

practised in the villages of northern Greece up to the middle of this century: for one day, the women took over – the men had to stay at home and look after the children, while the women gathered in the local inn, drank to excess and organized mock trials of men. . . . What breaks out in this carnivalesque transgression-suspension of the ruling patriarchal Law is, therefore, the fantasy of feminine power. When Lacan draws attention to the fact that one term for 'wife' in everyday French is *la bourgeoisie* – that is, the one who, beneath the semblance of male domination, actually pulls the strings – this can by no means be reduced to a version of the standard male-chauvinist wisecracking on how, after all, patriarchal domination is not so bad for women, since – at least in the close circle of the family – they run the show.

The problem goes deeper: one of the consequences of the fact that Master is always an impostor is the duplication of the Master – the agency of the Master is always perceived as a semblance concealing another, 'true' Master. Suffice it to recall Adorno's anecdote in *Minima Moralia* about a wife who apparently subordinates herself to her husband and, when they are about to leave a party, obediently holds his coat, yet while she is doing this, she exchanges ironic patronizing glances behind his back with fellow-guests which deliver the message 'Poor weaking, let him think he is the master!'. The opposition of male and female power is thus perceived as the opposition of semblance and actual power: man is an impostor, condemned to perform empty symbolic gestures, whereas the actual responsibility falls to women. The point not to be missed here, however, is that this spectre of woman's power structurally depends on male domination: it remains its shadowy double, its retroactive effect and, as such, its inherent moment. For that reason, the idea of bringing the shadowy woman's power to light and acknowledging its central position publicly is the most subtle way of succumbing to the patriarchal trap.

However, once the public Law casts off its direct patriarchal dress and presents itself as neutral-egalitarian, the character of its obscene double also undergoes a radical shift: what now erupts in the carnivalesque suspension of the 'egalitarian' public Law is precisely the authoritarian-patriarchal logic that continues to determine our attitudes, although its direct public expression is no longer permitted. 'Carnival' thus becomes the outlet for the repressed social *jouissance*: Jew-baiting riots, gang-rapes. . . .

In so far as the superego designates the intrusion of enjoyment into the field of ideology, we can also say that the opposition of symbolic Law and superego points towards the tension between ideological meaning and enjoyment: symbolic Law guarantees meaning, whereas superego provides enjoyment which serves as the unacknowledged support of

meaning. Today, in the so-called 'post-ideological' era, it is crucial to avoid confounding fantasy that supports an ideological edifice with ideological meaning – how, otherwise, are we to account for the paradoxical alliance of post-Communism and Fascist nationalism (in Serbia, Russia, etc.)? At the level of meaning, their relationship is one of mutual exclusion; yet they share a common phantasmic support (when Communism was the discourse of power, it played deftly with nationalist fantasies – from Stalin to Ceauşescu). Consequently, there is also no incompatibility between the 'postmodern' cynical attitude of non-identification, of distance towards every ideology, and the nationalist obsession with the ethnic Thing. The Thing is the substance of enjoyment: according to Lacan, the cynic is a person who believes only in enjoyment – and is not the clearest example of it precisely the cynic obsessed with the national Thing?

The difference between Law and superego also coincides with that between writing and voice. Public Law is essentially *written* – precisely and only because 'it is written', our ignorance of Law cannot serve as an excuse; it does not exculpate us in the eyes of the Law. The status of the superego, in contrast, is that of a traumatic *voix*, an intruder persecuting us and disturbing our psychic balance. Here the standard Derridean relationship between voice and writing is inverted: it is the voice that supplements the writing, functioning as a non-transparent stain that truncates the field of Law, while being necessary for its completion.

Another facet of this obscene underside of the Law is exhibited by the custom of the power elite in the USA. A rumour is rife that every year, the entire power elite (top politicians, managers, military, journalists, the wealthiest . . .) gather for a week in a closed resort south of San Francisco in order to 'socialize'. What they actually do there is, for the most part, to indulge in obscene games that suspend the dignity of social rituals – hard drinking, dancing and singing vulgar songs in women's clothes, telling 'dirty' stories. . . .

### The Split Subject of Interpellation

We could also say that this nightly, obscene law consists of *proton pseudos*, the primordial lie that founds a community. That is to say, identification with community is ultimately always based upon some shared guilt or, more precisely, upon the *fetishistic disavowal of this guilt*. When, for example, a Communist in the Soviet Union of the 1930s answers the reproach that the Communist regime is terroristic beyond compare, that thousands are condemned and shot without proven guilt, that the whole of agriculture is in ruins, the actual strategy of his response consists not

in a direct denial of these facts but, rather, in claiming that the authors of these reproaches 'are unable to penetrate the essence of what is going on' and to perceive the emergence of a New Man, of classless solidarity – a Communist knows very well that millions are dying in the camps, yet this knowledge only confirms his belief that the sublime 'true People' happily and enthusiastically builds Socialism. . . . The more reality is miserable and depressive, the more a true Stalinist Communist clings to his fetish.

Every allegiance to some community eventually involves such a fetish, which functions as the disavowal of its founding crime: is not 'America' the fetish of an infinitely open space enabling every individual to pursue happiness in his or her own way? The nature of this solidarity-in-guilt can also be much more specific; when, for example, the Leader is caught with his pants down, the solidarity of the group is strengthened by the subjects' common disavowal of the misfortune that laid bare the Leader's failure or impotence – a shared lie is an incomparably more effective bond for a group than the truth. Perhaps one should reread Hans Christian Andersen's 'The Emperor's New Clothes' along these lines: of course everybody knew that the emperor was naked, yet it was precisely the disavowal of this fact that held the subjects together – by stating this reality, the unfortunate child effectively dissolved the social link.

This paradox of solidarity-in-guilt, however, is far from holding true only for totalitarian communities – suffice it to recall today's 'progressive' cultural critique communities: is not their founding gesture a fetishizing elevation of an author (typical candidates: Alfred Hitchcock, Jane Austen, Virginia Woolf . . .) all of whose 'politically incorrect' misdeeds are pardoned in advance or reinterpreted as subversive-progressive in an unheard-of, hidden way. . . . The community's enjoyment is provided by this very collective disavowal – for example, by our insistence on the 'progressive' character of Hitchcock, which suspends the symbolic efficiency of what obviously does not enter this frame.

In this respect, we are ultimately doing the same thing as the Western Stalinist Communist who, in the 1930s, faithfully followed the reversals of the Party line and first saw the main enemy in Fascism, then changed into an engaged pacifist enthusiastically supporting the Soviet-German pact and warning against English or French militarism, and ended by calling for a common front of all 'progressive' forces, Communists and bourgeois democrats, against Fascism – far from putting him to much trouble, these reversals only confirmed him in his Communist creed. Or – as Jean-Claude Milner put it<sup>3</sup> – perhaps the principal function of the Master is to set down the lie that can sustain group solidarity: to surprise the subjects with statements that manifestly contradict facts, to claim

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again and again that 'black is white'.... Consequently, it is not sufficient to say 'My country, right or wrong!' – my country is truly mine only in so far as, at a certain crucial point, it is wrong.

This tension between the public Law and its obscene superego underside also enables us to approach Althusser's notion of ideological interpellation in a new way. The Althusserian theory of 'Ideological State Apparatuses' and ideological interpellation is more complex than it may appear: when Althusser repeats, after Pascal, 'Act as if you believe, pray, kneel down, and you shall believe, faith will arrive by itself', he delineates an intricate reflexive mechanism of retroactive 'autopoietic' foundation that far exceeds the reductionist assertion of inner belief's dependence on external behaviour. That is to say, the implicit logic of his argument is: kneel down and *you shall believe that you knelt down because of your belief* – that is, that your following the ritual is an expression/effect of your inner belief. In short, the 'external' ritual performatively generates its own ideological foundation. Herein resides the interconnection of the ritual that pertains to 'Ideological State Apparatuses' and of the act of interpellation: when I believe that I knelt down because of my belief, I simultaneously 'recognize' myself in the call of the Other-God who dictated that I kneel down....

Things are even more complex in the case of interpellation – Althusser's 'example' contains more than his own theorization gets out of it. Althusser evokes an individual who, while carelessly walking down the street, is suddenly addressed by a policeman: 'Hey, you there!'. By answering the call – that is, by stopping and turning round towards the policeman – the individual recognizes-constitutes himself as the subject of Power, of the big Other-Subject: ideology

'transforms' the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there!'

Assuming that the theoretical scene I have imagined takes place in the street, the hailed individual will turn round. By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a *subject*. Why? Because he has recognized that the hail was 'really' addressed to him, and that 'it was *really* him who was hailed' (and not someone else). Experience shows that the practical transmission of hailings is such that they hardly ever miss their man: verbal call or whistle, the one hailed always recognizes that it is really him who is being hailed. And yet it is a strange phenomenon, and one which cannot be explained solely by 'guilt feelings', despite the large numbers who 'have something on their consciences'.

Naturally for the convenience and clarity of my little theoretical theatre I have had to present things in the form of a sequence, with a before and an

after, and thus in the form of a temporal succession. There are individuals walking along. Somewhere (usually behind them) the hail rings out: 'Hey, you there!' One individual (nine times out of ten it is the right one) turns round, believing/suspecting/knowing that it is for him, i.e. recognizing that 'it really is he' who is meant by the hailing. But in reality these things happen without any succession. The existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing.<sup>4</sup>

The first thing that strikes the eye in this passage is Althusser's implicit reference to Lacan's thesis on a letter that 'always arrives at its destination': the interpellative letter cannot miss its addressee since, on account of its 'timeless' character, it is only the addressee's recognition-acceptance that constitutes it as a letter.<sup>5</sup> The crucial feature of the quoted passage, however, is the double denial at work in it: the denial of the explanation of interpellative recognition by means of a 'guilt feeling', as well as the denial of the temporality of the process of interpellation (strictly speaking, individuals do not 'become' subjects, they 'always-already' *are* subjects). This double denial is to be read as a Freudian denial: what the 'timeless' character of interpellation renders invisible is a kind of atemporal sequentiality that is far more complex than the 'theoretical theatre' staged by Althusser on behalf of the suspicious alibi of 'convenience and clarity'.

This 'repressed' sequence concerns a 'guilt feeling' of a purely formal, 'non-pathological' (in the Kantian sense) nature, a guilt which, for that very reason, weighs most heavily upon those individuals who 'have nothing on their consciences'. That is to say, in what, precisely, consists the individual's first reaction to the policeman's 'Hey, you there!'<sup>6</sup> In an inconsistent mixture of two elements: (1) why me, what does the policeman want from me? I'm innocent, I was just minding my own business and strolling around . . . ; however, this perplexed protestation of innocence is always accompanied by (2) an indeterminate Kafkaesque feeling of 'abstract' guilt, a feeling that, in the eyes of Power, I am a priori terribly guilty of something, although it is not possible for me to know what precisely I am guilty of, and for that reason – since I don't know what I am guilty of – I am even more guilty; or, more pointedly, it is in this very ignorance of mine that my true guilt consists.

What we have here is thus the entire Lacanian structure of the subject split between innocence and abstract, indeterminate guilt, confronted with a non-transparent call emanating from the Other ('Hey, you there!'), a call where it is not clear to the subject what the Other actually wants from him ('Che vuoi?'). In short, what we encounter here is *interpellation prior to identification*. Prior to the recognition in the call of the Other by means of which the individual constitutes himself as 'always-

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already'-subject, we are obliged to acknowledge this 'timeless' instant of the impasse in which innocence coincides with indeterminate guilt: the ideological identification by means of which I assume a symbolic mandate and recognize myself as the subject of Power takes place only as an answer to this impasse.

So we are again at the tension between the public Law and its obscene superego underside: the ideological recognition in the call of the Other is the act of identification, of identifying oneself as the subject of the public Law, of assuming one's place in the symbolic order; whereas the abstract, indeterminate 'guilt' confronts the subject with an impenetrable call that precisely prevents identification, recognition of one's symbolic mandate. The paradox here is that the obscene superego underside is, in one and the same gesture, the necessary support of the public symbolic Law and the traumatic vicious circle, the impasse that the subject endeavours to avoid by way of taking refuge in public Law - in order to assert itself, public Law has to resist its own foundation, to render it invisible.

What remains 'unthought' in Althusser's theory of interpellation is thus the fact that prior to ideological recognition we have an intermediate moment of obscene, impenetrable interpellation without identification, a kind of 'vanishing mediator' that has to become invisible if the subject is to achieve symbolic identity - to accomplish the gesture of subjectivization. In short, the 'unthought' of Althusser is that there is already an uncanny subject that precedes the gesture of subjectivization. Is not this 'subject prior to subjectivization' a pure theoretical construction and, as such, of no use for a concrete social analysis? Evidence to the contrary is offered by the syntagm that recurs regularly when social workers attempt to render their experience of the 'antisocial' adolescent criminal who lacks what we ideologically call the 'elementary sense of compassion and moral responsibility': when you look into his eyes, it seems as if 'there is nobody at home'.<sup>7</sup>

The key Althusserian text here is 'Trois notes sur la théorie des discours' (1966).<sup>8</sup> In the first Note, Althusser proposes the hypothesis according to which each of the four fundamental types of discourse implies a specific mode of subjectivity - that is, brings about its own 'effect-of-subject [effet-sujet]': in ideological discourse, the subject is present *en personne*; in scientific discourse, it is absent *en personne*; in aesthetic discourse, it is present through interposed persons [*par personnes interposées*]; in unconscious discourse, the subject is neither present nor simply absent but a gap represented by a place-holder.<sup>9</sup> In the third Note, however, Althusser suddenly and rather unexpectedly pulls back and constrains the subject to ideological discourse, emphasizing that one can speak of the 'subject of science' or the 'subject of the

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unconscious' only in a metaphorical sense. The moment we accept this position, of course, we are compelled to repudiate the very notion of the 'divided subject': as Althusser puts it, there is no divided subject, there is only the subject plus the abyss [*Spaltung*] that gaps between the subject and the order of discourse: 'le manque du sujet ne peut être dit sujet'.<sup>10</sup> In short, Lacan illegitimately identifies the void, the gap that undermines the self-identity of the subject, with the subject itself.

Our Lacanian standpoint compels us here to persist with Althusser I (that of the four 'effects-of-subject') against Althusser II (that of the ideological status of the subject): Althusser's constraining of the subject to ideology is a clear case of theoretical 'regression'. The four 'effects-of-subject' in Althusser I are clearly not of equal weight: there are two candidates for the role of the subject *par excellence* – either the ideological subject, present *en personne*, or the subject of the unconscious, a gap in the structure (\$) that is merely represented by a signifier. Althusser opted for the first choice (ideological status of the subject), whereas from the Lacanian standpoint the second choice seems far more productive: it allows us to conceive of the remaining three 'effects-of-subject' as the derivations-occultations of \$, as the three modes of coming to terms with the gap in the structure that 'is' the subject.

An additional argument for the Lacanian choice is provided by the symptomatic reading of Althusser himself: is not the shift in Althusser's theory announced by his essay on 'Lenin and Philosophy' – the self-critical repudiation of 'theoreticist deviation'; the assertion of class struggle in theory; the theory's self-referentiality, that is, the notion that theory is included in its object – a kind of 'return of the repressed', of the dimension of the subject of the signifier? What is indicative here is Althusser's new definition of philosophy, which encapsulates this shift: no longer 'philosophy is the Theory of theoretical practice' but 'philosophy represents politics (class struggle) in theory' – is this not a clear variant of Lacan's 'a signifier represents the subject for another signifier'? Class struggle as the gap that prevents totalization is the sole true 'subject' of history, whereas philosophy is the Master-Signifier (S<sub>1</sub>) that represents the subject – the class struggle – for the theory, within the field of knowledge (S<sub>2</sub>).<sup>11</sup>

#### Kundera, or, How to Enjoy Bureaucracy

Emphasis should be laid on the inherent political dimension of the notion of enjoyment – on the way this kernel of enjoyment functions as a political factor. Let us probe this dimension through one of the enigmas of cultural life in post-Socialist Eastern Europe: why does Milan