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## Logics of Enjoyment in Tabloid Discourse

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### Introduction

Like all social entities, tabloid discourse is a heterogeneous field that makes any overall claims and value judgments about it impossible. However, this impossibility can be overcome when we shift our focus from analyzing this heterogeneous entity as whole to specific “logics” (Glynos and Howarth 2007: 134-137) operating within it. In the light of Lacanian psychoanalysis, this paper aims to single out two prominent logics of enjoyment circulating in the tabloid discursive realm. It is my belief that, although these two logics of enjoyment do not exhaust all dimensions of tabloid enjoyment, spelling them out can allow us to advance our understanding of tabloid discourse especially when the factor of enjoyment, so central to the discursive field of tabloid, has been clearly marginalized, or subjected to oversimplified conceptualization, in the relevant scholarly literature. The analytical effort of this paper is asymmetrical and particular emphasis is put on the one of the two logics. This logic of enjoyment, which has been labelled as “predatory” (Turner 1999), through its strange peculiarity and elusiveness, has made a scholarly expert of popular cultural and media studies claim that media cultural studies have not addressed it sufficiently or convincingly (ibid). The Lacanian analytical-critical attempt to isolate and elaborate this peculiar logic of enjoyment is done through elaborating a set of tabloid examples already existing in the

scholarly literature.

Inspired by Žižek's interpretations of the Lacanian category of "perversion," this paper claims that the central key of the predatory logic of enjoyment consists in transforming *any* rules within the social Other into Imaginary laws through a *perverse* articulation of these rules. This "logical" affinity between perversion and predatory tabloid discourse can be seen especially clear in the uncanny similarity between the climactic denouement of the predatory tabloid discourse and that of the Stalinist show trial, the paradigmatic example of the politically perverse enjoyment in Žižek's work (see for example Žižek 1997: 58-60 and 2001). In both cases, the storm of accusations appeases only when the accused admits publicly that he/she is guilty of all charges and is deserved to be punished. Finally, although not trying to be exhaustive, I will also flesh out four privileged discursive routes that make possible this perversely logical operation in the discursive realm of the predatory tabloid discourse to further substantiate my claim.

### **Multiple Faces of Tabloid Discourse**

Traditionally, tabloid discourse has been recognized as the most unworthy and harmful member of the journalistic world because of the mindless sensationalism and rampant "infotainment" it abundantly provides as well as the human-interest, personalized diversion produced by it, which leads us away from serious social-political issues (Franklin 1997). Against this widespread "lament" (Langer 1998: 1-10), media cultural studies have recently developed more nuanced analyses of tabloid discourse that have radically complicated this picture. Research innovations on tabloid discourse in media cultural studies have commonly started from rejecting the role of information transmitter that traditional journalism assigns to media and mass communication in general, and in which tabloid discourse can easily be viewed as trivial, unworthy and simply harmful. Alternatively, tabloid, instead of being treated as a belittled (journalistic) entity, has acquired serious academic attention. Two prominent perspectives and one pending problem emerge from this set of scholarly literature.

Within media cultural studies, the dominant view has conceptualized tabloid discourse as a ritual transmitter that binds the subject to its community and helps the subject to situate itself in a modern, abstract, and complexly mediated society. Scholars who hold this perspective have converged on the recognition of tabloid discourse as a sense-making machine and rule-facilitator that helps subjects become *attached* to the normative rules of society (Bird 1992; Gripsrud 1992, 2000; Langer 1998). This sense-making and rule-facilitating function has been exercised via high melodrama (Gripsrud 1992, 2000) and tabloid works as contemporary folklorism (Bird 1992) to "reaffirm cultural values and offer answers to perplexing questions" (ibid: 163). It has also been suggested (Langer 1998) that, through dramatizing the process of sudden dislocation and later restoration, happening to both individual and community, tabloid discourse fleshes out cognitive

maps that can help us to answer the important question of how to “conduct a life which is both permanent and changing, that has causal linkage and displays total randomness, that produces continuities yet is simultaneously discontinuous, that progresses with stability and is characterized by resounding instability?” (ibid: 144).

Different from the first approach of this literature, which takes the stabilizing function of tabloid discourse as its focus, there is another perspective that emphasizes the carnival pleasure that tabloid discourse can bring powerfully into being (Fiske 1989: 103-127 and 1992; Glynn 2000). This tabloid pleasure constitutes the People’s resistance towards authority by its transgressiveness. It has been suggested that the pleasure of tabloid is “a sceptical laughter which offers the pleasures of disbelief, the pleasure of not being taken in” (Fiske 1992: 49). This laughter can undermine authority because stories like “the UFO landing,” “the spirit afterlife,” “scientists’ inability to explain an alien mummy” can “show official knowledges and their narrative explanations of the world at their point of breakdown.” The language of tabloid is a “language of the low” that can “disrupt the official” and in which the “respectable meaning is undercut by the disrespectful, sexual one” (ibid: 110). With regard to the “excessiveness” of tabloid language, it is “meaning out of control” (ibid: 114) which shows the vulnerability of the established order. Furthermore, “tabloid stories oppose and interrogate norms” (ibid: 50) and “if the power of the norm to explain is inadequate, so too is their power to rule and discipline our lives” (ibid: 52). Tabloid press represents a “miniaturization of social relations...[and the] inversion of the power that normally structures them” (Fiske 1989: 107).

From these approaches, we have seen the pictures of the tabloid as sense-making machine/ rule-facilitator and as the People’s transgressive resistance, in a carnival style. However, media cultural researcher Graeme Turner (1999) has pointed out that media cultural studies, due to its populist tradition, has a blind spot, namely, a failure to provide proper explanations for the *predatory journalistic strategy* that tabloid discourse constantly deploys. Turner has described the predatory journalistic strategy as tending to “employ tactics of representation which entrap and exploit its subjects (the hidden camera, the reconstruction, the surprise talk-show guests),” “the self important *gravitas* of the journalist exposing an issue of ‘public interest’ (a politician’s sex life, for instance)” (ibid: 60), and “the relentless intrusiveness of the paparazzi, the bullying foot-in-the-door reporter who uses media exposure as a weapon and as a genre of performance, the lynch-mob mentality of so-called ‘attack journalism,’ or the sleazy self-righteousness of the ‘hidden camera’ stories” (ibid: 68). In general, the predatory strategy “is marked by a mode of operation that is the consequence of the programs’ evident confidence in their power to control representation and their readiness to exercise that power in the interests of the program” (ibid: 70).

If we accept the basic perspective of this paper, which recognizes tabloid discourse as a heterogeneous field containing multiple layers or logics, then, questions such as “what is the ‘true’ face of tabloid? Sense-making machine, People’s pleasure, or a journalistic predator?” can, and

should, be exceeded in the inquiry concerning logics. By focusing on the factor of enjoyment, a factor that has been marginalized in the scholarly literature but which nonetheless constitutes *the* critical factor to better understand tabloid discourse, one possible direction in advancing tabloid studies without simply refuting the two established positions might be to take all three perspectives as valid and to try to explain the logics of enjoyment that underlie them, with special attention to the final inchoate perspective concerning the most perplexing dimension of tabloid discourse.

### **The Factor of Lacanian Enjoyment**

The important factor of enjoyment has appeared sporadically in the scholarly literature under other names, for instance, “force.” It has been suggested that as a contemporary mediated “sense-making system...designed to cope with the threatening black hole God left after Him when he return to His heaven,” tabloid discourse is “constructed to demonstrate the existence of an underlying system of absolute *forces* and values, moral *forces* and values” (Gripsrud 2000: 297, my emphases). Most of the time, enjoyment shows itself under the name of “pleasure.” However, this pleasure/enjoyment has either been relegated to a question that solely relates to the feelings of the audience, without analysing the discursive staging of enjoyment in news texts (Bird 1992: 107-137), or treated in an essentialist fashion, such that “sensational exposures of the inadequacy of the norms are pleasurable in themselves”(Fiske 1992: 115). It is clear from this that the factor of enjoyment has not been properly theorized.

Lacanian enjoyment is not a raw material. The uniqueness of the Lacanian approach to analyzing enjoyment, as Žižek (2005: 190-193) has hinted, consists precisely in its “de-substantialization” of the concept of affect and “geometricalizaion” of enjoyment. Enjoyment is not a thing but rather a logical or structural formation constructed discursively. In other words, there is no enjoyment as such; there are only *logics* of enjoyment constituted differently and discursively. The enjoyment that the subject enjoys is nothing but this discursive modality. Different logics signify different ways in which the subject, the other, and the Other are related in the pursuance of enjoyment. When analyzing the discursive operation that constructs logics of enjoyment, the focal point in analysing discourse is not its “meaning” but rather the way in which the discourse maps out the relational link between the subject, the other, and the Other.

It is from this perspective that we have to understand that the two logics of enjoyment, neurosis and perversion, which will be used in analysing tabloid enjoyment, do not operate as conceptual umbrellas for sets of positively descriptive features (for example, homosexuality as perversion) but rather signify a structural logic in which the subject, the other, and the Other are differently articulated in the pursuance of enjoyment. We can now also understand why enjoyment is not pleasure for the Lacanian approach. Pleasure is closer to a description of an emotional state. Enjoyment, however, concerns a logical connection that can be unpleasant or even painful. In

other words, when analyzing enjoyment, emotion lies. This does not mean that enjoyment is *necessarily* unpleasant but rather that enjoyment and pleasure are not situated on the same analytical level and their relationship is neither incompatible nor, as the literature on tabloid posits, necessary. “If one insists on using the term pleasure” to name the enjoyment procured here, “this must be understood as *unconscious* pleasure” (Glynos, 2008: 279, original emphasis) that *can or might be* consciously experienced as displeasure or even pain.

The first dimension of the Lacanian Other can be defined as a field of language, moral law, and culture; it is a field of Symbolic rules that organize social practice in general. However, it must be stated from the beginning that the multiple, patterned rules of the Other do not form a closed totality and that the field of the Other is ridden with inconsistency and contestability. “Regularity in dispersion,” a term that aims “simultaneously to hold on to the idea of a pattern and an open-endedness” (Glynos and Howarth 2007: 139), can be an appropriate description of the way in which these rules are organized. The enjoyment-seeking subject needs to listen to the multiple, inconsistent, and sometimes ambiguous designations emitted from the Other because this is a subject whose enjoyment, or *jouissance*, is constitutively lacking and who has put the hope of the retrieval of enjoyment in following the rules of the Other. This is where the second dimension of the Lacanian Other comes into the picture; which focuses more on the subjective perception of the Other and is more important than the first in terms of enjoyment. Although the Other is a *field* constituted by multiply patterned rules co-existing inconsistently, on the level of subjective perception, the Other functions as a *locus* or *site* from whence these orders and rules are issued and is a *dialogical point* with the subject. In other words, the subject acts in accordance with the rules and, within the social Other, is nothing but an act that tries to find the secret path that will lead it back to its lost enjoyment.

An imagined situation might be helpful for us to better capture this transformation from the Other as a field, to the Other as a dialogical site of enjoyment in subjective perception: when we painstakingly strive after a goal---collecting all the information we can, formulating a meticulous plan, and making all effort to achieve our goal ---- but all this still leads us to failure. When we watch our hard efforts sent out without any sign of returning, we stare into the sky and exclaim “what do YOU really want from me?,” then this point in the empty sky might be the Other as dialogical point of enjoyment in a very pure form.<sup>1</sup>

## Tabloid Discourse and the Neurotic Logic of Enjoyment

The most elementary logic of enjoyment in psychoanalysis, namely, neurotic enjoyment, tends to link the subject with the Other in two apparently contradictory ways: firstly, the subject tends to take the Other as the locus that instructs the subject in the pursuance of enjoyment. Secondly, the subject tends to perform practices that transgress the rules of the Other because, since the Other can instruct me in seeking enjoyment, the Other has often been fantasized as withholding massive amounts of enjoyment which triggers the temptation of transgression on the side of the subject. These two apparently oppositional attitudes towards the Other, from the logical perspective of Lacanian psychoanalysis, share the same structural logic towards the Other, namely, to uphold the fantasmatic fact that *the Other has enjoyment that is enjoyed secretly*. It is based on this logic that the subject either obeys the Other in order to retrieve enjoyment or tries to steal enjoyment back from the Other through transgressive practices. Transgression actually further highlights the power of the Other: as Lacan points out, subjective “transgression in the direction of *jouissance*,” that is, in the direction of stealing back the enjoyment, “only takes place if it is supported by the oppositional principle, by the forms of the Law” (Lacan 1992: 177). It seems that the two established perspectives on tabloid discourse ---tabloid discourse as sense-making/ rule facilitating machine and as the pleasure of the People’s transgression----can fit nicely with this neurotic logic of enjoyment. This analogy can be further substantiated when we look at the role of the Imaginary other.

In neurotic logic, the other holds the position of the Other and functions as an Imaginary representative of the Other. On the one hand, the melodramatization of rules and events through a personalized framework and human-interest angle indeed uses the others’ stories to help us make sense of the rules that the Imaginary others embody, whether these others have heroically rescued the community (the 9/11 firefighters, for instance), heart-warmingly performed their social roles (good mother, for instance), or deviated from these rules (for example, the personal stories and histories of criminals). On the other hand, the pleasure experienced in viewing the *Sun*’s Page Three Girl is exactly based on the transgressive enjoyment on the side of the subject. When the other enters into the scene of subjective transgression in neurotic logic, these others tend to be prominent social figures: as pointed out earlier, the disrespectful laughter is aimed at figures of authority, to undermine their glamour. Think about those pictures that capture the grotesque facial or bodily expressions of celebrities (politicians or popular singers, for example), and that make us laugh; this subjective enjoyment is generated through revealing “the ordinariness of their origins” and recognizing that they are not born to stardom (Connell 1992: 82) and our laughter is generated from the subjective stealing back of the enjoyment from these Imaginary representative others. Finally, the “oppositional resentment” (ibid) towards prominent social figures in tabloid discourse expresses the neurotic logic in a way that synthesizes the two apparently oppositional subjective

attitudes towards the Other (respecting and transgressing the Other): as Ian Connell (ibid) has pointed out, this oppositional resentment towards prominent others is not resentment intending to subvert the established social Other but resentment based on the subjective perception that privilege has been granted to the wrong people and this has, paradoxically, reaffirmed the enjoyment of the Other.

### **Predatory Journalistic Strategy in Tabloid Discourse**

Now we are turning to the inchoate perspective, or, to be more precise, to an impending question concerning the most perplexing and peculiar layer in tabloid discourse. As we have said, Turner (1999) has named this discursive layer as a predatory journalistic strategy and has enumerated some key features related to this most disturbing dimension of tabloid discourse. Turner did not theoretically elaborate upon this predatory strategy, but offered two paradigmatic examples of it, asking researchers to pay analytical attention to these. It is worthwhile briefly re-describing these two examples.

The first example Turner gives is of a news story about the destructive effects of long-term youth unemployment run by a TV show called *A Current Affair* in Australia. The show starts as a heartwarming “we’ll fix it” story and, in the end, turns into a “teenage benefit scrounger” one that provokes massive indignation. In the beginning, the programme shows vividly the harmful effect of unemployment on three Melbourne teenagers’ lifestyle and the burdens put upon their family. Then, the programme finds them job opportunities in a tourist resort in Northern Queensland, 3000 km from their hometown. However, all three turn down the jobs, because the two brothers do not want to cut their hair and the sister does not like the colour of her new uniform. After this, the three are shown flying to an island, sailing a catamaran, and enjoying the sun on the beach. According to Turner, after the show was broadcast, “all hell broke loose”: the TV station was besieged by outraged calls; neighbours offered vitriol about them in the media; the Premier of the state and the Prime Minister both agreed that the behaviour of this family was totally unacceptable. The TV station devoted six consecutive nights to reporting and demonising them. They were spat upon in the street, pilloried in the press, and received death threats, and, ironically, the welfare office terminated their unemployment payment because they had refused a legitimate offer of work. Finally, it was revealed that the turn of the narrative line from the “we’ll fix it” to the “benefit scrounger” story was designed by the programme from the beginning and that the programme-makers had already known beforehand that the three teenagers would not take jobs like the ones offered.

The second example is from the same programme. This time, *A Current Affair* chose an immigrant video repairman, gave him a number of VCRs to repair, and secretly filmed him at work. After the job was done, the programme compared the video recording with the invoice and showed

that the two did not match, suggesting he was trying to con his clients. Confronted with the recorded “hard facts,” the repair man could not defend himself; his English was extremely poor and his understanding of the situation was limited. But to some degree, this was enough: convinced of his incapacity to defend himself, he committed suicide.

As we can see, some features of these two examples also exist in the tabloid discourse operating in terms of the neurotic logic mentioned above, for instance, the scenario of transgressive practices, irrefutable hard facts, and most importantly, a dramatized scenario that makes sense of the rule. However, it will also be clear that the way in which these features are articulated together has been through a dramatic change that has, in turn, reformulated these features. Firstly, the rules---the importance of “diligence” in the first example and “honesty” in the second ---have obviously “gone berserk” here. Secondly, the irrefutable hard facts here seem to have been produced and staged specifically to open the way to these berserk rules. Thirdly, the tables of transgression have been turned: it is the Imaginary other that is enjoying transgressively. With regard to the usually transgressive audience of tabloid, they have all become, at least in the discursive interpellation of these stories, indignant law-abiding citizens. Finally, we simply cannot miss the fact that, differently from neurotic logic, the targeted Imaginary other is no longer prominent social figures but ordinary people, or, in this case, if we want to be more precise, marginalized social members (jobless teenagers from a poor family and an immigrant worker). Ironically, People’s power has been used against the most marginalized people. To summarize this peculiar situation, which can be elaborated later, what we have here is a scenario in which pillorying the other paves a passage to help the subject ascend to a moral high point and in the process of which a massive amount of enjoyment is generated to feed the audience-subject. The Lacanian perverse logic of enjoyment can help us to better theoretically capture this specific type of theatricality.

### **Journalistic Predator and the Perverse Logic of Enjoyment**

Different from the neurotic logic of enjoyment, which takes the Other as holder of enjoyment and which enjoys secretly, the Other in perverse logic is an Other who *never enjoys enough* and interpellates the subject to become the *instrument* of the Other’s enjoyment and to inject the Other with a bigger dose of enjoyment. The enjoyment generated and organized by the perverse logic sustains itself by trying to establish the Other, to make the Other seen, over and over again. However, when trying to bring into existence the Other, to make the Other seen, the pervert nonetheless encounters a problem: as we have discussed, the Other is only a field of multiply patterned rules co-existing inconsistently and an empty locus of dialogue. This Other simply can not meet the harsh request of the perverse logic, namely, to make visible a lucidly clear, magisterially integrated, and all-powerful Other. To fulfil its logic and overcome this impossibility of



total representation (of the Other), the pervert takes recourse to Imaginary law to stand for the Other. Imaginary law is a law that has been “fantasized as being completely regulative, covering the entire field of relations and parcelling out ‘goods’” (Rothenberg and Foster 2003: 5). In other words, to overcome the impossibility of representing the Other, one single rule is picked out from the field of the Other, and this rule directly stands for the Other in its most concrete and integrated form.

From the discursive textuality of the two examples above, we can detect three discursive routes that make possible this perverse logic of enjoyment. The first can be observed in the reversed proceeding of the law. In contrast to the temporal sequence of law and punishment, in which there is firstly a law, and secondly, a transgression of the law that finally leads to punishment; the perverse logic *forces* the law to appear by playing with and reversing the “normal” temporal sequence. The two examples above have shown this in an exemplary way: tabloid discourse actively sets up a situation within which transgressive action is tempting to the reported other. By catching the tail of the transgressive other and inflicting punishment upon it, tabloid discourse retroactively brings the law into its full existence. In other words, *it uses punishment to retroactively prove the law*. In the two examples above, the rules/ laws are: “You shall not commit the sins of laziness (or, swindling), or else...!” These are the “tactics of representation which entrap and exploit its subject” that Turner has mentioned, and the Lacanian theorization of perverse logic needs only to add a twist to this observation: the ultimate aim of the entrapment is to bring the law alive, and the real, disturbing dimension of the predatory tabloid resides exactly in this bringing the enjoying law alive because here, *it is the law that has become the predator!*

The second privileged discursive route can be approached by observing the status of the Imaginary others. In neurotic logic, the other still “counts” because it still stands as the representative of the Other and the targeted others are generally prominent social figures. For the perverse modality, the “quality” of the other is not important anymore because it has been reduced to only a *strategic element*: the enjoying Other represented by the Imaginary law *needs the reported others only as a strategic element to demonstrate its power through staging the scenario that shows the righteous “blow” of the law upon the reported Imaginary others*. As has been pointed out, “one does not imagine a pervert without a partner,” however, “from the structural point of view, one must think the opposite, namely, that the other in the scenario of the perverse act only counts to the extent that he or she provides the basis for a form” (Nasio 2004: 97, original emphasis). It is this strategic use of the other that produces “the lynch-mob mentality of so-called ‘attack journalism’”, which Turner observes in predatory tabloid discourse. This use of the other is similar to Žižek’s analysis of the “sacrificial production of enemies” by the Stalinist regime, a regime which also adopts a perverse enjoyment in his theorization. As Žižek says, “the Stalinist sacrificial production of enemies” is a logic which operates in the following manner: “since the Party fortifies itself by fighting rightist and leftist deviations, one is forced to produce them in order to fortify Party

unity” (Žižek 1993: 195). Similar to the Stalinist show trial, the storm of tabloid predation ceases its fire when the targeted other admits publicly that he/ she is guilty of all charges and deserves to be punished. Here, the reverse circuit of punishment-law has been fulfilled.

Thirdly, the most intriguing discursive route in predatory tabloid discourse is the use of “hard facts.” We should not be surprised that lots of the facts that tabloid discourse lays before our eyes are true: in the two examples mentioned above, although the reported others have clearly been entrapped and set up; their laziness and dishonesty are irrefutable facts and they have committed their misdeeds without external coercion. However, here, Lacan’s outrageous statement becomes crucial: even if your wife really is cheating behind your back, this does not diminish the fact that you are a jealous husband!<sup>2</sup> Although on the level of epistemological fact, what the tabloid discourse says is true, it nonetheless is the most insidious way to exploit the others on the level of enjoyment because it is *a practice that takes the epistemological hard fact as excuse and mask for its ontologically perverse logic of exploitation*.<sup>3</sup> This perverse manipulation of epistemological fact constitutes the base of what Turner calls “the self important *gravitas* of the journalist exposing an issue of ‘public interest’” and “the relentless intrusiveness of the paparazzi, the bullying foot-in-the-door reporter who uses media exposure as a weapon and as a genre of performance.” It is exactly through this masking of the truth of enjoyment with facts of reality, that tabloid can claim that it is only the instrument of the Other (“People have the right to know, I am only doing my job!...To tell the truth!,” “this is reality, take it or leave it!,” or simply, “he/ she deserves it!”), while simultaneously getting off both on and by the law.

### **Tracking the Journalistic Predator in the Heterogeneous Field of Tabloid Discourse**

As pointed out from the beginning, tabloid discourse is a heterogeneous field that cannot be reduced to a homogeneous social entity. In this section, I would like to use an example that can allow us to identify different layers of tabloid discourse surrounding one event in which the predatory, perverse articulation is only one of these layers. The point of this brief exercise resides in, firstly, showing the heterogeneous character of tabloid while at the same time locating the disturbing predatory, perverse layer imbricated within it. Secondly, to detect the perversely logical tendency in an example that is apparently less aggressive than the two already discussed. This example is that of the meditated discourse of the Port Arthur massacre in Australia, discussed by Stephen Stockwell (1997) in his case study.<sup>4</sup>

On Sunday 28 April 1996, Martin Bryant had killed 35 people in Port Arthur and the surrounding districts. Like many important and traumatic events, the Port Arthur massacre was fermented rapidly in social and media spaces after its happening, and the society was pressed to respond to it. The Australian media devoted a great deal of editorial space to covering this event, creating inventorial information consisting of personal details about the murderer, the victims,

relatives, and so on. Because the brutality was staggering and perpetrated by a single person, as expected, the private life of Bryant was put under a media spotlight. It was suggested by the media that the massacre resulted from Bryant's indulgence in and imitation of violent videos. According to Stockwell, the "Australian media were quick to pick up [this] theme" (ibid: 127) and statements such as the following abounded in media spaces: "...Bryant was also known for his love of movies, a passion he indulged with visits to Hobart video outlet Movie Madness," "more than 2,000 violent and pornographic videos have been found at the home of Martin Bryant...The tapes, lining shelves in two rooms, were discovered when work began to empty his house..."(ibid).

This discursive information concerning Bryant's private life can be suspected of being ideological because, if it remained at this personalized level and if the framework of personalization continually dominated the follow-up news-reporting and related discussions,<sup>5</sup> this traumatic event would inevitably be domesticated and reduced to a tragic "accident" committed by a madman. However, it can also be argued here that these personalized, private stories are only tabloid discourse's sense-making function, which is inevitable, or even necessary, especially in times when society encounters such traumatic events. Furthermore, as Stockwell has pointed out, it is also because of these personalized stories that people's concerns are triggered and a ground prepared for politicisation, through which issues about "weapon control" and "the influence of violent video" are brought to the forefront of national debate (ibid: 126-128). This has shown us that it is possible for a tabloid topic and tabloid's sense-making function to escalate into social and political reformations.

However, the mediated discourse made a disturbing turn when the media began to focus on a specific, well-known and violent horror movie called *Child's Play* and its "unique" relation with Bryant's psyche. The *Child's Play* series (*Child's Play*, 1988; *Child's Play 2*, 1990; *Child's Play 3*, 1992) are stories about the evil soul of a serial killer reincarnated in a doll called Chucky, and the selling point of this series resides in the way the serial killer, by making use of his innocent disguise, continues his "business" in a more brutal way after his actual death. The Australian media kept emphasizing that *Child's Play* was Bryant's "favourite video" and quoted his former girlfriend: "he used to go on about it all the time...There was a phrase out of that movie he used to say: 'Don't fuck with the Chuck.' He used to get excited when he said that" (ibid: 127). The Australian media further amplified this discursive line by emphasizing the previous "criminal record" of the *Child's Play* series in Britain: the first case of two eleven-year-old boys who murdered a toddler in 1993 immediately after one's father had rented *Child's Play 3*; and another case which involved the torture and murder of a sixteen-year-old girl by five women in 1992. One of the women had allegedly watched *Child's Play* and liked to say "I'm Chucky. Wanna play?" (ibid: 128) and British "police believe a cassette of the doll's chilling and robotic 'I'm Chucky. Wanna play?' catchphrase was repeatedly played through headphones while she [the murdered girl] was tied to a bed for days on end" (ibid).

From our experience in reading all kinds of media discourse, it is reasonable to take this last discursive layer as obviously more disturbing. Now, the problem is how to conceptualize this disturbance in analyzable terms. The perverse logic of articulation and the three privileged discursive routes fleshed out above can help us with task. Firstly, in this disturbing articulation, not only the social context and the structure that imbeds and connects with this massacre have disappeared, thus tending to wash away any possible politicisation of this traumatic event; but even the personalized details of the murder have been narrowed into one demonic, fetishized object that alone “possesses” Bryant and constitutes a mana-like cause of the massacre, namely, the *Child’s Play* movies. However, if we view this through the lens of perverse enjoyment discussed above, then we should not be led astray by this fetishized object. Because the point here is actually not possession itself but rather “possession as a punishment” for or a result of disobeying one single particular rule, namely, the injunction: “you shall not watch those violent videos, or the demon will come, it will haunt and possess you!” and this single rule has been fantasized here as more direct and powerful than the social structure or even than personal history.

This is undoubtedly the Imaginary law we have just discussed, a law that is completely regulative, covering the entire field of relations and parcelling out “goods.” Secondly, this perverse articulation also enjoys through editing and arranging epistemological facts: through selectively highlighting certain quotations, the media attempts to verify the possession. By drawing attention to the infamous history of *Child’s Play*, the media makes use of and further enhances the already abundant urban-legend-like implications of *Child’s Play*. Furthermore, the “don’t fuck with the Chuck!” idiom powerfully sharpens the power of the Imaginary law of “you shall stay away from violent videos!” Finally, the other, Martin Bryant, is not a “person” anymore; he is reduced to an element for the demonstration of Imaginary law, the flesh for the law’s sacrificial production of itself.

### **The Dark Side of the Force...**

Until now, when discussing the perverse articulation of rules, I have limited my analysis to examples related, at least by our normally social standard, to “positive” rules within the social Other, namely, “honesty,” “diligence,” and “stay away from those violent videos.” However, we cannot forget another important and darker side of social rules. As Žižek never fails to remind us, there are sets of ambiguous and underground rules---the patriarchal code, the nationalistic code, and so on---within the social Other, which are as much as or even more powerful than publicly stated and approved rules (see especially Žižek 1994: 54-85). Predatory tabloid can be counted as one of the types of discourse keenest to promote these underground social rules through, again, the operation of raising these rules to the status of Imaginary laws. In addition, as a type of discourse that is itself familiar with the politically correct atmosphere of contemporary society and can speak in a “ventriloquial” style (see Conboy 2006), predatory tabloid can perversely flesh out

these darker Imaginary laws in a very subtle and elusive fashion.

Let us examine another example documented in the literature (ibid: 131), within which the forcing out of the patriarchal Imaginary law has made the latter take its most repulsive but hidden form. In addition, we have to notice the fact that this type of discursive operation might be the most abundant type in predatory tabloid:

VANESSA THE UNDERDRESSER GOES LIKE A RACING CAR

...and I should know, says the British Champ who bedded her

A RACING driver told yesterday how he bedded sex-mad Big Brother beauty Vanessa Nimmo-within TWO HOURS of meeting her.

...stunning blonde...sizzling photos

BLONDE BEAUTY BROKE MY BED

A MALE model told last night how blonde bombshell Vanessa Nimmo BROKE the headboard on his bed during a passionate farewell romp...bedded the stunner...

As Martin Conboy has pinpointed here, “she is nicknamed ‘Vanessa the Undresser’ and she is a ‘fast’ woman, so much so that she is described as going ‘like a race car’ and her male conqueror can vouch for this because by a wonderful tabloid coincidence he just happens to be a racing driver. It is also significant to see the use of tabloid typographies to highlight the important issues of the story below the headline---“RACING...TWO HOURS...MALE...BROKE” (ibid: 132). What Conboy leaves out is the enjoyment that this paradigmatically repulsive patriarchal tabloid text has brought out, inviting the audience-subject to partake.

The perverse logic of punishment is expressed as subtle threat and ridicule (“Vanessa the Undresser”) as well as in the editing of the hard facts (a RACING driver told yesterday how..., stunning blonde, sizzling photos) to substantiate the promoted Imaginary law. In addition, we have to notice one important point here in order to pinpoint the fourth privileged discursive route of predatory tabloid: the constant deployment of one specific type of fantasy, a fantasy that is *supplementarily connected* with Imaginary law itself which, *although it has an ultra-transgressive visage with respect to the Imaginary law, has nonetheless functioned as a reverse substantiation of this Imaginary law*. Here, predatory tabloid is not using the patriarchal law itself, it is using the ultimately and apparently transgressive “beyond” which is *also* set up by this Imaginary law as its structural supplement, namely, the figure of the “game girl,” to substantiate it both doubly and reversely. Finally and most importantly, we have to notice that *all* the examples mentioned above invoke this ultra-transgressive but structurally/ logically supplementary fantasy: “Diligence” and its supplementary fantasy of the lazy teenager, “honesty” with that of the cunning foreigner, and the “you shall not watch those violent videos!” with the possessed indulger in violent video. These fantasies, in their straightforward opposition to the Imaginary laws, actually belong to and are produced by these same Imaginary laws and function as supplements that support, highlight, and buttress them “from the other side.” In other words, it is through this double-sided substantiation

that the patriarchal Imaginary law is “teased out.”

## Concluding Remarks

I have tried to single out two logics of enjoyment of tabloid discourse---neurotic and perverse ---through a Lacanian perspective. I do not intend to view these two logics as two distinctive definitions through which two types of tabloid discourse with a rigid boundary separating them can be produced. Ambiguity and a grey zone between these two logics remain. I will only discuss the most important ambiguity here concerning the role of transgression here. On the one hand, I have tended to relegate transgression in neurotic logic to the side of the audience-subject whose urge in trespassing the social rules of the Other constitutes an important part of neurotic enjoyment. On the other hand, in the perverse logic of enjoyment, I have explicitly placed transgression on the side of the reported Imaginary other through which the road for the advent of a punitive enjoying Other, in the form of Imaginary law, can be paved. Although this arrangement is valid in most cases, it is highly possible for the audience-subject’s neurotic transgression, expressed through attacking prominent social figures, to converge with the perverse logic of predatory tabloid when these prominent social figures have also trespassed socially sanctioned rules. It can be theoretically argued here that the perverse enjoyment is always a temptation for the neurotic subject because this is the easiest way to get rid of the anxiety-ridden relationship it maintains with the Other.

As described, the neurotic subject is always trapped in the secret of the Other’s desire: on the one hand, it takes the Other as guarantor, or proper distributor, of its enjoyment and always craves a response from the Other. On the other hand, when it transgresses the Other’s rules, feelings of guilt unmistakably follow right after the moment of transgression. How nicely convenient the perverse solution is here, in which the subject can enjoy directly through the Other and take it as mask of enjoyment. Valid as this claim might be, I do not propose to solve the ambiguities between these two logics solely by theoretical arguments because when we do this, we are aiming more at enhancing the explanative power of theory than advancing research insight into curious phenomena. Concerning the ambiguities between these two logics, I hold that theory in itself does not help us too much, and attentive case-by-case analytical observation of the discursive textuality must take over.

Most of the analytical effort within this paper has been put into the predatory tabloid discourse, and this is not only because the scholarly literature has not provided a convincing explanation of it, but also because it has, in my belief, disturbing social and political consequences. I think that predatory tabloid does not have a clear political stance, that is, it would be very difficult for us to pinpoint tabloid in-itself as supporting racism or anti-racism, sexism or anti-sexism, nationalism or multiculturalism, etc. because it is addicted to *any* established rule. It is true that

tabloid discourse tends to operate in accordance with the dominant white-patriarchal-capitalistic position because it is embedded in this white-patriarchal-capitalistic society; however, it also never shies from taking an oppositional stance. However, tabloid discourse does have political and social consequences. The social and political consequences reside in its “addiction” to the repetitive discursive practice of raising any social rule into the status of Imaginary law. We might say that predatory tabloid has a “conservative” tendency, but it is not “conservative” in the sense of political conservatism, which entails a certain political stance and project for the future. The conservativeness I am aiming at here is predatory tabloid’s powerful reification of the established social Other by means of an excitable and perverse galvanization.

As Conboy points out, when a racist remark is announced and picked up by the media, “a near unanimity [of anti-racism] was expressed across the range of tabloids in Britain” (ibid: 113). However, we must be very careful in evaluating these contestations of racism because once these contestations take the perversely predatory form, the “standard” operation is always to stage a mediated show trial against these figures and put all the blame on them until they apologise publicly for what they have said or done. It is by showing these quick (or, cheap?) and individualized repentances in front of Imaginary laws, that the predatory tabloid claims: “Justice has been done!”

When the perverse logic hooks in, the proper critical question “why and how can our society still work like this?”; an interrogation that should include the subject who enunciates it; has been reduced and turned into “how can *they* still say or do things like that?” We can ignore the racist tendency hiding in our social texture, especially because of the glaring degree of vehemence in these mediated show trials. By conflating justice with law through a quick show trial, predatory tabloid blocks the possibility of constructing racist, sexist, etc. events as points of reflection that constitute the entry for the endless pursuance of justice, that is, for a justice that is always in the state of “to come.” Yet, such endless pursuance might in fact be both the only justifiable definition of justice and indeed the very process of democratic struggle

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- 1 This exclaiming---“what do you want from me?”---has an important role in Lacanian psychoanalysis, please see Žižek 1989: 87-129.
- 2 With regard to this point and its use in political analysis, see Žižek 2008: 80-90.
- 3 This point has shown the uniqueness of Lacanian psychoanalytical analysis, namely, psychoanalysis works not on the level of epistemological reality but on the level of the subjective organization of enjoyment. As Jason Glynos (2002) has pointed out, in the practice of psychoanalysis, the analyst often encounters the problem of “epistemological incapacity” (ibid: 34). For example, a patient might tell the analyst that he/ she had witnessed some scenarios, which are unverifiable, or sometimes, simply fabricated. However, what the analyst should do is not to tell the patient that these scenarios are not real or that they did not exist and ask them to return to reality, but rather the analyst should patiently follow these narratives in order to find out how these scenarios relate with the organization of enjoyment on the side of the patient.
- 4 The original purpose of Stockwell’s case study is to analyse the role of the media in producing moral panic. Here, I use Stockwell’s case study to express my own concerns about tabloid discourse.
- 5 With regard to the ideological effect of the personalized framework, see Connell 1992 and Sparks 1992.

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