Beyond Interpellation

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There is something quite extraordinary about the fate of Althusserian ideas (apart from his personal fate, which is extraordinary beyond measure). The first period of vogue and scandal in the sixties and seventies—when the mere mention of Althusser’s name was certain to raise heat and cause havoc—was followed, without much transition, by the current period of silence in which the wild debates of the first period seem to be forgotten and only raise a smile at the most. Themes and topics widely discussed two decades ago have passed into oblivion; interest now remains confined to the notoriety of his personal life (scandalous enough to produce even best-sellers). I think this theoretical amnesia is not simply due to his falling out of fashion—it is not that his ideas have simply been superseded or supplanted by better ones. Rather, it is perhaps more a case of forgetting in a psychoanalytic sense, a convenient forgetting of something disagreeable and uncomfortable. If Althusser always produced either zealous adepts or equally zealous adversaries, if he could never be dealt with in an academic way, this was due to an utter inability to situate him. He did not fit in the western Marxist tradition, nor in the soviet type of Marxism (despite attempts to squeeze him into both), and neither did he belong to any non-Marxist current. This is not to say that Althusser was right, but rather that he was on the track of something embarrassing (or even unheimlich, to use the Freudian word) with which everybody would be relieved to do away. Althusser’s passage from notoriety to silence must be read as symptomatic, for notoriety and silence are, finally, two ways of evading crucial issues.

In the present paper, I am not pleading for a return to Althusser, but rather for sticking to the uncomfortable part of the Althusserian position. I think that the best way to do this is to reconsider Althusser’s relation to psychoanalysis and to try to articulate this relation with respect to a Lacanian conceptual framework. In order to do this, I propose to go back
to the famous Althusserian notion of interpellation and try to rethink its relation to the psychoanalytic account of subjectivity.  

The Clean Cut

Within the Althusserian position, the fundamental idea of the clean cut can be followed on a number of different levels. It is perhaps most obvious in the epistemological realm, where numerous discussions have focused on the notion of an epistemological break—the rupture between the real object and the object of knowledge as well as the rupture between ideology and science. But the famous formula of interpellation—"ideology interpellates individuals into subjects"—implies a clean cut as well. There is a sudden and abrupt transition from individual—a pre-ideological entity, a sort of materia prima—into ideological subject, the only kind of subject there is for Althusser. One becomes a subject by suddenly recognizing that one has always already been a subject: becoming a subject always takes effect retroactively—it is based on a necessary illusion, an extrapolation, an illegitimate extension of a later state into the former stage. A leap—a moment of sudden emergence—occurs.

If we take Althusser's argument as a whole, it appears that there is also a clean cut between the two parts of Althusser's theory of ideology. Roughly speaking, there is a break between his insistence on the materiality of state apparatuses on the one hand, and interpellation on the other—between exteriority and the constitution of interiority. How exactly would materiality entail subjectivation? Why would interpellation require materiality? One could say that materiality and subjectivity rule each other out: if I am (already) a subject, I am necessarily blinded in regard to materiality. The external conditions of ideology cannot be comprehended from within ideology; the institution of interiority necessarily brings about a denial, or better, a disavowal of its external origin. The grasping of materiality would thus presuppose the suspension of subjectivity, and this can only be provided by the Althusserian notion of science. But science is not a subject position. The extraordinary implication of this view is that the theoretician who sees through this ideological mechanism cannot himself escape it—in his non-scientific existence, he is as much of an (ideological) subject as anybody else, the illusion being constitutive for any kind of subjectivity and thus ineluctable. His only advantage is to see the necessary limitation of his advantage. Thus one must face an either/or
alternative: either materiality or subjectivity; either the exterior or the interior.

Why is this (admittedly rough) description of subjectivity insufficient? If there are moments that it does not cover, where exactly should one situate them—in the exterior, in the interior, or is the demarcation line itself faulty? And more specifically, how does this view of subjectivity match the psychoanalytic concept of the subject—a concept which is, after all, the central category in psychoanalysis? The Althusserian notion of a clean cut—a break, a rupture, a sharp edge, a sudden emergence, at whatever level of application—has been exposed to a great deal of criticism. Traditional critics have argued that the transition is in principle always gradual; they protested, in different ways, in the name of gradualism, that sharp edges and abrupt emergence were not dialectical. No date can be fixed, the argument would go, for instance, when Marx suddenly abandoned his alleged humanist ideology in favor of science. But this is perhaps not where Althusser’s deficiency lies: in fact, quite the contrary. I think we should hold to the idea of sudden emergence and abrupt passage as a deeply materialist notion and even—why not?—hold to the idea of creatio ex nihilo. Althusser has only pursued, with rare consequence, a basic structuralist insight: structure always springs up suddenly, from nothing, without any transitional stages, as Lévi-Strauss saw very well in the pioneer days of structuralism.

The real problem arises elsewhere: namely, with the fact that this sudden passage is never complete—the clean cut always produces a remainder. To put it in the simplest way, there is a part of the individual that cannot successfully pass into the subject, an element of “pre-ideological” and “presubjective” materia prima that comes to haunt subjectivity once it is constituted as such. A part of external materiality remains that cannot be successfully integrated in the interior. Interpellation was based on a happy transition from a pre-ideological state into ideology: successfully achieved, it wipes out the traces of its origin and results in a belief in the autonomy and self-transparency of the subject. The subject is experienced as a causa sui—in itself an inescapable illusion once the operation is completed. The psychoanalytic point of departure is the remainder produced by the operation; psychoanalysis does not deny the cut, it only adds a remainder. The clean cut is always unclean; it cannot produce the flawless interiority of an autonomous subject. The psychoanalytic subject is coextensive with that very flaw in the interior. (One could say that the psychoanalytic symptom, the starting point of analysis, is its most obvious manifestation.) In short, the subject is precisely the failure to become
the subject—the psychoanalytic subject is the failure to become an Althusserian one.

For Althusser, the subject is what makes ideology work; for psychoanalysis, the subject emerges where ideology fails. The illusion of autonomy may well be necessary, but so is its failure; the cover-up never holds fast. The entire psychoanalytic apparatus starts from this point: different subjective structures that psychoanalysis has discovered and described—neurosis (with its two faces of hysteria and obsession), psychosis, perversion—are just so many different ways to deal with that remainder, with that impossibility to become the subject. On the social level as well—on the level of discourse as a social bond—the four basic types of discourse pinpointed by Lacan are four different ways to tackle that remainder. Interpellation, on the other hand, is a way of avoiding it: it can explain its proper success, but not how and why it does not work. It is essential for psychoanalysis that the Althusserian alternative—materiality or subjectivity, exterior or interior—is not exhaustive. At this point, we can use an analogy with another well-known piece of post-Althusserian criticism: in the tricky subject of subjectivity, we have to make a step analogous to that of Laclau and Mouffé in introducing their crucial concept of antagonism. They criticize Colletti’s view, which has divided the world into two kinds of entities—the opposition in the real (the Kantian Realrepugnanz), and the contradiction confined to the realm of thought and concepts (this can be seen as a kind of new version of the old bipartition into res extensa and res cogitans). Laclau and Mouffé have convincingly argued that this division is not exhaustive either: antagonism can be grasped precisely as an impossible intersection of the two, as something initially invisible in the division which seems to cover the whole, but nonetheless lies within it. The remainder produced by subjectivation is also invisible from the point of view of interpellation, but it does not come from somewhere else, it is not situated in some third locality outside the two Althusserian ones. This is the essential point: the remainder is neither exterior nor interior, but not somewhere else either. It is the point of exteriorty in the very kernel of interiority, the point where the innermost touches the outermost, where materiality is the most intimate. It is around this intimate external kernel that subjectivity is constituted. Lacan has, as always, coined a fine word for it: extimacy.

Let me now try to put the two views of subjectivity into a wider perspective. Althusser’s consequent adherence to basic structuralist ideas can also be seen with the notion, essential for him, of a process without a subject. Such a notion is embedded in the general strategy promoted by
structuralism, which one could, in a simplified manner, outline as an attempt to put forward an a-subjective structure as opposed to the subject’s self-apprehension. There is a non-subjective “symbolic” dimension of which the subject is but an effect, an epiphenomenon, and which is necessarily overlooked in the subject’s imaginary self-understanding. This basic approach was applied in a number of different ways: in Lévi-Strauss’s structure as the matrix of permutations of differential elements regulating different mythologies, rituals, beliefs, and eating habits; in Foucault’s *episteme*, discursive formations and strategies, or later dispositives of power; in the production of “textuality” as opposed to imaginary sense; and in Derrida’s notion of writing, or *différence*. In spite of great differences between these attempts and their sometimes sharply opposed results, there was a common tendency to see the structure as a dimension “behind,” “underneath,” or “anterior to” the subject and opposed to it. The very notion of the subject fell thereby into a kind of disrepute and became synonymous with “self-deception,” a necessary illusion, or an essential blinding as to the conditions that produced it. The structuralist revolution thus saw itself as a break away from the humanist tradition centered on the subject (cf. Foucault’s rather massive talk about the “death of man”) and particularly as a radical rupture with the philosophical tradition based on the *cogito*.

Lacan’s view sharply differed from the structuralist model by clinging firmly to the notion of the subject and “rescuing” it all along. His talk about the subject of the unconscious was certain to provoke astonishment. He saw the unconscious, along general structuralist lines, as a structure—“structured as a language,” as the famous slogan goes—discovering in it, by *a tour de force*, the Saussurian and Jakobsonian operations of metaphor and metonymy. But he saw the unconscious as a structure with a subject, albeit a subject conceived as opposed to consciousness. Thus for Lacan, at whatever level we look at the matter, there is no process without a subject; the subject is necessarily implied by the supposedly a-subjective structure. He went even further with the baffling suggestion that the *cogito* is the subject of the unconscious, thus turning against some basic assumptions (shall one say prejudices?) of that period. A huge gap thus separates Lacan from the rest of the structuralist generation: whereas the structuralist generation defined itself as basically anti-Cartesian (and anti-Hegelian), Lacan saw himself as an heir to that tradition. This divide ultimately depends on the way in which subjectivity is grasped.
While Lacan is keen to retain the subject, he can do so only by submitting its traditional notions to severe criticism. The subject is something other than, and opposed to, consciousness, which entails the issue of recognition/miscognition. Indeed, Lacan and Althusser agree that this issue defines consciousness. Whether it be recognition in one's mirror image, as in early Lacan, or recognizing oneself as the addressee of an injunction or a message of the Other, it is the act of recognition that constitutes consciousness. Moreover, recognition always involves, at the same time, a miscognition: recognizing is intrinsically also a blinding. The link between reconnaissance and mécognition defines, for Lacan, the Imaginary; for Althusser this link is defined as “specular.” For both Lacan and Althusser, it is sharply opposed to cognition, or knowledge (savoir), which demands a transition to a different register. Agreement on this point could make them allies in the common battle against “ego-psychology,” or “homo psychologicus,” and self-centered consciousness. But here their ways part. For Althusser, recognition is the necessary and sufficient condition of subjectivity, and is thus necessarily an ideological notion; accordingly, one must be rid of it in order to proceed to science. For Lacan, however, the subject emerges only at the point of a non-recognition: all the formations of the unconscious have this in common, they are accompanied by a “this is not me,” “I was not there,” although they are produced by the subject. They depend on the emergence of an “alien kernel” within subjectivity, an automatism beyond control, the break-down, in certain points, of the constituted horizon of recognition and sense. The symptom is the most striking manifestation of this alien kernel, which for Lacan cannot ultimately be dissolved or reduced to sense; the symptom persists even if its meaning is deciphered in analysis. This non-integration is constitutive for the subject, although it may appear as its limit, reduction, or failure. Interpellation presents the successful part of subject formation—the emergence of sense and recognition: “this is me” and the world that makes sense for me—which is a precondition of ideology, but it cannot account for the emergence of the symptom (in the widest sense), unless by introducing concepts from outside its scope, which would eventually entail a different theory of the subject.

Falling in Love

Lacan’s view of the subject, so far presented in the most general outline, can find ample support in Freud. There are numerous passages in
which Freud speaks, for instance, about the introjection of the object as essential to subjectivity. In his *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), perhaps the best and the most systematic piece of evidence to that effect, he describes two basic types of ties between the subject and other people: identification and the object-relation (or simply, love). Both of them are founded on the introjection of the object—the passage of an exterior object into a certain place in the interiority of the subject—and it is this very passage that actually produces the division into an interior and an exterior. Their major difference consists in "whether the object is put in the place of the ego," as in identification, "or of the ego ideal," as in love and in object relations in general.\(^{12}\) The ego itself can thus be seen as ultimately constituted by this difference between the ego and the ego ideal; one could say that the ego is finally nothing else but this difference, this "differentiating grade in the ego" (161), where both of them are conceived as places to be filled with a series of external objects, mother and father to begin with.\(^{13}\) Love is, on the one hand, opposed to identification (which it presupposes and combines at the same time), and on the other hand, placed in the same line with hypnosis and group formation—all three are based on placing an object in the position of the ego ideal and differ only by the degree of sexual inhibition.

I will not pursue here the various instances where Freud makes use of this introjection of the object in his argument, nor the ramified implications of his use of introjection. Examples range from the incorporation of the object by devouring it in the oral phase to the formation of hysterical symptoms, and from the genesis of homosexuality to the analysis of melancholia. I would like to follow just one thread, that of falling love, which can perhaps best demonstrate the point I am trying to make: the junction of the contingent exterior and the intimate interior is essential to the concept of the subject. My assumption is that we can thus learn much about how the subject works, as well as about the formation of group ties. Freud has seen very well that falling in love is, in a way, of the same stuff as group formation (should one say "falling into ideology"?).

Let us first consider the simplest example, a paradoxical kind of social requirement that could be called "injunctions of love," such as: love your parents, your family, your home, your native soil, your country, your nation, your next-door neighbor. The paradox is, of course, that love is prescribed where there is actually no choice as to its object—one cannot choose one's parents or native soil, for example. The contingent circumstances of one's birth are transformed into an object of love; what is unavoidable becomes ethically sanctioned. The given is tacitly as-
sumed to be an object of possible choice and of one’s inner consent; in fact, one never makes the choice, or better, the choice has always already been made. If there is a choice, it is a forced one; it is decided in advance. These injunctions actually preserve the content of the given and change only its form, but this purely formal difference is essential: the natural links (the bonds of substantiality, to use Hegelian language) are undone as natural, but they are tied together as signifying ties. The subject can only be liberated from its natural bonds by being tied to the chains of the signifier (the current neutral term “the signifying chain” is perhaps not so innocent). This common process can be seen as a triple device of subjectivation—three things happen simultaneously: first, a passage occurs from a contingent exterior to the interior; second, a purely formal change takes place during which the content remains the same; third, a forced choice is made where the given is presented as what one has chosen. The forced choice is not simply an absence of choice: rather, the choice is offered and denied in the same gesture. This empty gesture is what counts for subjectivity.

One of the most famous formulations of the forced choice is given by Lacan in his seminar, *Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*. Much as Althusser has illustrated that the mechanism of interpellation recurs to the most trivial experience (such as responding to someone calling you on the street or being interpellated by the police), Lacan also takes a drastic example (though fortunately not so common as the Althusserian ones)—that of being presented with a choice of: “Your money or your life” (“*La bourse ou la vie*”). Peculiar to this choice is the fact that there is no choice at all: one can only choose to hold to one’s life and thus lose only money; holding on to the money would entail losing both. One can choose only one alternative—life—and even this alternative is curtailed (life deprived of money), whereas the other alternative is void. In any case, one loses the intersection of both (life with money).

The formal side of this model may serve as a pattern of subjectivation: one is presented with a choice which is decided in advance, and by choosing, one meets with a loss. To put it roughly, the subject, in its insertion into the social, is the subject of a choice, but of a forced one, and of a loss. This experience is very common; it is not confined to dark and solitary alleys. Love, in its many various forms, always has this mechanism of forced choice attached to it. I have started with the simplest and the most general example, something that everybody has to undergo to become a social being. But love in its most emphatic and glorified form, sexual love, the traditionally celebrated love between a man and a
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woman, involves precisely the same device. It would seem that there has to be an autonomy of choice—indeed one cannot speak of love if there is no freedom of choice (if the choice is made, for instance, by parents, as was the common practice until quite recently). Yet upon a closer, or even a very superficial, look at the centuries of effusions about love, it is obvious that love and the autonomy of the subject rule each other out. All melodramas know that; the pattern could be described as follows: A young hero quite by coincidence and through no endeavour of his own meets a young girl in some more or less extraordinary circumstances. What happened unintentionally and by pure chance is in the second stage recognized as the realization of his innermost and immemorial wishes and desires. The contingent miraculously becomes the place of his deepest truth, the sign of Fate given by the Other. It is the Other that has chosen, not the young man himself, who was powerless (and who has to face heroically, in the third stage, the consequences of his non-choice: the opposition of the parents or society, intrigues, bad fortune, illness, etc.). It turns out that pure chance was actually no chance at all: the intrusion of the unforeseen is turned into Necessity, *tyche* is turned into *automaton*. The moment of subjectivation is precisely that moment of suspension of subjectivity to the Other (Fate, Providence, Eternal plan, Destiny, or whatever one might call it), manifesting itself as the pure contingency of the Real. Indeed, that strange force of love reputedly rules out any other considerations; it does not permit deliberation, the balance of gains and losses, of the pondering of the advantages of a certain choice—it just demands unconditional surrender to the Other.16 The situation is contradictory since it presupposes the freedom of an autonomous choice and demands its suppression. This contradiction is reconciled in a strange logic of *post festum*: the young man has chosen only by recognizing that the choice has already been made, regardless of his freedom of choice; he can only endorse and corroborate the decision of the Other by accepting the unavoidable as his own inner essence. In other words, choice is a retroactive category; it is always in the past tense, but in a special kind of past that was never present. The moment of choice can never be pinpointed; it passes directly and immediately from a “not yet” to an “always already.” It is past by its very nature. Falling in love means submitting to necessity—there is always a moment when the Real, so to speak, begins to speak, when its opacity turns into transparence; the subject has only to recognize it after the fact.

Numerous examples immediately spring to mind. One could imagine the alluring task of setting up a catalogue of the precise moment of
falling in love, taking world literature, as well as cinema from its highest to its lowest forms, as evidence in the matter. Remarkably, this task was actually accomplished, at least for the bulk of French literature, by Jean Rousset, who has undertaken an extensive phenomenology of “the scene of first sight in the novel” (as the subtitle of his book goes, the title being *Their Eyes Met*). But perhaps the paramount case which offers a clue to the matter is the one discovered by psychoanalysis: the case of transference in the psychoanalytic cure. In 1915, Freud wrote his famous “Observations on tranference-love,” analyzing that extraordinary love which is a kind of by-product of the analysis that surprised Freud himself. It emerged as an artefact disturbing the smooth development of the analytical cure, and for quite a long time its implications were not seen. This love of the patient for the analyst (in the beginning, psychoanalysis had mostly to do with hysterical female patients) springs up with an astonishing, almost mechanical regularity in the analytical situation, regardless of the person of the analyst and that of the patient. This love is artificially produced—a function of the analytical situation—but nevertheless a true love, as Freud insists, in no way different from a “genuine” one, although experimentally induced. If it seems pathological, one should keep in mind that love itself is a highly pathological state. The only difference lies, at the most, in the utter predictability of its appearance in transference, not in its nature. Its structure is bared in a more obvious way than in its “normal” counterpart. It is here, in this laboratory situation, that this mechanism can be best studied in its pure form—psychoanalysis itself can ultimately be seen as the analysis of this mechanism.

The analytical situation is extremely simple: the patient, stretched on a couch, unable to see the analyst, is invited to tell freely whatever passes through his/her mind—the only rule in analysis is precisely the absence of a rule, generally known as “the ground rule.” Why should this elementary expedient, this external contiguity (not even a contiguity of sight, a presence only surmised) ineluctably produce a relation of love? Yet one can be certain to find this love in every cure, a love which nobody called for and which can be highly embarrassing for the analyst. There are three possible outcomes of transference-love, Freud says: the interruption of the cure (but the patient would start another one and run into the same predicament there); marriage (which would be, as Freud puts it, a great success for the patient but a disaster for the cure—Fitzgerald’s *Tender is the Night* is great literary evidence of this point); or a love affair (nothing wrong with that, but not exactly Freud’s idea of analysis). If all three so-
lutions are bad, the only thing that remains is to handle it—using it as a lever, as it were, of the cure, analyzing it as another formation of the unconscious, a pathology that the cure itself has produced. So the analysis, paradoxically, ultimately turns into the analysis of a pathological state—transference—which it has itself created.

It is remarkable, says Freud, that this transference-love usually appears as a kind of resistance: the patient usually responds with love just at the moment when the analysis touches upon some particularly painful area or subject. Yet, initially, transference was the very opposite of resistance—it was what started off the analysis. The ground rule implies a promise that resistances can be lifted, that the repressed can come to light. The minimal mechanism of transference is embedded in the very basic function of speech as addressed to the Other, the Other as an instance beyond all empirical interlocutors. This dimension allows for the function of the analyst who is placed exactly in that special position of the Other beyond intersubjectivity. Transference necessarily arises from the speech addressed to the Other; it is inscribed in the basic dimension of language. This is the function that Lacan subsequently called “the subject supposed to know.” Transference thus initially appears as the opening of the unconscious—the means by which the “ground rule” triggers a flow of “free associations” generating the ensuing processes of remembering, repeating and reconstructing the repressed. The Other to whom this flow of words is addressed is present as the figure of the analyst—as the supposed addressee of the messages of the unconscious: symptoms and dreams.

The Other is supposed to hold the key to their solution, to solve the enigmas posed by the unconscious, to decipher their meaning. But a second aspect of transference intervenes: the emergence of transference-love spoils the game. It emerges as a halt of repetition, when the free flow is cut short, when words fail; it emerges as a resistance, or, as Lacan puts it, as the closing of the unconscious. Transference in this new and unexpected sense appears as an obstacle:

From the very beginning Freud warns us that transference is essentially resistant, Übertragungs-widerstand. Transference is the means by which the communication of the unconscious is interrupted, by which the unconscious is closed. Far from being a surrender of authority to the unconscious, it is, on the contrary, its closure. (Lacan, Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse, 119; cf. passim)
It is in this resistance, in this closing of the unconscious, that transferential love is situated. Love is the opposite pole of the unconscious:

What emerges in the effect of transference opposes revelation. Love appears... in the function of deception. Love is no doubt an effect of transference, but it is its side of resistance. In order to interpret we must wait for this effect of transference, but we know at the same time that it closes the subject to the effect of our interpretation. (Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse, 228-9)

So the “dialectics of transference” involve two different and opposed movements: one could say that transference opens the unconscious and transference closes it; it sets off the free associations and it causes their running out.

Being the lever of the analytical cure, transference proves to be at the same time its major hindrance. It opens two perspectives, two different views on the human condition. On the one hand, we see the infinite chain of signifiers, with the subject gliding along it in an unending process. Each signifier only represents the subject for other signifiers, that is, represents the subject badly since the very failure of a successful representation is what pushes forward this process of infinite metonymy and infinite repetition, with no final word, no ultimate signifier to close or found it. This is the side qui parle. But on the other hand, there is a side qui ne parle pas, the dimension of a mute presence, a silent being—the part presented first by the silent and embarrassing presence of the analyst. The analyst is ultimately the one who stands in the way of the free flow and hinders the repetition of the signifier. With his/her massive presence, the analyst puts him/herself in the place of the object that arrests the symbolic, something that cannot be symbolized and around which the symbolic revolves. The analyst remains “ein fremder Mensch,” as Freud puts it, a stranger and a foreign body. It is this mute being that calls for the response of love on the part of the patient who offers him/herself as the object of the unfathomable desire of the Other. The unnameable object spoils the game of free flow and repetition, and it is in this break, in this inert and unspeakable being, that the subject’s jouissance can be situated. Where the signifier is arrested, one offers one’s being; in this lack of words the silent being of the subject manifests itself as love.

I have started with the assertion that there is a remainder involved in the mechanism of interpellation, the left-over of the clean cut, and that this remainder can be pinpointed in the experience of love. Love, how-
ever, is not a symptom, or rather, its symptom-value is covered by the emergence of sense: the contingent and senseless is miraculously transformed into the point of the highest sense, the realization of one’s most intimate wishes, not something imposed and alien. Thus far, one could see falling in love as largely comparable to the mechanism of interpellation—the transformation of contingency into necessity, the external into the internal—and one might rightly ask where the difference between the two lies. Could one say that love is what we find beyond interpellation? The point is that psychoanalysis, with the mechanism of transference, makes love appear as a symptom. It produces transference-love as a “necessary illusion,” a new pathology and its major lever, but psychoanalysis also bares the mechanism which produces love, and thus makes it appear in its very contingency. The analytical process can be seen as a demonstration that love involves a dimension “beyond interpellation.” The conclusion of analysis occurs precisely with the realization of the contingency of the object that has up to then covered “the lack in the Other.” The analyst occupies precisely the position of the remainder. The contingent bit of the Real that was covered up by the narcissistic deception of love now appears as such.

Love and Ideology

Perhaps it is in the experimentally produced pure form of love found in analysis that we can touch upon some fundamental implications of love as an ideological mechanism. Adorno speaks of “the blind spot of unquestioning acceptance of a given thing” merely because it is given, the obedience to the unavoidable which “love alone can psychically manage.” In this acceptance of the given as the most intimate, we find the blind spot of ideological construction—a point beyond the signifier where the subject silently submits and responds to the Other by offering his being. It is a point beyond the rational or faulty arguments presented by ideology, beyond the analysis of its nodal points, floating signifiers, subject positions, or open identities. If, according to the first point of view (the infinite chain without an ultimate foundation), every subject identity is open, then, from the second point of view, the being of the subject is limited, fixed, and inert in its jouissance. This inertia functions as a sort of ultimate foundation, but is unable to found the signifying chain; there is ultimately no conjunction between the two points of view. Love can function as a mechanism of ideology—it can serve as a link be-
tween what is most private and a social bond—only because it can successfully produce that passage from the outer into the inner and at the same time cover it up. Love masks the external origins of subjectivity, concealing them not behind the illusion of an autonomous subject as a *causa sui*, but, quite the contrary, by offering one’s being to the Other, offering one’s own particularity in response to external contingency. The remainder of the Real beyond the signifier demands the offering of that remainder in the subject, the part of the “individual” that could not be subjectified, the object within the subject. With that gesture, the remainder is dealt with and the Other is sustained. The opacity of the Other is made transparent by love, the lawless becomes the lawful.

Let us go back to interpellation once again and try to match this view of ideology with Althusser’s. The two differ in a further essential aspect: the question of lack. The basic and minimal mechanism of interpellation is described as a relation between two subjects, a specular imaginary relationship between a subject and a Subject. The Other—the Subject—is the bearer of social injunctions, convocations, addresses etc., an agency that has to utter at least a “Hey you!”, whereupon the individual can only answer by a “Here I am,” “It’s me,” recognizing him/herself as the addressee, thus turning from an individual into a subject. In psychoanalysis, this relationship is troubled by the fact that both entities, the Subject and the subject, are haunted by lack.

First, the subject, prior to recognition in the Other, is not simply the individual. There is an “intermediary” stage in that passage from the (real) individual into the (imaginary) subject, the stage where the process of symbolization opens an empty space, a crack in the continuity of being—a void that is not yet filled with the imaginary subjectivity. This empty space can be illustrated with the mechanism of forced choice I have mentioned above. The forced choice entails a loss and opens a void. The advent of the symbolic presented by the forced choice brings forth something that did not “exist” before, but which is nevertheless “anterior” to it, a past that has never been present. It “creates” something that cannot be symbolized—this is what Lacan called the Real—and which at its “first” appearance is already lost. The retroactive nature of the forced choice entails the loss of something that was never possessed. There is thus a major difference between Lacan’s forced choice and the one involved in interpellation: the Lacanian forced choice is such that not only is the choice of alternatives dictated in advance (only one option is viable), but the viable alternative is already curtailed (*écorné*, says Lacan). The scheme of the intersection of two circles (Lacan, *Les quatre
concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse, 192-3) is designed to show that one loses the intersection of the two choices anyway (life with money, in Lacan’s example). The example is meant to illustrate the price one has to pay for the entry into the symbolic. Yet the example may be misleading insofar as it suggests that one might actually have possessed “life with money” before being presented with the choice, whereas entry into the symbolic demonstrates that the intersection is produced by choosing—as something one never had, but lost anyway. In Althusser’s model, there is no place for loss, for the price paid for becoming a subject. Interpellation transforms the loss into a gain (just like the mechanism of love) and thus makes the void which is created invisible. There is no place for lack—being is continuous either in the Real or in the Imaginary; the Symbolic is ultimately eluded. (In this respect Althusser follows his master, Spinoza.)

It is in that moment of loss that psychoanalysis situates castration as the entry into the theory of the unconscious. Moreover, the Subject as the Other is also subject to deficiency. One could say that there is an analogous “anterior stage” of the Other preceding the positivity of injunctions in which the individual recognizes him/herself. The difference already appears with the Other as embodied by the analyst. The analyst presents the Other in its purest form precisely because he/she is not the bearer of any injunctions (the famous rule of abstinence): the analyst can ultimately impersonate the Other best when he/she says nothing. The subject cannot simply respond to the call of the Other, for there is no call; however, that makes the Other all the more present. The presence of that Other has to be supplied by the subject him/herself; he/she has to make the Other exist first, not just recognize him/herself as the addressee. The Other exists only by the subject’s belief in it, the belief that there is a subject supposed to know. The psychoanalytic Other is that surmised Other, the conjectured Other who exists only through supposition, the Other who does not address the subject, but to whom the subject addresses his discourse and his love. Is it possible to seduce this Other, to rejoin the Other by offering one’s being?

In a (rather implicit) way, the Althusserian Other must also be supplied by the subject. The Subject only exists through the subject’s recognition in it; its retroactive existence is correlative to that illusory “always already” of the subject. Nevertheless, there is a step in the emergence of both the subject and the Other that Althusser leaves out and that can perhaps be best illustrated by Althusser’s own example. To elucidate the transition between the external materiality of state apparatuses
(institutions, practices, rituals, etc.) and the interiority of ideological sub-
jectivity, Althusser borrows a famous suggestion from Pascal, namely
his scandalous piece of advice that the best way to become a believer is to
follow the religious rituals (although they appear completely senseless to
a nonbeliever), after which the creed will follow by itself with an in-
escapable necessity. So where does the creed come from? In the first
stage, that of following the senseless ritual, there is no established author-
ity of the Subject, no direct convocation or address, no specular rela-
tionship, but merely a string of nonsense. The subject has to make the Other
exist first; he/she does this with a supposition ascribed to that senseless
chain of ritual, a supposition that it means something even if one does
not know what—a belief that there is something to believe in.

There is an invisible dividing line between “the first materiality”
(following the ritual before the advent of creed) and “the second mate-
riality” (the same ritual supported by inner belief): the two are separated by
the “empty gesture” of subjectivation. The crucial question concerns the
status of the subject attached to “the first materiality.” What made
him/her follow the ritual at all? Why did he/she consent to repeat a series
of senseless gestures? Clearly the creed did not motivate this consent
since it was to be the product of the situation. Yet even before belief,
there is already a belief involved—not belief in the Catholic faith, but a
minimal supposition that there is something to believe in, that there is a
“subject supposed to know” which can make sense of the string of non-
sense.25 A subject is already present before subjectivation and recogni-
tion, a subject “independent of consciousness” (to use a Marxist turn);
an unconscious belief is embodied in the ritual, a “belief before belief,”
as Zizek puts it (Sublime Object, 40). So if we count materialities, one
should perhaps also count empty gestures: there is a “first empty ges-
ture,” the minimal and purely formal gesture of consent—a purely for-
mal belief with no contents—which is enough to give rise to the Other
and to give support to the unconscious; and there is a “second empty
gesture,” which is a formal act of recognition, giving rise to belief and
inner acceptance. Althusser leaves out the second step.

Does the theory of interpellation allow for the status of the subject
before and “independent of” recognition? Can one be a subject without
knowing it? It is here that one has to introduce symbolic structure and the
notion of the subject as an “empty space.” This is also why Althusser’s
ardent insistence on materiality is insufficient. The Other that emerges
here, the Other of the symbolic order, is not material, and Althusser cov-
ers up this non-materiality by talking about the materiality of institutions
and practices. If subjectivity can spring up from materially following certain rituals, it is only insofar as those rituals function as a symbolic automatism, that is, insofar as they are governed by an “immaterial” logic supported by the Other. That Other cannot be discovered by scrutinizing materiality, however closely one looks at it. Althusser admits this in a way when he indicates that material practices, at their core, have to be regulated by rituals, that is, they have to be “symbolically codified.” But what counts is ultimately not that they are material, but that they are ruled by a code, by a repetition. What one would need here, and what I think is lacking in Althusser, is the conceptualization of the relationship between materiality and the Symbolic: this relationship—not the resorption of materiality into the Symbolic or the other way round—is not accounted for. For Althusser, there is either materiality that does not make sense for the subject, or the same materiality endowed with sense by the gesture of subjectivation. However, sense and subject did not spring up from materiality but from the Symbolic that regulated it; moreover, there is no space in Althusser’s account for the remainder produced in the operation, the “nonsensical” materiality that exists for the subject as the limit of sense. Zizek proposes a theory of ideology, in the Lacanian view, based precisely on this point: “The last support of the ideological effect...is the nonsensical, pre-ideological kernel of enjoyment. In ideology ‘all is not ideology (that is, ideological meaning)’, but it is this very surplus which is the last support of ideology” (Sublime Object, 124). Thus a paradoxical materiality persists after the advent of sense as something that “does not make sense” and which is the only support of jouissance. This bit of the Real is dealt with in the Lacanian concept of fantasy, which correlates the symbolic subject (the one not based on recognition, the empty space that Lacan marks $) and the objectal surplus (objet a); these are the two entities not covered, I think, by the mechanism of interpellation (or that are both produced and repressed by interpellation as the constitution of the Ego). The two are also connected in the symptom, although in a different way—Lacan gave it much thought in his last phase through the notion of sinthome. Symptom and fantasy are the two ways to establish a link between the $ and the objet a, and they are both “beyond interpellation.” They form a conceptual pair, both opposed and complementary.

To summarize: within the imaginary subject of interpellation based on the specular relationship between the Subject and the subject, there is a symbolic subject defined by an empty space, the void produced with the introduction of the symbolic order, a void metonymically gliding along
the signifying chain. But within this subject, there is finally a piece of “external” materiality, a paradoxical object that comes to fill the empty space as the intimate—extimate—kernel. In the core, we find the outside (hence the topological endeavour of Lacan’s later period to produce a suitable model for it). The trouble arises because that paradoxical internal materiality cannot successfully fill the void, and the effort of every ideology is precisely to fit an element into an empty space. Love is one of the mechanisms of doing it, of accomplishing that passage from exterior into interior. The deceptive formations that ideology takes hold of are situated in an irreducible gap which cannot be healed. Whatever comes to fill this gap has no natural or legitimate affinity to it; it is in this impossibility that ideology and its critique are situated.

One could pursue the analysis of the same basic model following other paths: the path of identification (which Freud suggests is both complementary and opposed to love), the formation of symptoms, the path of fantasy (with its impossible articulation between the void of the subject and the object). By pursuing analysis along these different lines one could eventually come to a more elaborated theory of ideology “beyond interpellation.” I assume that all these paths converge in this basic point: every ideology, in its reduced form, can be defined as an attempt to form the impossible junction of two minimal elements that by their very nature do not fit. The remainder, that bit of the Real that could not pass into the symbolic structure, plays an essential part in the matter (beyond “discursive strategies,” the analysis of nodal points and the articulation of floating signifiers), since it is only this part of the Real, this eluding little object, that provides jouissance (as opposed to pleasure). This little bit of surplus is finally the motor of any ideological edifice, its fuel, the award elusively offered to the subject for entering into ideological turmoil. The structural problem of ideology is ultimately that this fuel cannot be integrated into the edifice, so it turns out to be at the same time its explosive force. Psychoanalysis is profoundly anti-ideological, in its attempt to put asunder what ideology has united. Its very starting point is the failure of a happy union of two heterogeneous elements; but the remedy that analysis has to offer is not a promise of some other happy union or another harmony. Analysis only shows that no such harmony is possible or desirable. Such a remedy is decidedly paradoxical insofar as it offers a greater evil to heal a smaller one, showing that the disease that the subject suffers from is incurable—yet analysis also shows that this incurable disease is another name for the subject, that this disease founds the very possibility of human experience.
The first version of this paper was published in German ("Jenseits der Anrufung," in Gestalten der Autorität, ed. Slavoj Zizek, [Vienna: Hora Verlag, 1991]). It has met with the detailed criticism of an Althusserian group in Vienna defending Althusser's position. The criticism incited me to state my argument more clearly and to reshape extensively my original paper while sticking to all its essential points. The Viennese group, called "Allgemeinheit zwei," comprises Isolde Charim, Robert Pfaller and Michael Wiesmueller. Although we tend to disagree on some fundamental issues, I have a great esteem for their work, which merits much more international attention. They are among the unfortunately very few who try to stick to the Althusserian theoretical legacy. I am very grateful for their well-informed criticism as well for numerous lively debates. I also owe my thanks to the editors of Qui Parle for their critical comments and useful suggestions.

3 It is strange how Althusser himself, with his fundamental theoretical attitude, came to occupy a position comparable to that remainder—the position that could not be situated and did not fit on either side, but haunted both from the inside.
4 "Extimacy" (Extimité) was also taken as the title of Jacques-Alain Miller's course in 1985-86, to which I am greatly indebted.
5 Michel Pecheux, one of Althusser's most perspicacious pupils, expressly deemed the formulations "subject of the unconscious" and "subject of science" an "idealist reinscription" of Lacan committed by Lacan himself (Les vérités de la police [Paris: Maspero, 1975], 122).
6 Althusser's opposition to Lacan on this point is most obvious in the brief remark: "Let me remark in passing that the process without a subject is also at the basis of the whole work of Freud" (Althusser, Lénine et la philosophie, suivi de Marx et Lénine devant Hegel [Paris: Maspero, 1972], 70).
7 It can be shown that this type of subjectivity is also at stake in Hegel's philosophy (what Hegel had in mind with his "substance is the subject," or as the clue to the "experience of consciousness"). Althusser has, at a certain point, come closer to Hegel, otherwise his arch-enemy, by claiming that one can detect in Hegel precisely the process without a subject, although distorted by teleology (Lénine et la philosophie, 70, 87-8)—which, I think, is a major misunderstanding typical of the difference between both views of subjectivity.
8 Thus Althusser argues, "But to speak of the process without a subject implies that the notion of the subject is an ideological notion. . . . 1—the concept of process is scientific; 2—the notion of the subject is ideological" (Lénine et la philosophie, 70).
For Lacan, then, the outcome of analysis may be characterized by the formula “Love your symptom as yourself!” See Slavoj Zizek, *Enjoy Your Symptom!* (New York & London: Routledge, 1992). Althusser uses the term symptom in his “lecture symptomale,” but in a very different fashion: first, the symptom is not something that imposes itself as alien, but something that the reading has to “dig out,” a gap that has to be produced in what seemed like a seamless universe saturated with sense; second, once it is dug out, it can be dissolved by the concept and the gap is filled. The discourse of science fills in the symptom.

Michel Pecheux was well aware of the problem, speaking of “the lack of connection between ideology and the unconscious” (*Les vérités de la police*, 122) or “the overbearing absence of an elaborated conceptual articulation” between the two (136). He tried hard to fill the absence by some provisional formulas, which mostly made the problem worse. Cf. 123, 141, 147, 157-8, 162.


Freud writes, “We are aware that what we have been able to contribute towards the explanation of the libidinal structure of groups leads back to the distinction between the ego and the ego ideal and to the double kind of tie which this makes possible—identification, and putting the object in the place of the ego ideal” (*Group Psychology*, 162).


Freud writes, “Even in its caprices the usage of language remains true to some kind of reality. Thus it gives the name of ‘love’ to a great many kinds of emotional relationship which we too group together theoretically as love; but then again it feels a doubt whether this love is real, true, actual love, and so hints at a whole scale of possibilities within the range of the phenomena of love. We shall have no difficulty in making the same discovery from our own observation” (“Group Psychology,” 141).

The decision about love can never be freely and autonomously made by the subject him/herself. This is illustrated in a very amusing way in Somerset Maugham’s short story “A Marriage of Convenience.” A marriage advertisement by an eligible bachelor is answered by thousands of letters. The man has to face the utter impossibility of a choice and has to use another stratagem to make a decision—to put up at least some pretense of a choice made by Fate.

Jean Rousset, *Leurs yeux se rencontrèrent* (Paris: Jose Corti, 1984). I must leave the matter with the reference to his work, which could be pursued further in many different directions and on other material. However, let me briefly refer to a paramount American example. The relation between love and free choice is one of the central
themes in the work of Henry James. Many Jamesian plots turn around this point: if love comes from the Other, in that miraculous instant passage from external contingency into the intimate, if it does not spring from an inner decision, then it can also be artificially produced. There is something automatic, almost mechanical about falling in love, which can be used and abused. A young girl, beautiful, rich and intelligent, comes from America to Europe to take her time and fully enjoy the freedom of her choice of a husband. But it is precisely at her most free and autonomous moment that she is trapped: what she considered to be the sign of Fate deciding about her marriage is revealed to be the result of a nasty intrigue. Her free choice was brought about artificially, and since she had made her decision in complete autonomy, it is only by persevering in it that she can be portrayed as a lady. See also the short story “Lord Beaupré” which demonstrates the case with utmost clarity.


19 See Michel Silvestre: “Thus we can say that love is a demand—even though it remains unanswered—a demand addressing being. . . . Love addresses that point of speech where the word fails” (Demain la psychanalyse [Paris: Navarin, 1987], 301). The paper by Michel Silvestre on transference, “Le transfert dans la direction de la cure,” originally published in Ornica? 30, 1984, and then included in his posthumous volume cited above, is the best account of transference in psychoanalysis that I know of.

20 I follow the practice of many English authors of retaining the French word, jouissance. I do not think that enjoyment (as opposed to pleasure) is a good English equivalent of la jouissance as used in psychoanalysis. It is very common in English to use the imperative form “Enjoy yourself!” or even the first person singular “I am enjoying myself,” whereas in French, it is practically impossible to use the imperative “Jouis!” (the Lacanian imperative of the Superego) or the first person singular “Je jouis” (unless under rather special circumstances).

21 Let me dissipate two possible misunderstandings. First, there is nothing irrational or ungraspable in this being beyond words, nothing that would call for casting away language as insufficient, nor for some kind of immediate contact, a direct seizure of immediacy, intuition or whatever. What is beyond language is the result of language itself. Only in and through language is there an unspeakable—that remainder produced as the fallout of the Symbolic order and the Real. Second, what is beyond the signifier is not beyond reach—not something that one could not influence or work upon. Psychoanalysis is precisely the process designed to touch that being, that elusive object, and since it is the product of the impact of language, it can only be tackled through words (psychoanalysis
being a "talking cure" from its very first occurrence on), and not by any other, supposedly more direct means.

22 Hence one of Lacan's descriptions of the concluding moment of analysis is as "the falling out of the objet a" embodied in the analyst; or the maximum distance between the point "I" (the ego ideal) and the objet a in the formula proposed in Seminar XI (Lacan, Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse, 245).


That a thing is loved simply because it exists is a consequence of obeying the extant, the inescapable; love alone can manage such obedience. Accepting what there is has become the strongest glue of reality, the replacement of ideologies as specific, perhaps even as theoretically justifiable, conceptions about what exists. The blind spot of unquestioning acceptance of a given thing, of something set in its place, is one of the invariants of bourgeois society. (41-42)

24 Both what Lacan calls the logic of alienation and that of separation function according to this model (though I cannot develop it here), the first one accounting for the curtailment of sense (the part of nonsense entailed by gaining sense), the second one accounting for the object, the part of being that one has to pawn in the operation (the object being placed in the intersection of the subject and the Other, that is, at the point where the lack of the subject coincides with the lack of the Other). Cf. Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse, 191 ff., 199 ff.

25 Pascal in a way admits this by the circularity of his argument in fragment 233: the wager on faith makes sense only if one already believes, before accepting faith, that it makes sense, that one will gain by it. Cf. also Zizek's discussion of Pascal and the Althusserian use of it (The Sublime Object of Ideology [London: Verso, 1989], 36-40).

26 One can see the difficulty when Althusser gets rather entangled trying to sort out different modalities of materiality.

27 From there, one can propose a different kind of account of ideology, structured not around meaning, but around its limit or beyond, around its own impossibility (cf. Zizek's attempt to reinterpret the classical case of anti-Semitism, Sublime Object, 125-9).

28 The point could be demonstrated in a more technical way by Lacan's "graph of desire." While the first stage of the graph could be taken to present the mechanism of interpellation, the second stage deals with the dimension "beyond interpellation." It introduces the entities not covered by interpellation and correlates them in the formula of fantasy, $ <> a.