also allows

\textsuperscript{56} Žižek, “Carl Schmitt in the Age of Post-Politics”, p.30.
\textsuperscript{57} Coolsaet, “The Transformation of Diplomacy at the Threshold of the New Millennium”, p.19.
\textsuperscript{58} Sharp, \textit{Diplomatic Theory of International Relations}, pp.220-221.
for diplomatic, economic or even military interventions when these laws are violated (with everything from trade embargos or the withdrawal of embassies to drone strikes justified as the protection of human rights). So, in the post-political order, this return of the Real has taken the form of ethnic or racial violence undermining the established order. The issue for diplomatic scholars is that these actors – terrorists, rouge states, and parties engaged in ethnic conflicts – pose such a threat to the established order because they no longer follow the basic logic of the nation state. Compared to the people of ultra-politics (which was clearly calling for more control and openness in diplomacy) this violence lacks the rationality of the repressed, it is only perceived as a destructive force.

We are now at the center of the concept of Ideological State Apparatus. As we have seen, the goal of the ISA:s were never to constitute individuals as subject, getting individuals stuck in the interpellation of diplomacy in order to let their activities reproduce the existing relations of production, but rather to uphold the system by excluding the antagonism that haunts it. This, in turn, leaves ideology with the byproduct that is subjectivity, standing in for the radical negativity of the antagonism, and continuously returning to haunt the smooth functioning of the symbolic network. In literature as well as in science, it is possible to trace this antagonism through the failure of even the most perfect diplomat as well as through the different threats constantly endangering the survival of the diplomatic system. Through its role in ultra- and post-politics, handling the effects of the repression or foreclosure that establishes a symbolic order, the diplomatic ISA functions as one of the ways in which the system deals with the return of the antagonism. This is why the diplomat and diplomacy still is seen as shrouded in mystery: it is a fantasy attempting to regulate the impossible relationship between the Master and its remainder in the University discourse.

As we also have seen, the different concepts active at the center of diplomatic theory – balance-of-power during the Cold War and mediation after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Soviet Union – brought with them a focus on one problematic relationship in particular: for traditional diplomacy theory it was the relationship between the US and the Soviet Union, the two super-powers in constant struggle with each other, while later diplomacy theory has turned its concerns towards the relationship between the West and the actors (rouge states, terrorist groups, ethnic warlords) that do not pertain to the nation state logic. Hence, a question that remains to be answered is what these relationships tells us about the general state of the capitalist system, assuming that the institutions of the state are not only handling the repression or foreclosure of the antagonism but that they are also overdetermined by it.

59 See Chapter II.3.


