

# Cultural artefacts as places of political contestation: Radical democracy, discursive ‘groundlessness’ and *The Name of the Rose*

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This article, taking as its point of departure the validity of Laclau and Mouffe’s perspectives on radical democracy, focuses, in particular, on whether or not neo-Marxist cultural criticism could, conceivably, have recourse to what were previously considered ‘high’ cultural artefacts. In an effort to argue in favour of the political relevance of certain ostensibly ‘high’ cultural artefacts to the neo-Marxist project of radical democracy, this article begins by exploring the way in which an awareness of discursive ‘groundlessness’ constitutes a necessary feature of the complex negotiations between, and within, the coalitions of a Left-wing hegemony. After this, it focuses, on the one hand, on the extent to which Umberto Eco’s novel *The Name of the Rose* (1983), because of its thematization of such discursive ‘groundlessness’, has the potential, albeit only incrementally, to help usher in radical democratic change, and, on the other hand, on how the commercial co-optation and rearticulation of Eco’s novel, through Annaud’s 1984 film version of *The Name of the Rose*, effectively dissolves and negates the political potential of the literary work. In short, through drawing into conspicuousness the discursive tensions that exist between the literary work and its cinematic rearticulation, this article endeavours to provide an example that highlights both the manner in which the realm of cultural consumption continues to constitute an arena of political struggle, and, consequently, the need for further consideration and discussion of the discursive orientation of neo-Marxist cultural criticism.

**Key words:** neo-Marxism, discursive ‘groundlessness’, ‘high’ cultural artefacts

## **Kulturele artefakte as plekke van politiese omstredeheid: Radikale demokrasie, diskursiewe ‘grondeloosheid’ en *The Name of the Rose***

Hierdie artikel, wat as vertrekpunt die geldigheid van Laclau en Mouffe se perspektiewe op radikale demokrasie neem, fokus pertinent op die vraag of die neo-Marxistiese kulturele kritiek moontlik toegang kan hê tot wat voorheen beskou is as ‘hoë’ kulturele artefakte. In ’n poging om te argumenteer ten gunste van die politieke relevansie van bepaalde oënskynlik ‘hoë’ kulturele artefakte vir die neo-Marxistiese projek van radikale demokrasie, begin hierdie artikel deur ’n ondersoek te loods na hoe ’n bewussyn van diskursiewe ‘grondeloosheid’ ’n noodsaaklike kenmerk verteenwoordig van die komplekse onderhandelings tussen, en binne, die koalisies van ’n Linksgesinde hegemonie. Hierna word daar enersyds gefokus op die mate waarin Umberto Eco se roman *The Name of the Rose* (1983), deur die tematisering daarin van sodanige diskursiewe ‘grondeloosheid’, die potensiaal het, sy dit deur geleidelike toename, radikale demokratiese verandering tot stand kan help bring, en andersyds op hoe die kommersiële koopting en herartikulasie van Eco se roman deur Annaud se filmweergawe van *The Name of the Rose* in 1984 die politieke potensiaal van die literêre werk effektief ophef en neeger. Kortom, deur die aandag te vestig op die diskursiewe spanning tussen die literêre werk en die kinematografiese herartikulasie daarvan, poog hierdie artikel om ’n voorbeeld te voorsien wat die soeklig laat val op sowel die wyse waarop die terrein van kulturele konsumpsie voortgaan om as politieke strydperk te dien, as die gevolglike noodsaak vir die verdere oorweging en bespreking van die diskursiewe oriëntasie van die neo-Marxistiese kulturele kritiek.

**Sleutelwoorde:** neo-Marxisme, diskursiewe ‘grondeloosheid’, ‘hoë’ kulturele artefakte

**A**longside the emergence, in recent years, of neo-Marxism, has arisen the question of what form neo-Marxist cultural criticism might take. However, the answer to this question is complicated by the way in which neo-Marxism, for the most part, distances itself from much of the discursive backbone of the Marxist ‘metanarrative’, namely those “absolute categories of... ‘the Party’, ‘the Class’, or ‘the Revolution’” (Laclau & Mouffe 2001: 190). As such, part of the above mentioned question concerns whether or not neo-Marxist cultural criticism can have recourse to ‘high’, ‘authentic’ or ‘autonomous’ culture that, from a New Marxist perspective, remains politically important, insofar as it constitutes “a rupture with the established reality principle [that]...at the same time...invokes the images of liberation” (Marcuse 1992: 52).<sup>1</sup> This is because, unlike the New Marxists, neo-Marxists are precluded from ever positing, except in the most vague and oblique terms, the actual form that such a ‘better world’ may take, insofar as their radical democratic politics is, amongst other things, obliged to “avoid the... extreme...represented by the totalitarian myth of the Ideal city” (Laclau & Mouffe 2001: 190).<sup>2</sup>

Yet Dreyfus and Rabinow, in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (1983), provide an insight that is valuable in relation to the above question. That is, they assert that,

For the genealogist philosophy is over[, insofar as there]... is nothing absolutely primary to interpret because, when all is said and done, underneath it all everything is already interpretation... The more one interprets the more one finds not the fixed meaning of a text, or of the world, but only other interpretations. These interpretations have been created and imposed by other people, not by the nature of things. In this discovery of [discursive] *groundlessness* the inherent arbitrariness of interpretation is revealed. For if there is nothing to interpret, then everything is open to interpretation; the only limits are those arbitrarily imposed. [My Italics] (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1983: 107)

In the light of this, this article advances that neo-Marxist cultural criticism *can* have recourse to, amongst other things, certain forms of ostensibly ‘high’ culture, because of the way in which the thematization of discursive ‘groundlessness’ that occurs through such cultural artefacts resonates with the strategy of negotiation that underpins the neo-Marxist project of radical democracy. In sum, (1) such radical democracy rests upon the formation of a Left-wing hegemony to counter the neo-conservative hegemony which dominates at present. Yet, (2) such a Left-wing hegemony can only come about through a radical process of constant negotiation between, and within, coalitions of individuals and groups. (3) An awareness of discursive ‘groundlessness’, as Dreyfus and Rabinow intimate, is highly conducive to such negotiation, insofar as it renders ‘everything open to interpretation’. Therefore, (4) it is possible to conclude that the thematization of discursive ‘groundlessness’ that occurs in certain ostensibly ‘high’ cultural artefacts is of political value to neo-Marxism, by virtue of the way in which it prepares the discursive terrain for the emergence of radical democracy. In short, this is because, in the *absence* of such an awareness of discursive ‘groundlessness’, there can be neither a sufficient dissolution of the integrity of one’s own perspectives, nor any sufficient development of an understanding of the relativity of values, both of which are, arguably, necessary before any “establish[ment of]...equivalence between...different struggles” (Laclau & Mouffe 2001: 184) can take place, and, similarly, before any effective Left-wing hegemonic articulation of such different struggles can occur.

As such, after an initial brief discussion of the role of negotiation in neo-Marxism, the second section of this article, in the light of the above assertion by Dreyfus and Rabinow, explores how Umberto Eco’s novel *The Name of the Rose* (1983) constitutes an example of a ‘high’ cultural artefact that may be considered politically valuable for the ushering in of radical democratic change, because it promotes an awareness of discursive ‘groundlessness’. However, the commercial co-option of this cultural artefact, which occurred via its rearticulation through Annaud’s film *The Name of the Rose* (1984), was not only replete with all the seamless editing and visual trappings of mainstream classical realist cinema,<sup>3</sup> but also involved an embroidering of the narrative of the novel with features that propagate *essentialist* or ‘foundational’ thinking.<sup>4</sup> With regard to this, the third section of this article will consider how, although Annaud’s cinematic version of Eco’s literary work reached a far greater audience, it also dissolved the thematization of discursive ‘groundlessness’ found in the novel, and, thereby, concomitantly, the political value of the novel for the project of radical democracy.

Admittedly, Eco’s novel *The Name of the Rose* (1983) is, perhaps, neither the most important literary text of the current era, nor even the text that best thematizes discursive ‘groundlessness’, especially not when compared to the array of other ‘post-modern’ novels with which it was contemporaneous, and which have subsequently emerged. However, the discursive tensions that exist between it and Annaud’s film *The Name of the Rose* (1984), do provide a particularly good contemporary example of the manner in which a text, of political value for the project of radical democracy, can be co-opted by mainstream culture in a way that robs it of its capacity to ‘rupture’ the status quo with its ‘images of liberation’. That is, although, as discussed, unlike New Marxist cultural criticism, neo-Marxist cultural criticism is

obliged to avoid couching itself in terms of any ‘myth of the Ideal city’, this does not amount to the requirement that it abandon utopianism completely. On the contrary, it is possible that neo-Marxist cultural criticism might simply involve the valorisation, embrace and defence of those cultural artefacts that present a *different* notion of utopia. Such a utopia would be one that “liberat[es]...us, through its *disorder*, from the oppressiveness of what is extant, actual, established, and determined” [My Italics] (Megill 1985: 89), because of the way in which its *disorder* renders everything utterly negotiable.

### **Incompatibility between neo-Marxism and *essentialist* or ‘foundational’ thinking**

In recent years, Laclau and Mouffe have advanced what is, arguably, a neo-Marxist idea of radical democracy, in terms of which the “multiplication of political spaces and the preventing of the concentration of power in one point are...the...preconditions of every truly democratic transformation of society” (Laclau & Mouffe 2001: 178).<sup>5</sup> That is, in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy – Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (1985), Laclau and Mouffe present a new political strategy, the adoption of which, they advance, has become a necessity in the face of the increasingly hegemonic character of neo-conservatism.<sup>6</sup> In opposition to such neo-conservatism, the democracy advanced by Laclau and Mouffe is, firstly, ‘radical’, insofar as it does not simply involve the establishment of “an ‘alliance’ between given interests [but rather the]...establish[ment of] an equivalence between these different struggles” (Laclau & Mouffe 2001: 184). In other words, in terms of such an equivalence, each understands their success to be articulated with, and hence entirely dependent upon, the individual successes of a range of other struggles, such that the defence/extension of one’s rights cannot be made at the expense of another’s rights.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, Laclau and Mouffe’s form of democracy is ‘plural’, because it “broaden[s] the domain of the exercise of democratic rights beyond the limited traditional field of ‘citizenship’” (Laclau & Mouffe 2001: 185) and, instead, argues for the “proliferation of radically new and different political spaces...[, along with] the emergence of a plurality of [political] subjects” (Laclau & Mouffe 2001: 181). Thirdly, their form of democracy involves ushering in “hegemony [as]...a fundamental tool for...the Left” (Laclau & Mouffe 2001: 193), rather than as something to which the Left is subject. In effect, instead of regarding hegemony as something that, via a process of ‘resistance and incorporation’, steadily robs the Left of its political efficacy,<sup>8</sup> Laclau and Mouffe state that,

It is only when the open, unsutured character of the social is fully accepted, [and] when the essentialism of the totality and of the elements is rejected, that...‘hegemony’ can come to constitute a fundamental tool *for* political analysis on the left. These conditions arise originally in the field of...‘democratic revolution’, but they are only *maximized* in all their *deconstructive* effects in the project for a radical democracy, or, in other words, in a form of politics which is founded not upon dogmatic postulation of any ‘essence of the social’, but, on the contrary, on affirmation of the contingency and ambiguity of every ‘essence’, and on the constitutive character of social division and antagonism. Affirmation of a ‘ground’ which lives only by *negating* its fundamental character; of an ‘order’ which exists only as a partial limiting of *disorder*; of a ‘meaning’ which is constructed only as excess and paradox in the face of meaninglessness – in other words, the field of the political as the space for a game which is never ‘zero-sum’, because the rules and the players are never fully explicit. [My Italics] (Laclau & Mouffe 2001: 192-193)

In the interest of promoting the emergence of radical democracy, what neo-Marxist cultural criticism *could*, conceivably, concern itself with is, amongst other things, the valorisation, embrace and defence of those cultural artefacts that are either informed by, or which facilitate an awareness of, discursive ‘groundlessness’. This is because of the political value of such artefacts as incremental discursive moves that prepare the discursive terrain for the emergence of radical democracy. That is, arguably, such artefacts are politically valuable because, as discussed in the Introduction, while radical democracy rests upon the formation of a Left-wing hegemony, such

an hegemony can only come about through a radical process of constant negotiation between, and within, coalitions of individuals and groups. This, in turn, is predicated upon an awareness of discursive ‘groundlessness’ and the concomitant appreciation of the openness of everything to interpretation.<sup>9</sup> As such, a growing awareness of discursive ‘groundlessness’ could, firstly, enhance the ‘radical’ nature of democracy, because it is conducive to the establishment of the above mentioned *equivalence* between different struggles, by virtue of the way in which it stands to mitigate the ostensible integrity of partisan interests that have only ever allowed for a mere *alliance* between struggles in the past. Secondly, an awareness of discursive ‘groundlessness’ could, conceivably, also enhance the ‘plurality’ of democracy, insofar as it not only dissolves the erstwhile arbitrary limits that impinged on the interpretation of ‘citizenship’, but also lends impetus to the constant and unlimited interpretation of such a notion, and to the consequent proliferation of radically new and different political spaces and subjects. Thirdly, in this way, the thematization of discursive ‘groundlessness’ has the potential to engender not only the abandonment of *essentialist* or ‘foundational’ thinking, but also, concomitantly, the growth of dispositions necessary to the formation of an effective Left-wing hegemony.<sup>10</sup>

### **The political value of the discursive ‘groundlessness’ of Eco’s *The Name of the Rose* (1983)**

In a development upon the New Marxist cultural criticism of the Frankfurt School,<sup>11</sup> Macherey’s *A Theory of Literary Production* (1966), instead of focussing on the political effects of cultural *homogeneity*, examines, amongst other things, the important relationship that exists between the perceived narrative orientation of certain popular cultural texts and political policy. With regard to this, Macherey’s work, at least to a certain extent, identifies the ostensible ‘ideological project’ within Jules Verne’s science fiction as the implicit valorisation of French imperialism, insofar as he argues that,

[T]he French bourgeoisie of the Third Republic... ‘commissioned’... Verne’s work [and then had it] acclaimed by the Académie française[, because of the way in which this]... public... [both] found themselves in Verne’s work and tied that work indissolubly to their own historical moment: to the conquest of France’s colonial empire. (Macherey 1978: 159)<sup>12</sup>

There exists a similar intimate connection between, on the one hand, certain of the narrative tendencies of mainstream cinema,<sup>13</sup> and, on the other hand, the neo-conservative agenda.<sup>14</sup> That is, insofar as the former propagates the idea, firstly, that existence is benign and that the world of human affairs is ultimately just, secondly, that all human action can be thoroughly accounted for, and thirdly, that humans *always* have the capacity both to recollect, and to communicate what they recall, with complete accuracy and transparency, respectively, it engenders in viewers an uncritical disposition that, in many respects, is favourable to the ‘ideals’ of neo-conservatism. In short, this is because, firstly, through denying the primary hostility of the world, such films lend credence to the neo-conservative notion that life can be *completely* and *effectively* administered and guided through the use of appropriate policy and authoritarian control. Similarly, through advancing the notion that the world of human affairs is ultimately just, mainstream cinema not only presents an opiate rather than a remedy for those social injustices which persist, and which continue to be augmented, under neo-conservative hegemony. In effect, it also, simultaneously, engenders further political apathy, both through its representation of the realization of justice as an inexorable ‘law of history’, which carries with it the rider that justice does not therefore need to be agitated for, and through its repetitive representation of the form that justice ostensibly *always* takes, which limits consideration of the immensely complex questions that are indissociable from any serious contemplation of



justice. Understandably, in both cases, the neo-conservative agenda is well served, insofar as, while, in terms of the former, the non-challenging of the prevailing injustices that exist under neo-conservative hegemony is quietly encouraged, in terms of the latter, no real alternatives to neo-conservative ideas of justice are ever proffered for deliberation. Secondly, through advancing the notion that all human action can be thoroughly accounted for, the narratives of mainstream cinema propagate the idea of the primacy of the 'unified subject', which entails an eclipsing or a forgetting of, for example, those moods and predilections which, through their inexplicable emergence and recession, problematize the idea of the subject as a rationally autonomous being. This, again, plays neatly into the hands of neo-conservatism, insofar as it is in alignment with the endeavour, on the part of neo-conservatives, to limit the nuanced diversity of subjectivity in favour of deference to the 'ideal' of a subject who, informed by traditional values and strong patriotic and family feelings, can be relied on to be constant, predictable and conformist. Thirdly, through advancing the idea that humans *always* have the capacity both to recollect, and to communicate what they recall, with complete accuracy and transparency, respectively, mainstream cinema covertly lends credence to the notion that a historical account *can* be unequivocally 'true'. Arguably, this notion constitutes the most important cornerstone of neo-conservatism, insofar as the ideological strength of any national or anti-Communist foreign policy, along with the perceived legitimacy of any moralistic domestic social policy, are always only proportional to the ostensible 'authenticity' of the politico-historical account in which they are couched.

In contrast, Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (1983) systematically subverts the above mentioned three narrative tendencies found within mainstream cinema, and thereby, concomitantly, problematizes their engendering of an uncritical disposition favourable to the 'ideals' of neo-conservatism. That is, firstly, in the closing stages of Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (1983), Adso of Melk, in a rather blunt and unequivocal fashion, bears testimony to the hostility of existence that does not even spare the 'hero' of the narrative, namely William of Baskerville, who has hitherto guided both Adso and the reader through the labyrinth of the tale, insofar as he abruptly advances that his master perished from the plague around the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century (Eco 1998: 499).<sup>15</sup> Similarly, and in a manner that is almost as glib, the unpalatable issue of the prevailing of unspeakable injustice, which is carried out without the offenders ever being visited by any cosmic or divine form of retribution, is broached in relation to the young, attractive, peasant girl with whom Adso shares his first and only sexual relationship, insofar as she is wrongfully condemned as a witch by the Papal inquisitor, Bernardo Gui, and, consequently, burned at the stake. In short, in the narrative, despite the smitten Adso's desperate yet constrained search for a means of circumventing her fate, William, rather nonchalantly, advises him to think of her as burned flesh (Eco 1998: 406). Moreover, because this matter is not mentioned again in the narrative, the reader is left to surmise not only that her horrific execution ultimately came to pass, but also that, in addition, the arbitrary and heinously unjust reasons for which it took place, remained forever unchallenged.

Secondly, Eco's novel begins by problematising the idea that all human action can be thoroughly accounted for, through the way in which the author problematizes the *purpose* of the reader pursuing a literary expedition through the narrative of *The Name of the Rose* (1983) until its conclusion. This occurs when he maintains that, initially, he could think of little reason for publishing his Italian translation of a French translation of a 17<sup>th</sup> century Latin version of a book written by a German monk, in Latin, in the closing years of the 14<sup>th</sup> century (Eco 1998: 4), which, moreover, details events that are immensely distant and detached from the concerns of the present era (Eco 1998: 5).<sup>16</sup> Yet, when he later advances that, ultimately, he proceeded to publish it purely for the purposes of pleasure (Eco 1998: 5), he neither ventures to proffer an intelligible explanation of the nature of such pleasure, nor bothers to qualify the source

from which such pleasure springs.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, the reader is left either to accept that the impetus behind pleasure cannot *always* be accounted for, and to proceed through the novel in a manner that is informed by such an acceptance, or to simply cease reading. In turn, one of the two central characters in Eco's novel, namely William, is described as having a penchant for activities that constitute inexplicable 'ends-in-themselves', and which range from lying for lengthy periods on a bed in a state of deep meditative 'paralysis', to the consumption of herbal intoxicants (Eco 1998: 16). Moreover, throughout the narrative, William's preoccupation with such contemplative practice and such intoxicants, like Eco's publication of the novel, remains motivated by a purely private *pleasure* that he never deigns to explain further or qualify, which, again, problematizes the idea that idiosyncratic human behaviour can, and should, always be accounted for.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, the other central character of the novel, Adso, from the outset, maintains that, in relation to his story, he cannot guarantee the reader of a purposeful and coherent narrative, but can only provide a tale filled with wonder and awe (Eco 1998: 18). However, the significance of these assertions only dawns on the reader in the concluding part of the narrative, in the poignant image of Adso, having returned decades later to the abandoned ruins of the abbey, searching amongst the debris for the scattered remains of the library. In short, Adso explains that he spent an entire day gathering two sacks full of stray pieces of parchment that had survived the fire and years of exposure to the elements, and then, subsequently, spent years attempting to decipher the legible parts of these scraps. Moreover, he admits that, because he believed it was part of his destiny to do so, he was often tempted to regard them as oracular (Eco 1998: 500-501). In effect, through the above, the reader finally becomes aware that these fragmentary texts, far from being acknowledged by Adso as arbitrary and discontinuous, have been of immense significance in the constitution of the narrative of Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (1983), which the reader has just traversed. All of this is confirmed by Adso when, a little later, he confesses that he has often felt that the narrative he has written is simply an echo of what his collection of parchment scraps has suggested to him (Eco 1998: 501). As such, at this point, the reader must not only abandon any provisional overarching purpose which they may have, in spite of Adso's earlier warnings, projected onto the narrative, but they are also obliged to accept the largely inexplicable and illogical nature of his actions. That is, although, as mentioned, Adso promises, from the outset of the novel, to provide only a tale filled with wonder and awe (Eco 1998: 18), arguably, this wonder and awe spring not so much from the degree to which the events detailed are spectacular, as from the sublime *ambiguity* with which they are necessarily imbued, as a consequence of the arbitrary discursive circumstances from which they are derived.

Thirdly, Eco's novel problematizes the idea that humans *always* have the capacity both to recollect, and to communicate what they recall, with complete accuracy and transparency, respectively. With regard to this, again, from the outset of the novel, Adso intimates a lack of confidence both in the capacity of his mind to effectively recollect and piece together his vague memories of the past into an integrated whole, and in his ability to communicate such a tale coherently (Eco 1998: 11-12). However, this is less a stylistic expression of modesty and more an explicit acknowledgment, on the part of an aged monk, of those discursive limitations that are linked to mortality, and which, in many cases, are reflected in the onset of forgetfulness and *senile dementia*, as one approaches old age. Yet, in spite of the above thematization of the unavoidable ravages of time to which human memory is subject, many readers, no doubt, proceed through the narrative as they might any other novel – as though the text they are traversing, ultimately, constitutes a strategically integrated whole. However this charade is only possible until, through a last-minute sleight of hand, the *entire* narrative of Eco's novel becomes further problematized, in terms of its meaning, by the emergence of the senility of the narrator in the final instance. In short, this results in the tale becoming increasingly pervaded by a dark

and disturbing ambiguity, when considered in hindsight, since the complexity of the story, and the detailed imagery of which it comprises, effectively preclude the reader from ever being able to identify, with any degree of certainty, the places where the narrator's growing dementia have usurped the veracity and reliability of his account. In effect, just before the end of the narrative, Adso's tale begins to lose focus noticeably, insofar as his doubts and confusion over the meaning of his work mingle freely and aimlessly with, and lose themselves between, half-remembered poetic themes,<sup>19</sup> thoughts of eternal salvation, and concern over the arthritic pain in his thumb (Eco 1998: 501-502). At this juncture, an ominous opacity, which may well have secretly pervaded most of the preceding pages of the story, emerges into conspicuousness, insofar as the reader becomes aware that the aged Adso, at some point during the preceding narration, has succumbed to a form of senile dementia. As a consequence, any gleaning, on the part of the reader, of any enduring or overarching meaning from his account, is revealed for what it is, namely an exercise in fabrication, because there is no guarantee that most of the preceding pages of the narrative are not merely an echo of Adso's growing 'madness'.

Admittedly, the above aspects of Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (1983) parallel some of the themes that occur in Sartre's early 'existential' literary work *Nausea* (1938). Firstly, in Sartre's *Nausea* (1938), the character of Roquentin, looking down at the town of Bouville, both thematizes the imperious and uncanny nature of existence, and, concomitantly, mocks the false sense of security that the inhabitants of the town embrace and hide within (Sartre 1965: 225).<sup>20</sup> Similarly, because he understands existence to be contingent, he mocks their notion of 'rights' and their belief in the necessity of justice in the world of human affairs (Sartre 1965: 188). Secondly, Roquentin thematizes how, very often, idiosyncratic human behaviour *cannot* be accounted for, especially when he describes, in detail, the enjoyment he derives from picking up and feeling stray scraps of paper, whenever and wherever he finds them, (Sartre 1965: 21), but resists the temptation to fabricate any reason to 'explain' his preoccupation. Thirdly, he questions the validity of the idea that humans have the capacity to recollect and rearticulate the past with accuracy and transparency, respectively, when he worries over the way in which he cannot even effectively describe what occurred on the previous day, as he feels already too far removed in time from such events (Sartre 1965: 9). Moreover, Roquentin also expresses concern over the contrasting *comfort* with which other people believe that their memories and words can completely encompass all that they actually experienced on the occasions they pretend to recount (Sartre 1965: 17).<sup>21</sup>

Yet, the above parallels notwithstanding, the narrative of Eco's novel, arguably, surpasses such existential literature in terms of the degree to which it approximates discursive 'groundlessness', because there is no deference, within *The Name of the Rose* (1983), to a notion of *Being* in an attempt to break the discursive 'free-fall' to which language is condemned. That is, insofar as neither Sartre's *Nausea* (1938) nor, for that matter, Camus's *The Outsider* (1942),<sup>22</sup> kowtow to the three narrative tendencies of mainstream cinema discussed earlier, both texts could be said to attempt to steer clear of a *fall* into the tempting tranquillization of the language of the 'they'.<sup>23</sup> With regard to this, Heidegger states:

When Dasein, tranquilized, and 'understanding' everything, thus compares itself with everything, it drifts along towards an alienation...in which its ownmost potentiality-for-Being is hidden from it. Falling Being-in-the-world is not only tempting and tranquilizing; it is at the same time alienating. (Heidegger 1978: 222-223)

Consequently, it is possible to consider both Sartre's and Camus's novels as orientated around an approximation of existential *authenticity*, and an avoidance of Dasein's tendency to "plunge...out of itself...into the...nullity of inauthentic everydayness[,]...that...gets interpreted...as a way of 'ascending' and 'living concretely'" (Heidegger 1978: 223).<sup>24</sup> However, as such, the degree of discursive 'groundlessness' that informs both Sartre's *Nausea* (1938) and

Camus's *The Outsider* (1942) is mitigated through the way in which both texts are couched in an early Heideggerian notion of *Being* as 'foundational', which, ultimately, involves an element of *essentialist* thinking. According to Foucault, such *transcendence* has hitherto infused language and impelled it to rely "on some 'exteriority'...that...can [be] know[n], reveal[ed] or interpret[ed, for example,]...foundation[s]...such as God, Being or Truth" (Colebrook 2002: 71). Against this, Foucault maintains that,

the essential task was to free the history of thought from its subjection to *transcendence*[...] to analyse this history, in the discontinuity that no teleology would reduce in advance; to map it in a dispersion that no pre-established horizon would embrace; to allow it to be deployed in an anonymity on which no *transcendental* constitution would impose the form of the subject; to...cleanse it of all *transcendental* narcissism...[, because] it had to be freed from that circle of the lost origin. [My Italics] (Foucault 2002: 223-224)

In contrast to Sartre's *Nausea* (1938) and Camus's *The Outsider* (1942), and in keeping with Foucault's above assertions, the narrative of Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (1983), at an implicit level, parodies the philosophical preoccupation, informed by the notion of *transcendence*, with divining an underlying *essential* meaning from what is construed to be mere 'surface' discursive movement. This occurs through the image, already discussed, of Adso, decades after the destruction of the library, attempting to piece together its remnants, and through the thematization of his belief that from such remnants a *message* might reach him (Eco 1998: 500). Analogously, the narrative implicitly questions the legitimacy of such a pursuit, not only through its rather tragic description of how Adso, afterwards, spent a great deal of time attempting to decipher these remnants (Eco 1998: 500), but also through its thematization of the degree to which he was, ultimately, tempted to regard them as oracular (Eco 1998: 501).

At a more explicit level, Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (1983) concludes on a similarly critical note, via the final cryptic Latin lines of the novel (Eco 1998: 502), which translate as, 'The rose remains as formerly regarding its name, (yet) we keep/have/hold to (only) the bare names (of things)'.<sup>25</sup> That is, as Eco points out, this derives from the 12<sup>th</sup> century poem *De contemptu mundi*, by the Benedictine monk Bernard of Morlay, and was chosen because it constitutes a peculiar "variation on the 'ubi sunt' theme[<sup>26</sup> insofar as it]...adds that all these departed things leave...only...names behind them [that continue to]...speak of both the nonexistent and the destroyed" (Eco 1984: 1). In this way, the final lines highlight the irony surrounding the manner in which these names, despite having long since lost the objects to which they refer, are nevertheless still 'embraced' and *clung to* as though they contain the *essence* of the things they used to describe.

Thus, through relinquishing the *essential* 'foundation' of *Being*, Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (1983) not only 'surpasses' the existential literature discussed above, by virtue of the way in which it moves into the realm of radical discursive 'groundlessness', but also, concomitantly, subverts all three of the above mentioned narrative tendencies of mainstream cinema in a far more extreme way than was previously possible through such existential literature. Consequently, Eco's text, far more than such existential literature, problematizes the discursive process through and in terms of which such mainstream cinematic narrative tendencies engender in viewers an uncritical disposition that is favourable to the 'ideals' of neo-conservatism. As such, because radical democracy rests upon the formation of a Left-wing hegemony, which requires a constant and radical process of negotiation, and because an awareness of discursive 'groundlessness' is highly conducive to such negotiation, insofar as it opens everything up to interpretation, it is possible to argue that the thematization of discursive 'groundlessness' that occurs in Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (1983) is, from a neo-Marxist perspective, of significant political value for the project of radical democracy.



## **Essentialism and ‘foundational’ thinking in Annaud’s *The Name of the Rose* (1984)**

Ironically, in contrast, Annaud’s 1984 mainstream cinematic rearticulation of Eco’s *The Name of the Rose* (1983) was only accomplished through an embroidering of the narrative of the novel with, amongst other things,<sup>27</sup> precisely those three narrative tendencies which were subverted through the novel. Consequently, from a neo-Marxist perspective, Annaud’s commercial co-option of Eco’s literary work can, arguably, be construed as politically problematic, insofar as it functions as a counter-measure that mitigates the political value of the novel. This emerges into conspicuousness when one considers the manner in which, within Annaud’s *The Name of the Rose* (1984), the three narrative tendencies, discussed earlier, propagate an *essentialist* or ‘foundational’ way of thinking.<sup>28</sup>

Firstly, in Annaud’s film, during the last few high angle long shots, which feature Adso of Melk (Christian Slater) and William of Baskerville (Sean Connery) travelling away from the abbey, there occurs an increasing distance between the audience’s vantage point and the two characters. However, via a voice-over, the much older Adso, who, at the beginning of the film, narrated the opening lines of the tale, returns and concludes the narrative with a monologue in which he advances that a similar distance developed between him and William (Sean Connery) after their separation a few years later. That is, although the death of William is not in any way negated in the narrative of the film, this event is rendered *opaque*, in the closing moments of the tale, when Adso asserts that he does *not* know what happened to William after they parted. This is very telling, not only because it constitutes a *new* element in Adso’s testimony that does not closely follow Eco’s novel, but also because it, in effect, *replaces* the line in the novel that describes William’s death from the plague around the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century (Eco 1998: 499). In addition to this characterisation of existence as *essentially* benign, and with regard to the theme of justice, the narrative of Annaud’s film clearly propagates the two key American cultural myths, namely “that the truth will always prevail (wrongs will be made right) and that the powerful in...society can be brought down by the little people who are represented [as]...truth-seek[ers]” (Denzin 1995: 23). In doing so, it communicates a rather *essentialist* notion of justice as an extant, ‘foundational’ aspect of reality that, although it may be temporarily obscured or eclipsed, inevitably emerges and prevails according to specific norms and a familiar pattern. This much is evident in Annaud’s film when, after the peasant girl (Valentina Vargas) has been sentenced to be burned outside the abbey, there occurs a standard ‘montage of tempo’,<sup>29</sup> involving Bernardo Gui (F. Murray Abraham) as the ‘villain’, the peasant girl (Valentina Vargas), tied to the stake, as the ‘damsel in distress’, and the peasants armed with pitchforks, as the ‘heroes’, who steadily approach and, predictably, rescue the peasant girl (Valentina Vargas), after Bernardo Gui (F. Murray Abraham) has retreated within the abbey walls to attend to the fire in the library. In addition, even though, through this unexpected series of ‘seditious’ events, Bernardo Gui (F. Murray Abraham) is unwittingly spared culpability for the peasant girl’s (Valentina Vargas’) death, harsh cosmic or divine retribution is nevertheless visited upon him for his unjust *intentions*, insofar as, during his attempt to flee from the abbey, his carriage is overturned by the peasants and he is ‘accidentally’ impaled on a set of spikes.<sup>30</sup> In fact, the cinematic text even goes so far as to eradicate any doubts about the peasant girl’s (Valentina Vargas’) survival because, when Adso (Christian Slater) and William (Sean Connery) finally leave the abbey on horseback, there occurs, along a forest path amidst the snow drifts, a scene in which Adso (Christian Slater) silently meets with her, embraces her fleetingly, and then bids her farewell, before departing to follow his master, who has already ridden off into the hazy sunlight.

Secondly, the narrative of Annaud’s film, rather than problematising the idea that all human action can be accounted for, implicitly advances the notion of a ‘positive and unified’ subject. In

short, in relation to the character of the older Adso, it not only *excises* his initial doubt about the capacity of his mind to effectively recollect and piece together his vague memories of the past (Eco 1998: 12), which effectively frames the narrative of the novel. In addition, it also rearticulates his initial efforts as a strategic hermeneutic endeavour, involving his pursuit of a *true* version of history, as a *faithful* chronicler of certain *events* that occurred long ago at a particular abbey. Similarly, the narrative of Annaud's *The Name of the Rose* (1984) concludes with no intimation whatsoever that the older Adso, at any point during his narration, has succumbed to senility; rather, on the contrary, despite an advanced age, he remains *completely* lucid and possessed of both a crystal clear memory and penetrating personal insight.<sup>31</sup> That is, through concluding with the older Adso's characterisation of the peasant girl (Valentina Vargas), with whom he shared his first and only sexual relationship, as someone that he has *never* stopped dreaming about,<sup>32</sup> the film advances the largely unrealistic image of the subject as an entirely *consistent* entity that, regardless of time, continues to orientate itself around particular salient experiences, which it recollects with the utmost clarity and precision, as though it had preserved them in the mental equivalent of amber. Moreover, Annaud's film presents the character of William (Sean Connery) as an entirely rational subject, insofar as every word and gesture that emerges from him is so carefully calculated that, to a large extent, he often appears to be a caricature of the figure of Sherlock Holmes. In fact, with regard to this, at one point during the process of his investigation of a death at the abbey, he even refers to his logical deductions as *elementary*.<sup>33</sup> Arguably, the above is very significant because through transforming these characters of Eco's novel in this way, the narrative of Annaud's film engages in a violent process of discursive 'exclusion' of the ambiguity that 'originally' surrounded both characters. Concomitantly, it thereby dissolves the critical political edge with which such ambiguity was synonymous, in the interest of 'including', instead, the idea of an *essentially* purposeful and logical subjectivity. Through doing so, Annaud's film opposes the project of radical democracy, which, in contrast, involves "the emergence of a *plurality of subjects*, whose forms of constitution and diversity it is only possible to think if we relinquish the category of 'subject' as a unified and unifying essence" (Laclau & Mouffe 2001: 181).

Thirdly, Annaud's *The Name of the Rose* (1984), via an opening caption, acknowledges *only* that the film is a palimpsest of Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (1983), which amounts to little more than the assertion that it is a screen adaptation of a literary text, and that, as a consequence, some liberties have been taken in relation to certain aspects of the narrative. As such, neither the immense ambiguity that pervades Eco's novel, as a result of the thematization of both its genealogy and its fragmentary nature,<sup>34</sup> nor the manner in which the novel, thereby, implicitly questions the ostensible solidity of the discursive 'foundations' of the reader's environment, are allowed to emerge into conspicuousness through the film. Consequently, the discursive 'foundations' of the audience's world are allowed to remain *essentially* intact. In other words, the discursive institutions that characterise the audience's environment are, albeit implicitly, left to reside in a state of ostensible stability, which all too easily communicates itself into an unspoken endorsement of the prevailing notion of such institutions as the legitimate products of an *essential* evolutionary 'telos', rather than as the arbitrary results of an array of discontinuous discourses. Moreover, as already mentioned, in Annaud's film, Adso's (Christian Slater's) introductory monologue actively promotes the idea that his historical account is objective, true and accurate. That is, although, in the beginning of the film, Adso (Christian Slater) echoes much of the *Prologue* of Eco's novel, importantly, he sheds any hesitance concerning the validity of his testimony and asks God to fill him with sufficient wisdom and grace so that he can faithfully chronicle the events that occurred in the past. While the cinematic narrative thereby intimates that history comprises of 'objective' events, through its added reference to wisdom and grace it concomitantly implies that an individual, in a sense, chooses between accessing this objective

*truth*, or contorting it into subjective *falsity* under the influence of personal interest. Similarly, in the absence of the sense of hesitance and tentativeness that characterises the *Prologue* of Eco's novel, the cinematic narrative advances the idea that the human capacity both to recollect, and to communicate what is recollected, is underpinned by an *essential* accuracy and transparency, respectively, which may or may not be exercised, depending on one's choice. Understandably, the propagation of this approach to the past, in terms of which it is viewed as a series of 'foundational' events that constitute a *true* or objective history, which one, through the exercise of diligent effort, can access, echoes the sentiments that legitimate the discursive practices of neo-conservatism. This is particularly the case in relation to neo-conservative national or anti-Communist foreign policy, and/or moralistic domestic social policy, insofar as such policy, for the most part, derives its ostensible validity from a single skewed version of history that is nevertheless upheld as utterly beyond doubt by the paternalistic political authority in question. For obvious reasons, the above is entirely incompatible with the acceptance of the legitimacy of, and negotiation between, a multiplicity of different and conflicting historical perspectives, which underpins the formation of a Left-wing hegemony, and, by implication, the entire project of radical democracy itself.

## Conclusion

As discussed, the emergence of radical democracy rests upon the formation of a Left-wing hegemony, which, in turn, requires a radical process of constant negotiation between, and within, coalitions of individuals and groups. On the one hand, certain cultural artefacts have the potential to extend the depth and parameters of such negotiation through their thematization of discursive 'groundlessness', insofar as a growing appreciation of such 'groundlessness' not only reveals the *arbitrary* nature of partisan interests, hitherto clung to as non-negotiable, but also allows for their transformation. Concomitantly, the influence of such cultural artefacts is important in the inscription of such transformed interests within a highly porous and dynamic discursive framework orientated not around the establishment of "an 'alliance' between given interests [, but rather around the]...establish[ment of] an equivalence between...different struggles" (Laclau & Mouffe 2001: 184). Similarly, insofar as a restrictive notion of citizenship constitutes the product of prejudice, it is conceivable that the above mentioned cultural artefacts, through their problematization of the discursive *basis* of such prejudice, can help "broaden the domain of the exercise of democratic rights beyond the limited traditional field of 'citizenship'" (Laclau & Mouffe 2001: 185). Understandably, in doing so, such cultural artefacts can play a significant role in the process of ushering in a radical *and* plural democracy, in terms of which "hegemony [can operate as]...a fundamental tool for...the Left" (Laclau & Mouffe 2001: 193). However, on the other hand, other cultural artefacts, by virtue of the orientation of their narratives around *essentialist* or 'foundational' thinking, have the potential to severely limit and mitigate such a process, and, indeed, to engender uncritical dispositions that are, instead, favourable to the 'ideals' of neo-conservatism.

Consequently, it is politically important, in the interest of ushering in radical democratic change, to thematize the ways in which contemporary cultural artefacts function as competing moves upon the discursive playing field of the present era. With regard to this, although Eco's novel *The Name of the Rose* (1983) is, perhaps, neither the most important literary text of the current era, nor even the text that best thematizes discursive 'groundlessness', arguably, the discursive tensions that exist between it and Annaud's film *The Name of the Rose* (1984) do provide a particularly clarifying example of the manner in which such contemporary cultural artefacts function as sites of contestation in the struggle between radical democracy and neo-conservatism. Admittedly, any embrace of this perspective would be predicated on the

exponential broadening of the Marxist framework, to the point where much of what may be termed Marxist ‘orthodoxy’ will find itself slowly but steadily relegated either to the margins of political practice or, even, to the realm of political history. Yet, the loss of such orthodoxy should not be regarded as synonymous with the dissolution of the need for *cultural* criticism; this is because, the advent of neo-Marxism notwithstanding, the realm of cultural consumption remains a privileged arena in which political struggle takes place.

## Notes

1. Marcuse maintains, “I believe – and it was Adorno to whom I am closest in this respect – that in art, literature, and music, insights and truths are expressed which cannot be communicated in any other form. In the aesthetic forms an entirely new dimension is opened up which is either repressed or tabooed in reality, namely the images of a human existence and a nature no longer confined within the norms of a repressive reality principle, but really striving for their fulfilment and liberation, even at the price of death...I would see all authentic literature as both[,]...on the one hand, accusation of existing society, [and,]...on the other hand (and internally linked to that) the promise of liberation” (Marcuse 1992: 52). Similarly, such authentic culture, “according to Horkheimer, has taken over the Utopian function of religion: to keep alive the human desire for a better world beyond the confines of the present; it carries the key to unlock the prison-house of mass culture...Its decisive characteristic is the assertion of a universally obligatory, eternally better and more valuable world that must be unconditionally affirmed: a world essentially different from the factual world of the daily struggle for existence, yet realizable by every individual for himself ‘from within’, without any transformation of the state of fact. Affirmative culture embodies the promise of tomorrow and thus a critique of today[, while, simultaneously, functioning as]...a realm we enter in order to be refreshed and renewed to continue with the affairs of today... ‘Authentic’ culture maintains a ‘subversive negativity’ in its creation and occupation of a ‘second dimension’ of social reality” (Storey 1998: 106-107).
2. Admittedly, for many, the distinction between New Marxism and neo-Marxism remains somewhat vague. However, for the purposes of this article, on the one hand, New Marxism is defined as a political stance that is informed by both the writings of, amongst others, the Frankfurt School *and* a concomitant tendency to reify and cling to certain Marxist ‘tenets’ (Cf. note 5). On the other hand, neo-Marxism is defined in terms of an appreciation and an embrace of “the radical extent of the changes which are necessary in the political imaginary of the Left, if it wishes to succeed in founding a political practice fully located in the field of the democratic revolution and conscious of the depth and variety of the hegemonic articulations which the present conjuncture requires” (Laclau & Mouffe 2001: 176-177).
3. The critical nature of Eco’s *The Name of the Rose* (1984) notwithstanding, Annaud’s film version of *The Name of the Rose* (1984), rather than aligning itself, at the level of form, with what is broadly understood as ‘critical’ cinema, was heavily influenced, in terms of its style, by the classical realist film. In short, classical realist films are those that are orientated around “a set of formal parameters involving practices of editing, camera work, and sound which promote the appearance of spatial and temporal continuity. This continuity was achieved, in the classical Hollywood film, by an etiquette for introducing new scenes (a choreographed progression from establishing shot to medium shot to close shot); conventional devices for evoking the passage of time (dissolves, iris effects); editing techniques to smooth over the transition from shot to shot (the 30 degree rule, position matches, direction matches, movement matches, inserts to cover up unavoidable discontinuities); and devices for implying subjectivity (interior monologue, subjective shots, eyeline matches, empathetic music)...The classical realist film was ‘transparent’ in that it attempted to efface all traces of the ‘work of the film’, making it pass for natural” (Stam 2000: 143).
4. That is, as will be discussed, Annaud’s *The Name of the Rose* (1984) propagates the idea, firstly, that existence is benign and that the world of human affairs is ultimately just, secondly, that all human action can be thoroughly accounted for, and thirdly, that humans *always* have the capacity both to recollect, and to communicate what they recall, with complete accuracy and transparency, respectively. Through doing so, Annaud’s *The Name of the Rose* (1984) implicitly posits the existence of certain *essential* / ‘foundational’ principles that underpin



not only all of existence, but also all forms of human action/interaction, such that the narrative of the film lends a sense of stability and non-negotiability to both.

5. According to Laclau and Mouffe, the primary obstacle to this process is “essentialist apriorism, [or] the conviction that the social is sutured at some point, from which it is possible to fix the meaning of any event independently of any articulatory practice[, because t]his...logic of ‘a priori privileged points’...seriously limits the Left’s capacity for action and political analysis” (Laclau & Mouffe 2001: 176). Arguably, this short-coming was already pointed out by Marcuse, when he advanced that the “main defect [of the New Left was]...their unrealistic language and, in many cases, totally unrealistic strategy...[, because t]hey refuse to recognize that we are not in a revolutionary situation in the advanced industrial countries... [Similarly, he pointed to their] ... reluctance to re-examine and to develop Marxist categories, [and to their]...tendency to make a fetish out of Marxist theory...[and] to treat the Marxian concepts as reified, objective categories, instead of becoming finally conscious of the fact that these are historical and dialectical concepts which cannot simply be repeated, [and] which have to be re-examined in accordance with changes in society itself” (Marcuse 1992: 46).
6. In short, neo-conservatism is primarily orientated around “restoring traditional values[,]. . .strengthening patriotic and family feelings, pursuing a strong nationalist or anti-Communist foreign policy and reinforcing respect for authority[,]. . .all of which may involve limiting ‘disapproved lifestyles’” (Brittan 1988: 213). In effect, “neo-conservatives are the ‘new Spartans’, and the[ir] chauvinistic foreign policy and moralistic social policy...stand opposite to commitment to personal freedom” (Kymlicka 1992: 155).
7. Admittedly, this aspect of Laclau and Mouffe’s work does not stray too far from classical Marxism, insofar as it echoes Marx’s and Engels’s support, in *The Communist Manifesto*, for “an association...in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all” (Marx & Engels 1977: 61).
8. Arguably, one of the best illustrations of the discursive machinations involved in such a process of ‘resistance and incorporation’ is provided by Gramsci. In short, he asserts that, in the media industry, “language...serves a hegemonic function[, by virtue of the way in which]...its subtle connotations freeze perception and conception, [and thereby both]... facilitat[e] the acceptance of conventional assumptions and imped[e] the expression of heretical ideas[. Admittedly, on the one hand, e]very culture discloses and guides its system of values [in this way; that is, by presenting through its language]...its general cognitions[and]... conception of the world” (Femia 1981: 44). However, on the other hand, “hegemony is maintained (and must be continually maintained: it is an ongoing process) by dominant groups and classes ‘negotiating’ with, and making concessions to, subordinate groups and classes... There are of course *limits* to such negotiations and concessions. As Gramsci makes clear, they can *never* be allowed to challenge the economic fundamentals of class power” [My Italics] (Storey 1998: 124-126). Consequently, the occasional granting of the *illusion* of victory, to the previously exploited and marginalized, tends to be concomitant with their *continued* covert exploitation and marginalization, while it simultaneously robs them of their revolutionary fervour, and hence, their capacity for political efficacy.
9. Although the form of such a Left-wing hegemony is sometimes difficult to imagine, Paine’s documentary film, *Who Killed the Electric Car?* (2007), provides an example that suggests some of its possible initial parameters. That is, this film details, amongst other things, the partial beginning of a possible Left-wing hegemony, which occurred with the formation of an environmentally-orientated coalition between *radically* different marginal groups, and which proceeded, with relative success, to lobby against the neo-conservatives in the interest of developing an effective environmentally-friendly means of transport. This coalition, which was, arguably, made possible not only by the existence of a common objective, but also by a general acknowledgment of the relativity of all values, underpinned by non-*essentialist* or non-‘foundational’ thinking, increasingly put pressure on the government to facilitate the provision of, if not completely electric vehicles, then at least hybrid vehicles, which are part electric, part combustion engine, driven. As such, if the increasing production of hybrid vehicles is due to the demand from organized coalitions, such as the one mentioned above, and if these demands differ from the interests of the neo-conservatives, who sought to use their hegemony to bury all *alternatives* to the combustion engine, then such increased production of hybrid vehicles constitutes the victorious result of an emerging Left-wing hegemony. Admittedly, whether or not this is a *significant* political victory, and whether or not such Left-wing coalitions will *continue* to grow until they can consistently and effectively

wield hegemony as a political tool, in relation to multiple issues across the political spectrum, remains to be seen. Nevertheless, as it stands, the emergence of such a coalition constitutes an event that, from a neo-Marxist perspective, should not be ignored.

10. In many ways, this constitutes a further step towards what Allan Bloom referred to as the “Nietzscheanization of the Left” (Bloom 1988: 217). However, in this regard, it should be remembered that the dynamism of Dionysus cannot ever be embraced to the *complete* exclusion of the stasis of Apollo, and vice versa, insofar as complete dispersion, like complete inertia, spells death. Consequently, from a Nietzschean perspective, it is always only a question of the *degree* to which a cultural dynamic or artefact is *more* Dionysian and *less* Apollonian, or *more* Apollonian and *less* Dionysian. Similarly, the discursive ‘groundlessness’ of radical democracy does not constitute a *fundamental* alternative to the *essentialist* or ‘foundational’ thinking of neo-conservatism. Rather, just like the tendency towards non-negotiability, which characterizes neo-conservatism, is more underpinned by *essentialist* or ‘foundational’ thinking and less orientated around an embrace of discursive ‘groundlessness’, so too the openness towards negotiability, which characterizes radical democracy, is more orientated around an embrace of discursive ‘groundlessness’ and less underpinned by *essentialist* or ‘foundational’ thinking.
11. Adorno and Horkheimer, in *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception* (1944), maintained that audiences’ potential to be critical of the socio-cultural and politico-economic status quo of capitalism was increasingly being mitigated and dissolved through what they termed the ‘culture industry’, which functions both to diffuse audiences’ capacity to imagine alternative forms of socio-cultural organization, and to limit their horizons of political interpretation. According to Adorno and Horkheimer, this is something that is achieved through the *homogeneity* of cultural products. That is, “culture now impresses the *same* stamp on everything. Films, radio and magazines make up a system which is *uniform* as a whole and in every part...The result is the circle of manipulation and retroactive need in which the unity of the system grows ever stronger...It is the coercive nature of society alienated from itself” [My Italics] (Adorno & Horkheimer 2000: 7). In short, although their critical work analyzes the various organizational strategies that have facilitated the rise to dominance of the monopoly of the ‘culture industry’, in terms of their argument, the underlying *homogeneity* of the cultural commodities produced by this industry also play a pivotal role in retarding audiences’ development of aesthetic sensibilities, which is concomitant with the diminishing of their critical political potential. With regard to this they advance, “Not only are the hit songs, stars, and soap operas cyclically recurrent and rigidly *invariable* types, but the specific content of the entertainment itself is derived from them and only appears to change. The details are interchangeable... As soon as the film begins, it is quite clear how it will end, and who will be rewarded, punished, or forgotten. In light music, once the trained ear has heard the first notes of the hit song, it can guess what is coming and feel flattered when it does come” [My Italics] (Adorno & Horkheimer 2000: 9). All of this, in effect, informs the subjectivity of audiences around rather infantile predilections for amusement, which, in turn, condemns them to political subordination, insofar as it prevents their development of mature aesthetic sensibilities, and, concomitantly, critical political perspectives.
12. Importantly, though, Macherey goes on to point out the irony of this appropriation of Verne’s work by the bourgeoisie. That is, against Barthes, who maintains that, “Verne belongs to the progressive line of the bourgeoisie [because]...his work proclaims that man is capable of everything...[and] that even the most distant world is an object within his reach” (Barthes 1972: 165), Macherey maintains that Verne’s work was “not...inevitable...because no ideology is sufficiently consistent to survive the test of figuration...[. In other words, although Macherey admits that any] work is possible only because it answers a historical requirement, a certain necessity of working at a given moment under particular conditions...[, he nevertheless advances that Verne’s work is] not a simple reflection of the contradictions of its time, nor...a deliberated description of the project of a social class at a given moment...[. Instead, it] represents a form of final *perception* of reality...[-] an effort to express its profound nature, to illuminate its recesses, through the arrangement of animated figures and the unfolding of a chosen fable” (Macherey 1978: 192-239).
13. Cf. note 3
14. Cf. note 6
15. The author has followed William Weaver’s translation (Vintage, 1998).

16. In effect, the thematization of the genealogy of the text lends further weight to the author's ostensible reservations concerning its publication, insofar as the numerous translations to which it has been subject severely problematize its historical accuracy.
17. Admittedly, Eco does offer a few reasons for publishing the work, but they are, for the most part, tantalizingly abstruse and opaque (Eco 1998: 5).
18. That is, at no point in the narrative does William explain to Adso, or, for that matter, to any other character, what transpires during his contemplations on the pallet, or for what purpose he engages in them. Similarly, when Adso enquired about the intoxicating herbs William chewed, the latter simply laughed, answered *vaguely*, and gently cautioned Adso against using them (Eco 1998: 16).
19. In his *Postscript to The Name of the Rose* (1984), Eco explains that the poetic theme reflected amongst Adso's final words is "the 'ubi sunt' theme...[, which, generally speaking, involved] the...topos [of the disappearance of]... the great yesteryear, the once-famous cities, the lovely princesses[, et cetera,]...into the void" (Eco 1984: 1).
20. The author has followed Robert Baldick's translation (Penguin, 1965).
21. In addition, all of the above three features of Sartre's *Nausea* (1938), for the most part, are found just as saliently in Camus's *The Outsider* (1942). That is, following Joseph Laredo's translation (Penguin, 2000), firstly, the idea that existence is not benign but rather possessed of 'hostility' emerges in the description of the funeral procession held for Meursault's mother. This occurs through the thematization of the way in which the conditions change rapidly from those of a beautiful morning to those of an intensely oppressive midmorning (Camus 2000: 17-21). Similarly, the emptiness of the notion of justice is thematized in the novel not only through the travesty of the trial that sees Meursault being sentenced to death as much for his murder of the Arab as for his failure to cry at his mother's funeral, but also through the broaching of the irony that, regardless of one's actions, one is ultimately 'damned if one does and damned if one doesn't'. Arguably, the most lasting image of the latter occurs in the tale of the Czech man who, having left his village for twenty-five years, returns with the intention of assuaging his guilt by helping his mother and sister financially, only to be brutally murdered by them, because they failed to recognize him and wanted his money (Camus 2000: 78).
- Secondly, Meursault problematizes the idea that all human action can be accounted for, insofar as he thematizes the degree to which one always remains a stranger to oneself. This is evident in his assertion that, although his mother expressed sadness when she first began to live at the old age home, after a few months she would have expressed equal sadness at the prospect of leaving the place (Camus 2000: 11). Similarly, although Meursault admits that he kept a scrap book in which he placed cut-outs of interesting things from newspapers (Camus 2000: 25), he did not believe it a worthwhile venture to try to understand *why* such things amused him. Thirdly, the narrative of Camus's *The Outsider* (1942) also questions both the accuracy of the human capacity to recollect the past, and the idea that whatever is recollected can be communicated with transparency, when Meursault accounts for the events which transpired on the beach, and which led to the death of the Arab, in only the most vague and ambiguous of terms. That is, he resists the temptation to *manufacture* a more cogent account of the events and rather articulates his experience of them through the use of sublime and mystical metaphors (Camus 2000: 60).
22. Cf. note 21
23. The language of the 'they', for the most part, comprises of 'idle talk', which expresses very little because it does not seek to genuinely understand the subject of its discussion. That is, through 'idle talk', "We do not so much understand the entities which are talked about; we already are listening only to what is said-in-the-talk as such. What is said-in-the-talk gets understood; but what the talk is about is understood only approximately and superficially...The primary relationship-of-Being towards the entity talked about is not 'imparted' by communication; but Being-with-one-another takes place in talking with one another and in concern with what is said-in-the-talk" (Heidegger 1978: 212). Yet, despite this, in 'idle talk', "an understanding of what is talked about is *supposedly* reached...Because of this, idle talk discourages any new inquiry and any disputation, and in a peculiar way suppresses them and holds them back" [My Italics] (Heidegger 1978: 213). A result of this, in turn, is that, for the most part, 'idle talk' is substantiated with reference to the nameless 'they', insofar as what 'they' say about the subject of the 'talk' is accepted unequivocally. Consequently, the 'they' of the public domain ultimately "prescribes one's state-of-mind, and determines what and how one 'sees'" (Heidegger 1978: 213).

24. This is, of course, not to regard *falling* as a pejorative term, or as something that can ever be completely avoided, since, as Heidegger maintains, *falling* “does not express any negative evaluation, but is used to signify that Dasein is proximally and for the most part *alongside* the ‘world’ of its concern...Falling is a definite existential characteristic of Dasein itself” (Heidegger 1978: 220).
25. The author would like to express his gratitude to Dr. J. M. Strijdom, of the University of South Africa, for his kind assistance in translating the Latin into English.
26. Cf. note 19
27. Cf. note 3
28. As discussed, these narrative tendencies, far from being innocuous, can be understood as intimately connected to the neo-conservative agenda, insofar as they engender in viewers an uncritical disposition favourable to the ‘ideals’ of neo-conservatism.
29. ‘Montage of tempo’, or ‘accelerated montage’, is a cinematic technique invented by D.W. Griffith, and, in its earliest form, it involved a cinematic “handling of a tried device – the last-minute rescue[. For the most part, it was developed by]...March 1911[, in the]...disjunctive method of narration in *The Lonedale Operator*, which achieve[d] a much greater degree of breathless excitement and suspense [than ever before,] in the scenes where the railwayman-hero...rac[es] his train back to the rescue of the heroine[, who is being] attacked by hold-up men in the depot...[. With regard to this, Eisenstein maintains that] Griffith [was the]...great master of montage constructions...created in a direct-lined quickening and *increase of tempo*...[, and that the] school of Griffith[, which continues today as mainstream American cinema, is,]... before all else[,] a school of *tempo*” (Eisenstein 1949: 226 & 235).
30. Again, none of this occurs in the narrative of Eco’s novel.
31. With regard to this, the final words in Annaud’s film, uttered by an aged Adso (Christian Slater), are orientated around his recollection of the peasant girl (Valentina Vargas). In short, he concludes the narrative by asserting that, of the many faces from the past that he recalls, the peasant girl’s face appears to him most *saliently*; and that he has *never* stopped dreaming about her.
32. Cf. note 31
33. “Sherlock Holmes is a fictional detective of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, who first appeared in publication in 1887...Holmes is famous for his intellectual prowess... and...deductive reasoning...[, and] is arguably...one of the best known and most universally recognisable literary characters in any genre...Holmes often remarked that his logical conclusions were ‘elementary’, in that he considered them to be simple and obvious” (Anon. 2007: 1). The character of William (Sean Connery), in Annaud’s *The Name of the Rose* (1984), draws heavily on the figure of Holmes; this is perhaps nowhere more evident than when William (Sean Connery) and Adso (Christian Slater) are outside the abbey walls investigating the death of one of the abbey monks. Here William (Sean Connery), in a manner that echoes Holmes, analyzes the ‘crime scene’ and provides an insightful, rational and, ultimately, accurate, appraisal of the sequence of events that led to the monk’s demise.
34. Cf. note 16. Furthermore, because the cinematic narrative concludes in the manner already described (Cf. note 31), it both eclipses the final lines of Eco’s novel and, thereby, occults the way in which these lines thematize discursive ‘groundlessness’, as discussed earlier.

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