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**Baudrillard Goes to Kyiv: Institutional  
Simulacra in Transition**

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**Abstract.** The transition process in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union from 1989 onward has been focused on the reform of institutions in order to re-orient the economy. However, throughout the former Soviet space, “transition” has been merely a label for many countries, covering the reality of a fundamental lack of change in either political or economic institutions. Using the idea of simulacra and simulation, first posited by philosopher Jean Baudrillard in 1981, I show how institutional change in transition for some prominent “transition economies” has proceeded through stages in simulation. In particular, using examples from Central Asia and Ukraine, I examine how crucial institutions have changed from a perversion of reality into symbols that are divorced from any reality. Current events in Ukraine show that institutional simulacra can be exposed when an exogenous reality forces its way through.

**Keywords.** Institutions, simulacra, transition, Ukraine.

**JEL.** B25, B52, Z13.

“To simulate is to feign to have what one hasn't... Whereas representation tries to absorb simulation by interpreting it as false representation, simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation as itself a simulacrum.” Baudrillard (1981).

## 1. Introduction

In his influential post-modern work *Simulacra and Simulation*, Jean Baudrillard (1981) unleashed a discourse on Western society, positing that reality had been replaced by a “hyperreality” of signs and symbols, divorced from meaning or truth. These so-called “simulacra” have come into being via a multi-stage process: first, as an accurate representation or “reflection of a basic reality” (Baudrillard 1981:170), secondly as a way to mask and pervert reality, thirdly as a signpost that marks the absence of reality, and finally as a sign unto itself, divorced from any reality. Baudrillard uses this conceptual framework to examine various symbols of Western society, hoping to expose the proliferation of symbols that have fused with reality in a process that “retains the contours of Hegelian dialectic” (Donohue 1995:153). His worry is that post-modern society has been seduced by the simulacra, and must counter the simulation process through revolutionary means.

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While Baudrillard's theory regarding simulacra has been applied in critical analysis and across various disciplines such as sociology (Bogard 1990) and anthropology (Coombe 1991), his insights regarding political symbolism have, for the most part, not filtered through to modern institutional economics or even political economic analysis. This oversight appears to be quite interesting, especially given that many of Baudrillard's own applications of his theory were centered either on economics in a broader sense (as in capital and its relation to society), specifically on military and political machinations (as with the Watergate scandal or terrorism in Italy, Baudrillard 1981), or even on political economy itself (Baudrillard 1972). Perhaps this oversight can be attributed to the fact that much of Baudrillard's theory rested on symbols that already existed, and thus the reality was lost long ago; apart from his work on the Gulf War (Baudrillard 1995), which was a discrete and fairly quick (non-) event, his analysis of simulacra was easier to see as a historical, already-occurred, rather than continuous and presently-occurring, process.

However, the transition from communism to capitalism in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and the former Soviet Union (FSU) starting in 1989 and, in some sense, continuing through today offers a much longer and more vast laboratory to test some of Baudrillard's philosophical ideals regarding simulation and simulacra. Baudrillard himself was not very sanguine on the transition process, noting that post-communism was an obliterating force (as well as an illusion) and postulating that, since communism was "doing," the removal of communism was the "undoing of history" (Baudrillard 1994a). Perhaps this animus towards the economic transition came about because the process of transition away from communism appeared to disprove one of his most basic tenets: "Everywhere, always, the system is too strong: hegemonic" (Baudrillard 1994b: 163). The communist system did indeed appear to be too strong to overcome, but collapse it did, weakened by the weight of its own internal contradictions and inability to provide the life it promised to its citizens.

But while communism as an economic and political system in Central and Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union failed, and the removal of communism in practice did not quite live up to Baudrillard's assessment, the transition process also exhibited some of the tenets of Baudrillard's thesis regarding simulation and simulacra (Heathershaw 2009). At its most basic, the transition process was a process of reforming and changing institutions, from those that planned communism to those that facilitated a market economy. But what happened when a "transition" occurred without a change in these institutions? In many countries, the symbol of "transition" did indeed mask changes that were anything but a break from the past, while the creation of non-Soviet institutions did not mean that the institutions themselves were not actually Soviet; that is, while the name may have changed, the staff, the goals, and even the buildings remained the same. Perhaps more importantly, institutions that were put in place during the transition period appeared to shift through Baudrillard's stages of simulacra, ending up either as symbols that masked reality or that obscured the total lack of reality.

The purpose of this article is thus to examine the idea of institutional change in some transition economies as following the process of simulation as originally described by Baudrillard (1981). The reality of the transition shows that, while in many countries basic and fundamental institutions actually did "transition," several others saw the creation of only

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representations of institutions. Indeed, in many post-Soviet nations, the simulacra of institutions are exactly as Baudrillard (1981) described in his fourth stage of simulation: “bearing no relation to any reality whatever.” Examining recent events in Ukraine and elsewhere throughout the former Soviet Union, I will show that Baudrillard’s post-modernist critique has been proven, but as a tool of political aggrandizement of institutions rather than an economic one. While Callon (1998:2) noted, in relation to transition, that “economics... performs, shapes and formats the economy, rather than observing how it functions,” it may be more accurate to say that the political appropriation of institutions and economics in transition also performed, shaped, perverted, and then did away with reality.

### 2. Institutions, Institutional Change, and Transition

Institutions, in the political economy sense, have been defined by North (1990) as “the rules of the game,” but they are in reality and in representation more than that. Institutions can be thought of as a set of rules, constraints, or behavioral guidelines (Hartwell, 2013), but these rules are designed or can spontaneously arise (Hayek, 1973) to shape the behavior of individual actors, whether in pursuit of economic, social, political, or other cultural goals; that is, institutions of human action are made specifically to influence further human action. Thus property rights are meant to influence those who would seek to appropriate all that they see, while constitutions are meant to affect the development of political life in a society. This influence is then carried out in a manner external to the individual, although institutions themselves are comprised of individuals or the memory of individuals. In this sense, following our conscience is not an “institution,” while the judiciary, property rights, and economic freedom all appear to bind us externally.

The concept of institutions as necessary for the development of an economy was largely ignored in neoclassical economics, which, for the most part, assumed away the existence of transaction costs. This (apparent) oversight was magnified by the transition from communism to capitalism in the CEE and FSU countries, which brought institutional tenets back into mainstream economics. Indeed, a key mantra of many economists in the transition process was that “institutions were neglected” (Kolodko 1999). However, on a conceptual level, this argument does not comport with the entire reason for transition, which was at its heart a change from institutions that planned an economy to those that facilitate a market economy. While *economists* may have neglected the idea of institutions, the *economy* did not, with institutional change being synonymous and indivisible from transition. At an empirical level, as well, institutional neglect has been disproven in a broader sense, with the countries that did actually neglect their institutional framework also readily identifiable by their lack of economic progress (Hartwell 2013).

Given that institutional reform was actually the process known as transition, it is perhaps instructive to review some of the prevailing theories on institutional changes. By their very nature, institutions are a long-term occurrence that for the most part resists the push and pull of normal economic policies, and thus changes in institutions are characterized as evolutionary (or as a “propagation process,” Witt 1989) or in a sudden revolutionary or discontinuous manner (North 1993). The evolutionary approach is characterized by the presence of transaction costs, as institutions

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(like any other bodies) tend to suffer from inertia, and the cost of changing rules, norms, and behaviors may mean that the institution will continue on unless benefits outweigh costs (Lin 1989). Where benefits exceed costs, the institution will change, but generally only gradually; there is even some disagreement on the extent of change that can be achieved under an evolutionary process, as recent theoretical ruminations on “institutional stickiness” (Boettke, Coyne, and Leeson 2008), or the tendency of institutions to revert to a mean after external influence, have been used to explain the failure of institutions in sub-Saharan Africa. Thus, changes to institutions happen in a much longer time-frame, and even then reversals or reversions to the mean are common, especially if the benefits to change are perceived as transient (the idea of “credible commitment,” Williamson 2000).

In the transition context post-1989 or 1991, there was little heed given to the evolutionary theories of change, as the goal of transition was to change the institutional framework as quickly as possible, thus making the revolutionary approach the preferred route to reform. In order to create this type of ‘institutional engineering’ (Przeworski 2004) in the shortest time possible, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and the former Soviet Union (FSU) used a process of importation where the “developing countries’ institutions would try to be modelled in the image of those from developed nations” (Angeles 2011: 158). With aid from international donors and technical assistance following in its wake, the transition countries put in place overarching legal regimes that were based on the norms and legislation prevalent in the US and EU, basically transplanting the institutional regimes necessary to replicate these political and economic institutions within their own countries.

While there is a large literature criticizing this approach based on the speed in which institutional development can actually (Roland 2004), in one sense it can be appreciated that this may have been the quickest way to replicate the institutions that were seen as necessary for a market economy. And in some instances, especially where the political will was present, this importation of institutions did work, in the sense that the countries in question (mainly the CEE countries of Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia) grew to approximate the countries that the institutions came from, effectively absorbing the institutional framework. However, in many countries in the Balkans (Stefanović and Mitrović 2012) and especially in the former Soviet Union, this transplant approach had less success in the face of cultural attitudes and, especially, political resistance. It was in this atmosphere, where political actors resisted the reform of the economic system, that the simulacra began to appear.

### **3. Potemkin Institutions and Simulacra in the former Soviet Union**

Although, for the most part, the idea of institutional change has only tangential relevance to Baudrillard’s conception of simulation and simulacra, this overview of institutions and institutional change sets the stage for what has actually occurred in broad swathes of the “transition economies.” With the vantage point of nearly a quarter of a century for some countries, judgments can be made not only on the success or failure of institutional development, but on the *reality* of institutional change. It is here, across

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much of the Soviet space, that Baudrillard can help to inform our understanding of the institutional change processes in transition.

Of course, Baudrillard himself was not involved in the larger economics debate regarding the role of institutions, or even in regards to institutional workings within his post-modern economies. For the most part, Baudrillard spoke only of institutions in relation to his conceptions of hyperreality or, in a broader sense, connected to political economy. In particular, the closest he comes to speaking in the language of modern institutional economics is where he notes that political economy (Baudrillard 1972:113) “is this immense transmutation of all values (labor, knowledge, social relations, culture, nature) into economic exchange value.”<sup>i</sup> However, Baudrillard’s framework of simulation and simulacra, especially when applied to the political appropriation of symbols and imagery in institutional change, have an eerie resonance to the history of institutional development in Russia and Central Asia in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

As Baudrillard based most of his examples on Western political and cultural life, it is easy to see that institutional simulacra are not an invention of *post*-communist society. Perhaps more important to note, simulacra are not native to just capitalist societies: indeed, *contra* to Baudrillard’s assertion that communism engendered “doing,” institutional simulacra were the very basis of communism as a political or economic force, dominating communist life in a way more accurately described as “pretending.” For example, an institution such as GosBank, the Soviet central bank, was not a bank in any accepted sense of the word, but mimicked its Western counterparts in setting the state budget with the Ministry of Finance of the USSR (a Ministry that would seem to have a greatly reduced remit in a society where finance was not necessary). Similarly, the institutions of central planning set out their own simulacra, with Stalin’s benevolent face exhorting the workers to “fulfill the Five-Year Plan in Four Years!” in posters of the 1930s. If the plan was designed for five years but was expected (on pain of exile or death) to be fulfilled in four, how was it a five-year plan (Hanson 1997)? And how was any plan fulfilled if, in the words of an adage during the Brezhnev years, the workers pretended to work and the state pretended to pay (Rosenblum 1997)? The simulacra and simulations during communism were legion, with slogans, actions, and institutions masking the lack of reality.

If communist society thrived because of simulacra, it appears the transition to post-communism has somewhat exacerbated their appearance, perhaps because the simulations under communism have become so ingrained as the fabric of society in these countries that it is difficult to reconstruct the “real,” but also perhaps because there are simply so many more institutions that need to exist in a functioning market economy. Whereas communism was expressly concerned with a monolithic state that was eventually to wither away, capitalism and in particular free-market capitalism is built upon a basis of uncoordinated, value-maximizing institutions that (while influenced by each other) are largely independent. Here it can be argued that Baudrillard’s conception of transition as a step back to a world before communism was on the whole correct – but what if the step back was to an era that never existed? How could a nation, with no experience in democracy or property rights, turn the clock “back” to this time?

It seemed that this disjoint between what was to be and what had been made a veritable breeding ground for the emergence of simulacra. Additionally, with no institutional memory for what the institutions

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themselves should look like, the process of importation (as noted in the previous section) was attempted, to graft institutions from other countries onto the body politic of the transition economy. In many instances, such as in Central and Eastern Europe, this approach worked; EU institutions provided an image for the fledgling institutions in these countries to approximate, a goal to work towards.<sup>11</sup> In other countries, however, where transition was not necessarily the goal of the ruling elite, importation was utilized as a smokescreen to shield the populace from the fact that nothing was changing. The reality was that simulacra were created to take the place of the institutions that were supposed to exist in the market economy, portraying to western donors and their own people that reforms had been carried out, when in most cases none had occurred.

The countries of Central Asia represent a perfect example of the “transition simulacra,” where institutions did not change at all but somehow the country was supposed to be transitioning. The Disneyworld-like case of Turkmenistan is perhaps the clearest illustration of a simulacrum writ large, a country that retains much of the same Stalinist structure as it had fifty years ago with little to no liberalization of the economy. Instead of a red Tsar ruling from Moscow, the larger than life figure of Saparmurat Niyazov ruled Turkmenistan for 21 years, aggregating for himself the title of Turkmenbashi (king of all the Turkmen) and changing the names of the months to honor himself, his mother, and other national symbols of a country that was only a simulacrum of itself. In the case of Turkmenistan, the reality was not that it had failed to “transition,” for that wasn’t the case – no actual transition occurred, so to speak of failing a transition is akin to blaming a runner failing to win a race she didn’t enter.

Other newly “independent” countries in Central Asia also have unwittingly adopted Baudrillard’s precession of simulacra; one of the few prior attempts to apply Baudrillard’s framework in Tajikistan is found in Heathershaw (2009), who notes that Tajikistan’s (and most of Central Asia’s) political life is virtual, a sort of playground where fake opposition parties actually perpetuate the hegemony of the regime. There is no real opposition in Tajikistan or Kazakhstan or Uzbekistan, at least none that is allowed to rear its head and challenge the system, with the only approved “opposition” parties a tool of the ruling classes. To truly be in opposition is to be outside the simulacrum entirely, and there is no room in the simulation for those who are not involved in it.

A similar dynamic has been catalogued by Engvall (2013) in the Kyrgyz Republic, a country that has undergone two separate “revolutions” after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, but continues to be plagued by the same dynamic of corruption that existed during the previous regimes. As Engvall (2013) notes, the society has become so simulated that the basic distinction of “public sector” and “private sector” no longer exists, with the “public sector” merely being a pyramid structure for the moving of money through a hierarchy. The institution of government, with all that implies (provision of public goods, protection of public safety, ensuring justice or equality), is thus a simulacrum; the symbols and trappings of a government exist in the buildings, laws, and rituals in Bishkek, but there is no reality behind them. Baudrillard (1981:180) could have been speaking of the Kyrgyz Republic (or Tajikistan, or Turkmenistan) when he noted, “Power, too, for some time now produces nothing but signs of its resemblance. And at the same time, another figure of power comes into play: that of a collective demand for signs of power - a holy union which forms around the disappearance of power.”

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### 3.1 Baudrillard goes to Kyiv... and Donetsk

The examples of the Central Asian republics are perhaps the most glaring and long-lasting manifestations of simulacra in the transition space, but this may only be because the simulacra themselves have not been exposed. No one has stood up to point out that there is a man behind the curtain or that the Emperor has no clothes. And perhaps it is easier to be seduced by the trappings of democracy and free-market capitalism without actually having to implement them in any way, shape, or form. But, like *the Matrix* (which was inspired by Baudrillard's writings, see Constable 2009), it may be impossible to discern that the simulacra are all around unless the reality that was once existent somehow bleeds through via a different channel.

This process of awakening appears to be happening at the time of writing of this essay in the headlines emanating from Ukraine. The entire country of Ukraine can somewhat be taken as a developing simulacrum of what a transition state is supposed to look like, closer to Baudrillard's third stage: a signpost masking the absence of a basic reality. Based on territory that had been alternately ruled by the Polish, Lithuanians, Crimean Tatars, and Russians, and in borders mostly cobbled together by Stalin's planners from pieces of eastern Poland during the "Great Patriotic War," the Ukrainian SSR was the forerunner of today's modern Ukrainian "state;" as Szporluk (2002) notes, "it was during the Soviet period that Lviv and Donetsk found themselves within one country for the first time in history." However, almost from its inception, its depiction as a "sovereign state" was a mere simulacrum, a "quasi-nation state" (Kolstø 1996) that was of course under control of Moscow. A true sovereign state would never let a foreign capital oversee a famine motivated by political economy (Stark 2010) that led to the deaths of millions and the deportations of millions more, coupled with resettlement of ethnic Russians on lands designated as "Ukrainian" (Polian 2004).

Much like the Central Asian states noted above, Ukraine too moved towards "independence" in a manner that was entirely in line with its Soviet past. Unlike the country's border with the newly-independent Moldova, where a "breakaway republic" of Transnistria established a quasi-state, or in the Caucasus, where a myriad of unrecognized statelets grew out of conflict (Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Adjara, Chechnya/Ichkeria, Nagorno-Karabakh), the territory of Ukraine held firm within the same Cold War borders. This did not mean that there were no tensions within these borders, as, in reality, the new Ukraine was accurately described as a "state of regions" (Sasse 2001). As in the Soviet days, the west of Ukraine had its own distinct ethnic identity, while the east more closely identified with Russia (Liber 1998); moreover, regional interests had already begun to assert their authority under the simulacra state, with Van Zon (2003) describing the takeover of regional government in Donetsk by a coherent group of clans as a major barrier to implementing national reform measures emanating from the government in Kyiv.

Moving along within the same territory as granted during both the *danse macabre* of Stalin with Hitler and the political calculations of Nikita Khrushchev (Kramer 2014), the new Ukrainian state that was born from the dissolution of the USSR was thus already a simulation of a modern nation-state. Indeed, this continuation of the previous simulation of the Soviet era meant that the territorial composition of Ukraine was perhaps the largest simulacrum of all, a parallel to the tale of Borges that Baudrillard (1981) references in *Simulacra and Simulation*, where the empire is depicted on a

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map the exact size of the empire itself. Indeed, Baudrillard's own words appear to predict the issues that have only recently burst into the open with Ukraine:

*The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory - precession of simulacra - it is the map that engenders the territory and if we were to revive the fable today, it would be the territory whose shreds are slowly rotting across the map. It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges subsist here and there, in the deserts which are no longer those of the Empire, but our own. The desert of the real itself.* (Baudrillard 1981:166).

Within these borders, within the map of Ukraine, the simulations continued even as the Soviet Union ceased to be. Institutional change, the *sine qua non* of transition, was halting, stalling, or refusing to occur, both at the national and the regional level. Even as political scientists bemoaned the slow process of "state-building" in Ukraine and attempted to trace its development in the face of internal and external pressures (Kuzio 2002), it appeared that "state-building" was more about attempting to erect a reality behind the simulacra of the country of Ukraine that was put in motion by Soviet diktat. Indeed, as Whitmore (2005:3) noted, "Ukraine was bequeathed a polity that lacked key prerequisites of statehood, such as citizens and clearly delineated, internationally accepted borders, and key institutions, such as a national army."

The first institution that clearly shows this tendency to simulation was the political institution of the executive, where, as in Central Asia, there was remarkable continuity between the Soviet era and independence: the head of state for the Ukrainian SSR, Leonid Kravchuk, became the first President of Ukraine and remained in power until 1994. Under Kravchuk's rule, "former" communist party members remained in key positions throughout the government, and, more importantly, the political stagnation overrode any semblance of economic institutional change, with "state-imposed restrictions, interventions and distortions in the foreign exchange, trade, and pricing regimes [that] were extreme over much of the late-1991 to 1994 period" (Kaufmann and Kailbera 1996). This state of affairs in both political and economic institutions continued under Kravchuk's successor, Leonid Kuchma, who desired a "a compliant parliament that would do his bidding" (Whitmore 2005:9) in order to continue to stifle institutional changes (6 years into Kuchma's reign, scholars were noting that a stronger parliament was necessary to impose market reforms (Darden 2001)). As in Turkmenistan or Belarus, "transition" was a label to mask the lack of movement towards any real goals. In Ukraine, the Soviet simulacra were given a new coat of yellow and blue paint, a fresh edifice for the populace to gaze upon while reality was negated.

The political stagnation in Ukraine, as in its Central Asian brethren, forestalled all hopes of institutional development throughout the country. But this did not mean that the political elite in Ukraine did not try. There is perhaps no institution more emblematic of the proliferation of simulacra in post-Soviet Ukraine than the police force (in all of its permutations) across the country. This essay is not the place to describe the evolution of post-Soviet security forces in Ukraine (this is admirably covered in Robertson 2005 from a technical standpoint), nor is it a forum to debate the role of the



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police in general as a tool of repression or manifestation of the ruling class (Gordon, 1973). It is, however, the place to note that the institution of the police in the broader fabric of Ukraine's simulacrum, especially in relation to the failed transition of the country.

And it is here that a break with the Soviet past can actually be seen, as a new Ukrainian simulacrum arises; the role of the police in the Soviet Union may have been arbitrary and capricious, but it was always understood that the police served the state. Indeed, the establishment of the "secret" police was an instrumental building block of the communist state, in order to keep the populace in line, expose enemies (real and imagined) of the regime, and be constantly vigilant against internal and external threats (Gerson 1976). Coupled with the plain-clothes secret police in the Soviet system was a "centralized, militaristic uniformed police... accountable to the party, with little popular mandate" (Mawby 2001: 23), the public face of the regime and the party. While different from the western notion of the police having a mandate to "protect and to serve," it was nevertheless clear that the institution of the police, in all its guises, was in service of the Communist Party.

In the new, post-Soviet Ukraine, however, it is unclear who the police are serving, and whom they are protecting, other than themselves (in Ivković's (2003) memorable phrase, they appear to only wish to "serve and collect"). Presumably, the police force under an independent and transitioned Ukraine was meant to emulate western models, and acting to protect property, keep law and order, or to protect the powerless from the powerful under the conception of equality before the law (Vila and Morris 1999). However, the police as an institution since independence has been riven by corruption, internal strife, and confusion of mission; as Shelley (1998) noted, in Ukraine, like other post-Soviet countries, policemen that had worked for the police apparatus under the Soviet Union were more likely to be active in illicit and illegal activities, due to simply having more opportunities through their previous position. Down to the rank and file, as well, there is a wealth of evidence on the corruption that pervades the police force in Ukraine (for an excellent survey-based analysis, see Beck and Chistyakova 2004), with one audit revealing nearly 30,000 cases that were either concealed or unjustifiably declined to prosecute from the police side (Beck 2005).

This reality of how the police in Ukraine operate today may be seen as the second stage of simulacra, in that it is a perversion of "to protect and serve;" it is hard to countenance Berkut officers firing on unarmed protestors as the height of a professional police organization. But it also can be argued that the "security" organs in Ukraine have reached the third stage of simulacra, in that they are divorced from reality altogether but the symbols mark its demise. It is not that the police are no longer protecting rule of law, or have become so corrupt that are perverting it; rather, the symbolism of the police remains (uniforms, badges, and above all, guns) but these only obscure the reality that *there is no rule of law*. It is as if over-sized children have crafted an idea of what reality should look like, and given all the actors the accoutrements of that reality, but there is no actual underlying institutional basis for it being reality.

An example of this can be seen in Polese's (2008) description of the complex transactions that occur during a traffic stop in Ukraine: financial payments are not always necessary, depending upon the situation, but interactions and the possibility of a bribe (or tribute, or "voluntary offer") are conditioned on the broader institutional framework, the personality of the

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specific officer, and the economic calculations of the officer and the detainee. While the initial traffic stop may be a way for the officer to appear to comply with the laws and regulations of his office, the entire “transaction” is in fact divorced from the law or the office of the police, apart from the threat of state-sanctioned violence that hangs over the detainee.

Moreover, recent events such as the drama playing itself out in eastern Ukraine continue to exhibit the simulacrum’s tendency to obscure.<sup>iii</sup> As reported while the separatist movement throughout eastern Ukraine gained momentum, local police commanders have been at best apathetic and at worst complicit in the unrest, standing idly by while public buildings were seized, violence perpetrated, and the actual laws of the country broken.<sup>iv</sup> Regardless of the merits of pro-Russian militants in this region of the country, the police would, by any metric, be expected to either a) enforce the laws of the country, b) attempt to protect where they could not arrest, or c) offer resistance to an authority directed by a country that was clearly not their own. Any of these actions would be consistent with the institutional imperatives of a police force, but instead, none of them were implemented.

Not only is the simulacrum of the police in Ukraine working in independence from the reality of the police as an institution; perhaps even more incredibly, in a twist that Baudrillard himself would have proud of, the simulacrum has brought the populace of Ukraine on board and actually reinforced its false nature. Čábelková and Hanousek (2004), in an important economic survey, noted that the perception of corruption of the police in Ukraine has made it *more likely* for members of the public to offer a bribe. Thus, the police have been perverted as a force for law and the public knows this, with the public’s actions then feeding the corruption that has divorced the police force from its actual essence. In this simulation, there is no reality, there is no law, there is only the simulacrum of the police force. This transformation into a simulacrum may be the only real institutional transition that has occurred in Ukraine.

### 4. Conclusions

The idea of simulation and simulacra is a powerful one in terms of political imagery and communications, but it also has been demonstrated in this paper that it can apply to economic and political institutions as well. While economic transition in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union has been an iterative and uneven journey, the process of transition itself has been treated as a simulation by many countries. This false reality has thus created simulacra of institutions in various Soviet successor states, with the most prominent examples being Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and (only because of the exposure of the simulacra to scrutiny) Ukraine. In this sense, perhaps I was too hasty earlier when I dismissed Baudrillard’s (1994b: 163) assertion that “everywhere, always, the system is too strong: hegemonic,” for it seems the communist era in Central Asia, Russia, and Ukraine has survived the assault of “neoliberalism” by adapting the very same institutions behind labels and symbols of its antithesis. Political processes throughout the post-Soviet space have thus appropriated reality, given it a new symbol, and removed any vestiges of the reality behind the institutions themselves. Even where institutional change has occurred in such an unreformed political environment, as in the divorce of the police in Ukraine from the Communist party, the political processes left-

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over from communism have subverted institutional development and substituted a simulacrum in their place.

The continuing struggle encapsulated in this appropriation and abrogation of reality seems to vindicate philosophers and political economists who Baudrillard set himself in direct opposition to, even as the states documented here continue to use Baudrillard's methods. As Ray (1997) has noted, post-modernists felt that the Soviet Union was the epitome of modernity, while other philosophers (and quite a few economists) believed instead that the transition away from communism was a struggle *for* modernity, with the formerly-communist countries rejoining their Western brethren in a common trajectory (Ray 1997:543). Framed in this sense, and *contra* Baudrillard, the communist era was thus an aberration, a struggle against modernity, but a struggle that is continuing today under various other symbols and signs. Simply put, the struggle did not end in 1989 or 1991, and this errant strand of either modernity or pre-modernity is continuing to assert itself through the guise of simulacra and simulations. This power then hides in the open, begging all to look upon it, for it is not what it seems. While Baudrillard may have been exactly backwards in his conception of the causality of simulacra (believing that Western society engendered it, while communist society transcended it), his framework nevertheless explains the workings of simulacra *within* communism and in those countries that have not actually transitioned.

The solution to this problem in transition economies, perhaps ironically given Baudrillard's political leanings, is given by his closing words in *Simulacra and Simulations*: "This is ultimately why power is so in accord with ideological discourses and discourses on ideology, for these are all discourses of truth - always good, even and especially if they are revolutionary, to counter the mortal blows of simulation" (Baudrillard 1981: 182). Given the failure to implement the real institutions that are necessary for the economic system to transition, continued effort must be made to illuminate the reality that has been lost and provide a discourse of the truth; in short, for society, for individuals, for countries to counter the mortal blows of simulation with revolutionary discourse. In this sense, it is time to point out that the Emperor does not, indeed, have any clothes, nor is there actually an Emperor or a country to be Emperor of. In this manner, the Lukashenkos and Yanukovyches and Rahmons of the world can be made irrelevant by reality and their police can be ignored.

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### Notes

<sup>i</sup> To some extent, this early definition was correct, in that all institutions in an economy, whether political, economic, or social, do exert an influence on economic calculations and, especially, transaction costs. However, as has been noted elsewhere (Acemoglu *et. al* (2005), Hartwell (2013)), institutions can be further subdivided by their goals.

- <sup>ii</sup> Although McNeal (2006) argues, not implausibly, that the EU itself is a simulacrum, creating “inauthenticity in everyday life.”
- <sup>iii</sup> An irony inherent in the Ukrainian drama is that a cheerleader behind many of the actions in Ukraine has been Russian state-run TV media, an institution that has already been noted by Kiriya and Degetereva (2010) as a simulacrum. Channels such as Russia 1 or the English-language RT have been accused of outright falsehoods, stories which are changed in later days and weeks into half-truths, without any explanation of what happened to change reality.
- <sup>iv</sup> Simon Shuster, “Ukrainian Policemen Stand By as Pro-Russian Separatists Seize Control,” *Time Magazine*, April 29, 2014, <http://time.com/81475/ukrainian-policemen-stand-by-as-pro-russian-separatists-seize-control/>.

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