

The Interpellated Subject: Beyond Althusser and Butler

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Abstract:

According to the theory of "interpelation", capitalism brings forth a "subject form": a subject who, assuming his subjection, takes on its guilt. Through this "linguistic turn" within marxism, Althusser endowed social structure with speech. But how could social relations "interpelate"? Through which voice does it make itself heard? And what sort of guilt could be at stake here? The meta/structural approach can take on this program of research, whereas Althusser's classical Marxism lacked the means. It thinks class relations through two class factors, namely, the market and the organization, instrumentalists in capitalism at the two poles of the dominant class. These are the two rational mediations underlying the immediacy of modern discursivity, shared by everyone in an amphibiological interpelation. The same demand - freedom and equality! - is made by the powerful and the people-multitude. This is the metastructure, the posed-presupposition of the structure within which class struggle is already articulated - one voice common in the "differend". Modern society carries within itself the principle of its self-critique, charged with guilt and peril. But the guilt of the modern is not that of breaking the law, but of bowing to it to comply. This supposition underlies all emancipatory speech.

Key words:

Althusser, Butler, interpelation, subjection, culpability, metastructure, linguistic turn, "differend", subject, Marxism

Today the question of a "subject form" generated by capitalism arises again in anthropological and political debate. Althusser has provided a famous formulation of it in terms of "interpellation." Here I suggest radically reinterpreting this interpretation and redeploying it on a more realistic socio-political register, in terms of what I designate as the "metastructural" approach of modern society.

In a 1969 manuscript, partially published in 1970, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," Althusser defined ideology as "the interpellation of the individual as a subject." He set the stage for the paradox of a subject constituted as such through the injunction to conform to a law. A subject is only a subject at the cost of its voluntary submission. This is, in fact, a true paradox. Especially if we add that the consciousness that recognizes the law thereby recognizes itself as guilty.

Some time ago, Judith Butler revisited this famous fragment.¹ She connects the three questions thus posed – “Who interpellates?” “What subject is thus constituted?” “What guilt?” – to a figure, a “trope,” whose paths and detours she analyzes from Hegel to Foucault, by way of Nietzsche and Freud. In accordance with Althusser’s analysis, she emphasizes that the capitalist order calls on definite social practices that the subject, after its formation, winds up “mastering,” but in this mastery its own subjection is realized. To injunction responds obedience, which is also an admission of guilt. This is how the interpellated “turns against himself or herself.” But it is from such a reversal that he or she proceeds as a subject.

These three questions are inseparably linked: the nature of the fault is clarified only provided that we know who is speaking, to whom, and in what way, or by what means. They belong to the same decipherment, which I presume here has not yet been completed. *It remains especially to understand how “social relations” can “interpellate,” what voice can make itself heard, and what kind of guilt is involved.* This will, therefore, be the object of my investigation.

It seems to me that the difficulty lies in, among others, the double register of Althusser’s discourse. The anthropological, “generic” register is indeed a question of *the* subject as such and its constitution in the social language game. The “specific” register, that of so-called capitalist social relations, is also a question of a subject defined historically, emerging in the conditions of a particular social structure, with the particular practices it implies. To link generic and specific is the challenge assumed by the historical materialist investigation opened up by Marx (and reclaimed by Althusser), which thinks about history by means of “periods,” and by successive revolutions, rather than by evolution. However, these two registers refer to two distinct theoretical tasks. One of them is based on interrogating this text about the general lesson it promises: this is what Butler does, whose analysis concerns, primarily at least, the “eternity” of interpellation, in the sense in which Althusser says that it has to do with the unconscious. But another theoretical task is no less based on reconsidering this text in the register of the historical specificity presupposed. What then of the relationship between historical variation and the presupposed invariant, the eternal of a “human nature”? Between what changes and what does not change? Or, in Althusser’s words, between “what can no longer last” and what “will last a long time”?

1
Butler 1997. See Chapter 4

1. Domination in terms of “Ideological State Apparatuses” *Althusser intends to provide Marxism with “the theory it lacks”*

“Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” published in the form of an article in 1970 in *La Pensée*, is extracted from a long manuscript dated 1969, originally intended for the collection *Théorie*, and explicitly devoted to the “capitalist relations of production.”² The envisaged work embraces the various ideologies (familial, union, political, cultural, etc.) that appear in this context and the “apparatuses” by means of which the latter materially exist. The author argues that the “reproduction” of capitalist social relations depends on the academic Ideological State Apparatus and that the “functioning” of these relations depends on legal-moral ideology. The fragment published in 1970 takes up what is essential to the manuscript’s final chapter – Chapter 12, “On Ideology” – which it broadens and generalizes, enabling us to pass from the specific to the generic. The transition that links Chapter 11, “The Legal Ideological State Apparatus” to Chapter 12, “On Ideology” is unambiguous: “Now that we believe we have succeeded in defining ‘law’ as an Ideological State Apparatus that fulfills an absolutely *specific* function in capitalist social formations ... we can and must say a few words about ideology *in general*” (pp. 169-70, my emphasis). Althusser specifies that what he has in mind concerns all “class societies” (p. 176).

It is remarkable that this context – that of a manuscript devoted to analyzing processes that are presumed to be specific to capitalism – had been systematically ignored, strictly repressed, by the supposed spiritual inheritors of Althusser. It is significant that this “1970 manuscript,” published twenty-five years later, only appeared in the English language³ nineteen years after the French edition – in a cultural environment in which Althusserian “interpellation” had, however, encountered great success. A good generation had to pass for this writing to resurface. To connect this fragment to the totality it came from was doubtless naturally to blur the father’s original image. Indeed, we could not underestimate the

2
Published in 1995 by Presses Universitaires de France under my editorship, with the title *Sur la Reproduction*. The pages cited refer to the second edition, 2010, with a preface by Étienne Balibar. The double references, marked //, refer to the two versions of this text: the version of Chapter 12 and the version that appeared in *La Pensée*, as it is reproduced in Appendix 2 in *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, pp. 232-72.

3 Althusser 2014.

wide gap between the convocation of authorities as legitimate as Freud, Pascal, or Spinoza, intervening in the final chapter, and the reference, throughout the manuscript, supported by “Marxist-Leninist philosophy,” tied to “Marxist-Leninist science” (p. 181), and so on. There is every reason to be surprised by the emphasis and constancy with which Althusser declares his attachment to the “party of the vanguard of the proletariat” (p. 134). Up to the improbable.⁴ It is tempting to put this accumulation of rather hyperbolic professions of faith down to a passing exaltation.⁵ In any event, it is clear that Althusser, here as already in “Freud and Lacan,” published in 1964, aims to intervene on the political orientation of his party from within, choosing for this its most representative academic publication. He follows a certain “party” style, marked above all in the manuscript (even so, let us note that it could have been corrected and that it was not finally published by its author). However, we shall neglect this particular relation to the “party” to which he demonstrates his loyalty. And we shall stick to the other side of his remarks: to the much less orthodox ambition, clearly displayed in the text, of providing Marxism with the “theory” it lacks. For it is a question of nothing less than passing “from a ‘descriptive theory’ of law to the threshold of a proper theory of law” (p. 166). Therefore, what theoretical innovation does this intervention claim, considered in the totality of its manuscript redaction?

It is a common trait of philosopher-commentators on Marx to turn, as if by professional instinct, toward the “generic” register – whether it is a question of labor, of production, or ideology – and to consider that the “specific” is outside of their field of responsibility. It remains that general theorization supposedly comes in response to questions that are posed in the various historically particular configurations which could well, as an indirect consequence, interfere in the proposed generic concept – “ideology,” as it happens. Here we shall risk going back to the examination of this text by inquiring into the conditions in which are linked the moments of the “specific” and the “generic” in a materialist theory of “ideo-

4 “Here we shall be advancing cautiously on a terrain on which Marx, Lenin, Stalin and Mao have long since preceded us, but without systematizing, in theoretical form, the decisive progress that their experiences and procedures implied. Why? Because these experiences and procedures were restricted in the main to the terrain of political practice” (p. 74). “Stalin neglected these questions” (p. 92). To what unlikely reader is this manuscript addressed? Who among the subscribers to *La Pensée*, for example, still referred to Stalin in 1970?

5 One can also link up discourses by Deleuze and Foucault, who at the same time were enthusiasts of “proletarian revolution” (Deleuze and Foucault 2004). Another allegiance, a similar profession of faith.

logical interpellation.”

Althusser’s initial ambiguity: power as domination

In contrast with a rather perfunctory “Marxism,” Althusser reveals that the domination of the capitalist class is not only to be understood on the basis of the repressive capabilities conferred by private property of the large-scale means of production, but that it is just as much to be found in the complex ideological fabric of juridical, political, cultural institutions, and so on, through which bourgeois power is realized, as Gramsci had insisted. The concept of the State Apparatus, of Leninist origin, allows the state in the Marxist sense of the term to be identified, that is, as a class relation – in contrast with the standard pair state/civil Society – that is to say, state power as class power, and not only as the power of the public institution over individuals taken in their private relationships. Althusser thus counts among the actors of this realization that marked the “1968 generation”: all large-scale institutions of society take part in domination and class struggle.

He certainly intends to be careful not to turn the state into “a mere instrument of domination and repression in the service of objectives, that is, of the dominant class’s *conscious will*” (p. 72). And that is why even his problematic of ideology, understood as the *other* factor of hegemony, tends to be: “Ideological State Apparatuses” versus “Repressive State Apparatuses.” All the same, on this terrain he engages with the terminology of “Ideological State Apparatuses,” in an uncertain metaphorical register. He is certainly right to call for considering the specific “materiality” of the institutional devices of class, their ability to reproduce themselves, their compulsive rituals, and so on. But although Gramsci showed that these institutions, constitutive of what he calls “civil society,” are instances of confrontation *between* classes, the notion of “State Apparatus,” which designates them for Althusser, reintroduces an abruptly asymmetrical concept, that of the instrument of power of one class over another.

It is not a question here only of a defective connotation of the metaphor. For the latter actually responds to his conception of “power.” The power of the dominant class is to be understood, he writes, as the “excess” of its force in relation to that of the dominated class. “For class domination does indeed find itself sanctioned in and by the state, in that *only the Force of the dominant class enters into it and is recognized there.*”

What is more, this Force is the sole 'motor' of the state, the only energy to be transformed into power, right, laws and norms in the state."⁶With Foucault, we could object that power is nothing without the resistance opposed to it. Althusser would doubtless agree, for he holds that, despite power from above, class struggle from below doesn't cease, and he surely depicts that it has an impact in the institution. But the conceptuality of "Ideological State Apparatuses" does not seem naturally to show that this is so. The "voice" that the "apparatus" makes heard is that of the "master," who calls for free servitude. Such is the guiding line of the analysis. Does this not presume that power from below would be mute? Would it also be without a share in the history of modern times? This conceptual disequilibrium seems to be overcome only at the cost of a theoretical-political voluntarism that, faced with the injunctions of ideology, exhorts the "primacy of the class struggle."

We shall not examine here in its entirety Althusser's "politics," which takes some distance from the traditional scheme of socialist revolution conceived of as a passage from capitalist market society to a democratic order planned by all. We shall retain the care that he has, in various writings, made to highlight a conceptuality of "overdetermination" and "conjuncture"⁷ – without speaking about "the relative autonomy of the State." And one can agree with him here when he refers the politics of emancipation to the "political intervention of the masses" – which he designates as the "(political) dictatorship of the proletariat" (p. 63n. 10), in the sense, in fact, in which others would speak today about "radical democracy." But it is doubtful that the theoretical perspective he specifically proposes in this text, that of the "withering away of law and commodity exchange," linked to the reduction of planning to a simple "subordinate" technical "means" (p. 62), can illuminate the ways of the future. It is not in this kind of second chance for historical socialism that we shall find an agenda for the century that has opened.

6 Althusser 2006, pp. 109-10.

7 See, among others, the excellent book by Sato 2007.

2. The concept of interpellation: a "linguistic turn" at the heart of Marxism

How Althusser gives speech to social structure

I would propose here that Althusser, whatever his reading of history and his projections of the future, bequeaths to us an authentic theoretical-political heritage, worthy of being reclaimed for the interpretation of the present time: his theory of interpellation, which reexamines Marx's philosophical-political investigation. It aims to link the socio-economic matrix that defines "capitalist social relations" to an anthropology of the modern subject. *And it does so by means of this tour de force that consists in endowing the legal and political authority inherent in the economic "social form," with a faculty of "speech."* Through the "ideological apparatuses" is imposed a *command* that proceeds from the class relation taken in its totality (according to the "knotting together of superstructure and base," at least if we follow the proposed explanation, pp. 202-204). This is how Althusser refers to *interpellation*, the injunction to "submit yourself," at the same time as the "I obey" who responds to it, to the historically specific *social relations* in which it is heard. In doing so, it seems to me that he initiated at the heart of Marxism a true "linguistic turn," and of a different kind than the one proposed by Habermas, consisting not in *substituting* the paradigm of language for that of production, but in *relating* them to each other in a social relation in which every action, especially of production, is at the same time, an "action of language."

In my opinion, it remains the case that Althusser thus advanced a program for which he didn't have the means. What is necessary, in fact, for "social relations of production" to "interpellate," to give *rise* to an interpellation? There must be possible a conceptual chain that links the order of *structures*, of "relations of production," to that of *discourse*. Let us say it bluntly: such is precisely the "meta/structural" research program, which relates modern class "structure" to its "metastructure," understood as the declarative, interpellative presupposition, posed by the structure itself in the practices to which it gives rise.⁸The metastructure is posed as that by which the structure is to be understood. The question

8 Such is the central thesis I stated for the first time in Bidet 1990, and which I have not ceased to develop since then. But it is indeed, in my eyes, Marx who introduced this problematic of the metastructure (which he analyzes as a market economico-discursive relation) constituting the presupposition posed by the (capitalist) structure.

of interpellation, understood in Althusser's terms, in this sense is the central object of a meta/structural theory, its *raison d'être*. The concept of *superstructure*, to which it refers, which designates what is supposed to be "above," indeed cannot act as *metastructure*, which designates what is assumed "before": the *presupposition posed by structure*. The meta-structural problematic therefore fully takes up Althusser's heritage, the "linguistic turn" he supposes, in the context of his own version of historical materialism. More radically, it therein takes up a theoretical-political position that – at least this is the thesis I am advancing – finds its origin in *Capital*.

Why Althusser has no means for such a program

However, according to the analysis I am proposing, the Althusserian investigation leaves a blank, an indeterminate space, between "structure" as a class relation and "metastructure" as an interpellative presupposition. It lacks a conceptual chain. If we want to remove this epistemological obstacle, then the conceptual edifice proposed by Marx, his theorization of modern society, must be reconsidered in its entirety. As we have seen, Althusser's discourse remains inscribed in the limits of a traditional Marxism that aims to define a way leading from a world dominated by the *market* to a society *organized-in-concert* by all. The meta/structural problematic stands out from this residual orthodoxy. It takes the market and organization for what they are: the two primary forms of rational coordination, contemporaneous with each other, at the social scale. Thus it puts the theory of modern society back on its two feet: market and organization⁹. From there, it can go back to these two *mediations*, manifested as the two modern "class factors," in what *they give* as relays: to the *immediacy* of speech, to the inter-interpellation presumed to be constitutive of modernity. "As relays," since it is in the purportedly free relation of the market, just as in the purportedly free relation of organization, that the partners are *supposedly* treated as free, equal, and rational – that is, according to the standard of communicative action. "Supposedly" underscores that the social reality at question here is one of a *pretense*.

9 Which means that planning cannot be a simple (technical) "means," as Althusser intends. Arising from the "organization" form, a counterpart to the "commodity" form, it is not only, as he writes, "the organization of the productive forces" (p. 63f. 10), it is a social relation of production, and in this capacity, a "class factor."

In fact, this happens only in the critical process of the discursive relation between these two relations – in the language-based arbitration that the partners carry out between themselves, as opposed to the submission of one to another as a natural order. *In short, meta/structural theory not only claims and thematizes the linguistic turn initiated by Althusser, but it also realizes it by demonstrating in the market/organization pair, mediations of discursive immediacy, class factors that are constitutive of the modern class relation.* Or: the modern class relation as an instrumentalization of these two "mediations." In other words, meta/structural theory connects the "class relation" to the "speech" that interpellates while, on the basis of these two modern "class factors," defining mediations of interindividuality, understood in their modern pretense of being the relays of discursive immediacy. This is the sense in which I have allowed myself to propose that Althusser "did not have the means for his program."

These metastructural mediations of speech are never posed as such except in the class structure that instrumentalizes them into their contrary, with all the consequences that follow (alienation, exploitation, domination, and "abstraction"). And, in my view, it is from there, and there alone, that we can decipher this modern class structure, and envision how to propose a politics aiming at their abolition as class factors. I therefore invite one to consider interpellation according to its nature in modern class conditions: modern persons are interpellated as free, equal, and rational, that is, as being governed (supposedly at least, and this "supposedly" is not a rhetorical inflection but a theoretical determination) under the *aegis* of speech that is freely and equally exchanged. What analysis must be made of it and what consequences must be drawn from it?

In the Althusserian position, as it develops in the 1969 manuscript, there appears to remain in this respect something uncertain regarding the relationship between, on the one hand, a *historically situated legal ideology* (mentioned in Chapter 5), which presents subjects as "naturally free and equal" – in the context of a legal State Ideological Apparatus whose function would be, however, to strengthen the repressive apparatuses of modern capitalism – and, on the other hand, the *ideological process in general* (addressed in chapter 12), depicted by the religious ideology that would interpellate in terms of "submit yourself."

It seems to me that what is pertinent here, what is to be considered, is what modern (ideological) discourse says. Therefore, we shall suppose that modern interpellation *is* indeed what it says to be, and not – as Althusser suggests – a simple variant on religious injunction, or an injunction for which religion provides the "example." Interpellation is

certainly only metastructure: it is presupposed by the modern consciousness which is presented only as “instrumentalized” in class structure, in its constitutive contradiction. But it is thus uttered in a process of *class struggle*, and not, as one reads in Althusser, in a simple relationship of *domination/servitude*. The so-called “dominated” class – which it is more appropriate, in my view, to identify as the “fundamental” or “popular” class – appears as a subversive party in interpellation. Of a self-contradictory interpellation, to be understood contradictorily: on the utopian as much as ideological mode.

How Althusser misses the paradox of modern interpellation

From this moment on, we see the paradox of the relation between the *historical* and the *generic*, between the *modern* subject and the *human* subject. It is precisely that the modern class relation is constituted *specifically* in this reference to discourse *as such*, to the immediacy of communicative discourse, *presupposed* to govern mediations. That is to say, in the reference to “reason,” in the form of discourse equally shared between partners who are interpellated as free, equal, and rational, through two mediations, market and organization. According to these interactions, it is “understood” in “modernity” that we are equal in the last instance: a “popular prejudice,” Marx says in the first chapter of *Capital*. Modernity *is given* as the realization of our humanity. It is in this sense that modernity realizes the “instrumentalization” of reason. For the metastructural reference to freedom-equality-rationality is only given in the structural situation of unfreedom, inequality, and irrationality. The “free market,” with its discourse of freedom, defines the conditions in which capitalist domination is established. The universalisability of communicative action is the *reversed*, instrumentalized presupposition of the modern form of society. The universal is the twisted presupposition, “turned against itself,” of our historical particularity.

Althusser’s thesis is therefore unsatisfactory. He is certainly right to understand the interpellation inherent in the modern form of society in terms of the injunction to submission to the ruling order. Order always gives an order. It calls for obedience. But, as it happens, this does not at all contradict the literalness of a correlative injunction, an injunction to freedom. In fact, the paradox has to do with the fact that inter-interpellation is amphibolous. The same utterance, with two voices, “*We are free and equal*,” is given, by the symmetry it establishes between structur-

ally unequal interlocutors, in two contrary senses in the confrontation of the declaration: “That is”/“That must be” – and it is not a question of a moral obligation but of an injunction of power from below. One says: “*We are free and equal*, the case is settled.” The other says: “*We are free and equal*, and we will show it.”¹⁰ “Interpellation,” as speech that is always already socially uttered, would be inaudible to the modern in the unilateral terms that Althusser lends: “Submit yourself! Kneel!” - a voice from above, an Olympian language act immanent to my innermost social being. It is equally and simultaneously that of “Stand!” “Get up and walk!” - an interaction from below. The interpellated body is torn between these two postures, these two opposing figures of *corporeal hexis*. Amphiboly of the cry – “Equaliberty!” - common to the powerful and to the people-multitude. Class struggle is always already engaged, *una voce*, as hermeneutics.¹¹

The problem of the ontological status of the metastructure calls for a “spectral” analysis, with regard to knowing what kind of voice is heard, where it comes from, and to whom it is addressed. The specter is not a *voiceover*, reiterating to infinity. In this sense, Althusser finds himself in an impasse when he seeks in religious ideology - that of “Kneel!” the very matrix of social interpellation in general. A *generic* conception of ideology is certainly required. But just as necessary is a concept of ideology in the particular form of modern society: a *specific* concept. But to presume that the “example” drawn here from religious experience could depict the ideological in general is obviously inappropriate for representing interpellation in the modern form of society.¹²

10 The book by Binoche and Cléro 2007, which notably includes a critical reading of the main elements of Benthamite utilitarian critique, reveals the earliness and the importance of the debate around this amphiboly of the declaration of the “rights of man.” In this sense, see Deleuze: “what counts” is the “regime of enunciation itself in that it can include contradictory utterances”, in Deleuze 2006, p. 344.

11 This is the theme of chapter 6 of my book L’État-monde, “Idéologies, utopies, cryptologies.”

12 It is worth noting that Althusser does not attack “faith” but (on the contrary?) “religious ideology.” “Authentic” theologians could recognize him as of their own, he who rejects every interpellation that would not be that of my pure freedom.

3. Ideology between the eternal and the historical

Althusser, the Freudian domain, and the social field

Before concluding, however, we must still examine the relation that Althusser establishes between ideology and the unconscious.

Operating on the successive statements of the authors she has chosen, Judith Butler elaborates the theme of the “ambivalence” between the power that interpellates the subject and the power of the subject thus constituted: the subject finds itself generated by its very subjection, to which it is attached, and on the basis of which it exercises a power that conceals, but finally exceeds, the power from which it proceeds. It is a question here of the emergence of the subject as such: in its attachment to subjection is formed a will, a capacity of resistance that realizes itself in creative excess.

Butler seeks to follow Althusser on this terrain, and more specifically on the terrain of psychoanalysis. For the generality of “*ideology in general*” – which, in contrast with “*ideologies*,” characteristic of various forms of society, “has no history” (p. 174//254) – is, he says, to be understood in the sense of “eternity,” which is that of the unconscious. If “eternal” means “immutable in its form throughout all of history,” “*ideology is eternal*, just like the unconscious.” A connection, he adds, “justified by the *fact* that the eternity of *the unconscious* is based, in the last instance, on the eternity of *ideology in general*” (p. 176//255).

If this is so, being a question of the “evocation” of the concrete subject, of its “promulgation” as Butler says, ideology in general seems to possess, in relation to ideologies, an anthropologically sovereign privilege. The subject’s concreteness, captured in its ontogenesis, is to be considered for itself below the historical variants of its particular socialization through certain “particular ideologies.” Here we encounter Althusser’s ambition to connect psychoanalysis to “historical matérialism.”¹³ Referring to Freud, he recalls that, even before being born, the child finds itself always already interpellated, prey to the expectation and address of his or her entourage (pp. 192-93//265-66). We should note, however, that he does not cross the threshold of psychoanalysis: he does

13 See Althusser 2003, pp. 33-84, a 1966 manuscript, which seeks to think about psychoanalysis as a “regional theory arising from two “general theories,” the “GT of the signifier” and the “GT of historical materialism” (p. 64). On already finds here outlined the thesis of “interpellation,” in the same Lacanian context, according to which the unconscious is “structured like a language” (p. 56).

not pretend to enter into this field of knowledge. For, if “this business of the infant that is always-already a subject in advance” (p. 193) interests him, it is “on other grounds.” It is because it permits him to apprehend his own *societal* history: to follow the destiny of the “little child Louis” (*ibid.*), a subject first familial then academic, religious, juridical, political, up to ... “joins the Communist Party” (*ibid.*). Althusser thus remains, for his part, at the consideration of the constitution of the subject according to the sequence of the successive relations that await him during his existence in a definite society. The object of his research is, however, to establish the *point of articulation* between the historicity of the singular and the “eternity” of the general. The point of repetition and reiteration. And he believes it can be discovered in *interpellation* as such, whereby would be given, as always singular, ideology in general.

Therefore, he undertakes to consider this societal ideological as *ahistorical* (“general”) factuality. And he believes that he can elaborate the concept on the basis of what is supposedly an “example” (p. 194), that of religious ideology. By making use of such an “example,” however, he is led to define “ideology in general” in terms that can be judged to be singularly particular: either from the *religious* subject or, more precisely, from a specular configuration between subjects and the Subject. For there exists, he writes, “such a multitude of possible religious subjects on the *absolute* condition that here is a Unique, Absolute, *Other Subject*, namely, God” (p. 195//267). Thus one discovers oneself to be “a subject by the Subject and subjected to the Subject” (pp. 195-96//267). The great Subject is the master: he orders, he promises the supreme reward to one who obeys. Interpellation arises from *social domination in general*, as the principle of subjectivation.

Eternity of ideology? Self-criticism of ideology?

It obviously remains to be seen if what is “general” in this sense is thereby even “eternal,” and in what sense. Is this eternity called to terminate or only to “last a long time”? And is it even then, finally, the ultimate object of Althusserian investigation: What is the end of ideologies? What is the “end of ideology” and of the class domination it makes possible? It is remarkable that, in a passage that will disappear from the final version, Althusser canceled this horizon of eternity on which in one way or another he deploys all of his discourse. After having mentioned various figures of the modern Subject – “The Fatherland, the National or

General Interest, Progress, the Revolution” – faced with little subjects, the “members of the organization, the voters, the militants, and so on,” he arrives, in fact, at this singular restriction: “Revolutionary Marxist-Leninist political ideology is of course distinguished by the fact, *without historical precedent*, that it is an ideology which has been heavily ‘reworked’, and thus transformed, by a *science*, the Marxist science of history, social formations, the class struggle and revolution. This ‘distorts’ the specular structure of ideology without doing away with it altogether (‘no saviour from on high ... no prince or peer’ says the Internationale, and, consequently, no subjected subjects! ...). In this way, the Internationale seeks to ‘*de-centre*’ political ideology itself. To what extent is that possible, or, rather, since it is relatively possible, within what limits has it proven possible so far? That is another question.” (p. 198)¹⁴

It will be said that this passage, finally suppressed, reveals a “private” political style. But really: it is the style of the singular subject who is apprehended *sub specie aeternitatis*, that is to say, in its most intimate relationship with “History” – with a capital “H,” as Althusser loved to write. As we know, “everything personal is political.” But this is not exactly the point that detains us. It is not the moods, the fluctuating hopes that could be those of a *political* militant (who carefully notes that he is writing on 6 April 1969, p. 190//263), to which I want to draw attention. I would stop on this surprising fact, which is significant to Althusser’s *theoretical* endeavor in general: he does not see “any historical precedent” for the critique of ideology whose bearer is “the Marxist science of history.”

The meta/structural thesis is obviously, on the contrary, that the modern form of society has from its beginning carried the principle of its self-criticism, a principle of rejected injunction, of guilt and threat, which is immanent to it. And this was first formulated precisely in religious language. We may recall the slogan of the Lollards: “When Adam dug the earth, and when Eve spun wool, where then was the master? Where then the servant?” This was a famous interpellation, on the banner of insurgents. It was a foundational version of “we are free and equal.” And we could also invoke in this sense the *Liber Paradisum* of Bologna, 1250. *Inter*-interpellation, because there is none other, in the *social* fabric at least.

14 A long note takes up in detail this “other question,” that of the possible future of communism and humanity. It reveals to us an Althusser who defers his hope on the very crisis of international communism: (...) “They will discover in them varied examples of ‘decentralization’ at work, examples that are, to be honest, oddly heterogeneous and not always ‘reworked’ or ‘monitored’ by Marxist-Leninist science. Yet the day will come when the reunification of the international communist movement is ensured in forms ensuring as much ‘de-centring’ as possible. Paziienza.” (p. 199n. 33). In short, crisis will finally destroy the old Stalinism and open up a liberatory communism.

Since its historical beginnings, the modern metastructural voice, still mixed with a lot of others, is contradictorily ideology and utopia, illusion and critique. Amphibolous.¹⁵

What should be done with the trope proposed by Judith Butler?

If this is so, we shall observe that this ascent from Althusser to Marx has for its result to *exclude*, in all rigor, the feature proposed by Butler: subjection, attachment to subjection, the development from the depths of self-alienation of a capacity for resistance and creation. In the last instance, Butler appeals to “rage,” which alone can turn melancholy against the state by reappropriating “aggression in the service of the desire to live.”¹⁶ She turns the law, which expects submission, into the protagonist of the drama. Marx, by contrast, thinks about the state in its immanence to a definite class structure, which is only understood on the basis of its presuppositions – whose positive content we have seen. From this moment on, if it is true that the “interpellated turns back upon himself or herself,” it is a question of a “turning back” in an inverse sense. It is a question of this “reversal” from which emerges a particular subjectivity, namely, the subject of the subjected class. For what is found turned back in this way is a market relation that was declared to be free, equal, and rational. From this “popular prejudice” of equality, which Marx says is characteristic of modern times, we have seen that metastructural analysis provides an “enlargement” by showing the duality of “mediations” and their interference in an illocutionary discourse. Here is the *posed presupposition*. The law given as transcendent, by which the structural power of class is affirmed, therefore does not constitute its point of origin. It constitutes the reversal of a freedom posed *metastructurally*, in the *structural* relation that instrumentalizes it as “original” – or at least as an extraction prior to all servitude. Such is the work of the capitalist relation of class. It is to the one we declare explicitly “free” that we say: “Sell me your labor force, commit yourself to our ranks.” The law proposes a *voluntary* servi-

15 This is the way that we can, it seems to me, take up Althusser’s idea, as he formulated it already in Althusser 2005, p. 234, according to which “ideology” can also be “revolutionary.” If, however, we link this thematics to that of interpellation, it is necessary to have an adequate concept of the latter, opening onto “utopia” as much as onto “ideology.” In this sense, see the analysis proposed of *Liber Paradisum* in Bidet 2011, pp. 209-212.

16 Butler 1997, p. 187. See the commentary by Le Blanc 2004, pp. 45-65.

tude: here is the principle of “rage,” of “indignation,” of the experience of injustice that are characteristically modern. Such a “law,” which says not to be one of these, can only be uttered in terms of an *illocutionary* discourse addressed from each to each, as between those who are free and equal. That is to say, by reminding the will that one intends to submit, by reminding it that one can want something else. This interpellation contains, then, immanent to itself, its contradictory double: “Recognize yourself as being free, know that you are in advance freed from a law that is not yours.” This is why to this interpellation there is no univocal response in terms of submission.

It is true that the Marxian scheme is complicated in that it elaborates a *structural* figure endowed with a *tendencial* potential. The object of *Capital* is not only to figure out the conditions of a turning back T1, from which proceeds the subjected subject, but also the historical path that could lead to the turning back T2 of this turning back T1. As we know, Marx conceives of this “negation of the negation” as the final abolition of the free market for the benefit of a common plan, of organization freely defined by all. In this perspective of the historical passage from one mediation to another, he identifies the second with the very order of coordination, that is to say, the rule of speech equally shared by all. What metastructural analysis reveals is that one can only expect that a regime of speech would come in a “socialization” understood in these terms. *Organisational* mediation is in fact itself a class factor.¹⁷ We are thus led back to reconsider the structural order. If class structure is the combination of these two class factors that are the market and organization, according to the mode of *interindividual* relations that each of them features, *speech never happens* – in speech-acts inherent in practical interactions, especially economics – *except as charged with its own contradictory class content*. From this moment on, interpellation arises from a hermeneutics of class struggle.

The psychic apparatus implied in this social apparatus is therefore to be understood in terms other than those of the trope conceived by Butler. It is not “ambivalence,” in the sense in which she understands this term, but *amphiboly*: modern class power and one who claims to abolish it speak in the same language of freedom-equality-rationality. For the discourse of the moderns, this “concept” is the only one admissible. The

17 This factor reveals itself in two different contexts. On the one hand, in the societies that for a time abolish capitalism, competent leaders, masters of organization, henceforth themselves alone form the dominant class. On the other hand, in modern society in general, where they constitute, faced with capitalists, masters of the market, its other pole.

nation-state, which understands the subject as citizen, is its cradle. But it *exists* only as a class state. Metastructural interpellation is thus the imprint of an “original,” insurmountable impurity, posed only in the national class relation. Love of common earth, happiness of the language, purity of the race – outpouring of our identity in our little differences, which enables movies to have a “national” success – this is what competent rulers know how to put into words and spectacles, in performances in which we are invited to recognize ourselves. This happens all the time, one will say. But the point of modernity, however, is precisely that it is exposed to citizen symmetry. Rulers embody not only in the law, but also the fact that, supposedly at least, *we make the law*. Revolutionary instability, by which the trope, always renewed, is ceaselessly canceled. Before reappearing again. Not a sovereign Voice, of an *Other* to *resist*. But this common discourse we take together. The question it raises is not to know how the governed can resist the interpellation of those who govern, but how the speech shared by all could be sovereign.

Therefore, the philosophical novel imagined by Butler cannot be enlisted for a theory of the present time. At least not in a “general” way. It finds its truth only when we enlarge the framework of the analysis. In fact, the metastructural amphiboly dissolves from the moment that we go beyond relations among nations, the colonial relation, and more broadly the “systemic” order through which the “world-system” exceeds class structure as it is established in the nation-state. Here, the Butlerian trope demonstrates its immediate effectiveness. Subjection, without another word, is indeed what is demanded of the colonized as such. It is *the other* interpellation, just as constitutive of modernity. An entire anti- or post-colonial literature illustrates this fact that it is precisely through the assumption of this cultural subjection that a new subject, who is neither colonizer nor colonized, has found, by turning against it, the means of its uplift. The pride of being *black* or *indigenous*. By analogy (in the other social dimension, that of the social relations of sex): *gay pride*.

Everything would be simple if class “structure” and world “system,” in the sense that meta/structural theory gives to these terms, were not immanent to each another. In the world-system, the voice of structure cannot fail to be heard (it took little time for the soldiers of Toussaint Louverture to appropriate *La Marseillaise*). And in the structural context of the nation-state, the colonial interpellation of the world-system is imposed with violence. Sometimes it happens, in so-called “post-colonial” literature, that one attributes to the “republic” misdeeds that pertain to its relation to the *system*. This relation is immanent, it is true, and it is in-

deed a question of the republic. But it is provided that we not confuse the two *apparatuses* that we can understand the dialectical subtlety and the contradictions of their perverse interpenetration. It is necessary in every way both to criticize and to defend the “Republic.”

4. From the unhappy consciousness to a politics of power

Of what can modern human beings be guilty?

Here, with the figures of criticism and self-criticism, the question of the guilt of modern human beings inevitably reappears. *What* guilt, in fact? In order to answer this question, it has to be considered again on the specific terrain of *modern* historicity. Taking up the thread proposed by Butler, who invites us to reread the *Phenomenology of Spirit* according to the sequence that runs from the section “Master and Slave” to the following one, “Unhappy Consciousness,” it will then be asked of what the modern subject, interpellated as such, can be “guilty.” I would venture the following response, which could at first be judged trivial: *if modern interpellation is what it is said to be, modern guilt is not to break the law but to comply with it.*

The *presupposition* posed by modern social relations is that of freedom-equality-rationality, according to which we truly proclaim that there is no other law than the one we pose equally in every freedom as the law of freedom. Inter-interpellation constitutive of the modern institution. If there is guilt, it is because this presupposition is posed only in class relations that confer its amphibolous nature on it. The modern subject is guilty because it is originally, in its very constitution, caught up in the amphiboly inherent in class structuration. In the beginning, always recommenced, is the *logos*, the voice that interpellates. But its message of freedom is the presupposition of domination. The voice of the dominant has certainly ceased, in modern times, to be understood as a *transcendent* Speech, and as such capable of instituting in this capacity subjects who would only be beings of response. For in modernity we precisely do not pose as subjects except by posing that there is no rule to follow other than the ones we utter together. There is no other subject recognized than the citizen, inasmuch at least, as we have seen, that one abstracts from the “world-system” (this is the *other* “systematic” aspect of modernity, which goes beyond the present, strictly “structural” - more precisely, “meta/structural” - analysis.

Transcendence has not disappeared, however: from this moment

on, it resides in amphiboly. The voice is amphibolous because it is the voice of a “we” cleaved into a class relation, which is found *denied* in the complicit identity of enunciation. Emancipation and domination in the same utterance. “*We are* free and equal”: draped in equal and symmetrical rights that distribute privileges, in identities that forge exclusions, lulled, drugged by the music of freedoms that generate predations. Power equally constituting, always already unequally constituted. How could we not be always already, originally guilty?

Here the religious paradigm appears to be highly problematic. Thus Butler emphasizes, far from being a simple example, it conveys a definite content, in reference to Christianity, which makes it inappropriate to configure ideology in general. We cannot, however, remain here. The drama of the Althusserian fable of interpellation applies to the theological performance: see the powerful catharsis that brought happiness to so many unhappy readers of this now-classic passage – an appeal to “conversion.” But what sets the scene is not Christian guilt, it is *modern* guilt, which is to submit to a law established from above. “The subjects ‘go’: they recognize that ‘it’s really true’, that ‘this is the way it is’ and not some other way, that they have to obey God, the priest, De Gaulle, the boss, the engineer, and love their neighbour, and so on. The subjects go, since they have recognized that ‘all is well’ (the way it is), and they say, for good measure: *So be it!*” (pp. 197). The reader of Althusser is invited to *recognize himself or herself* in those who kneel in this way before the capitalist order (or before “the personality cult,” pp. 198-99n. 33). Metastructural analysis, however, leads one to think that it does not proceed so simply: the modern discourse of interpellation calls one to confess a *modern* guilt, which is not that of disobeying the law but, on the contrary, of submitting to it. We have the original sin we deserve. And the original sin of moderns is not that of the ancients (Christians).

The Althusserian formulation conceals what it should reveal. For the guilt that arises does not, in the last instance, refer to a Great Subject, the declared “instituter” of a good order, to the Unconscious whose voice would govern my consciousness: it is not in this respect that it is a failure. It refers – and this is what escapes Althusser – to the very presupposition of metastructural inter-institution, which, in fact, is indissociable from an *essential doubt*, constitutive of its unhappy consciousness. For what about my pretense to be free, to serve, that is to say, to help produce, a law of freedom? This guilt is not reserved only for “intellectuals of emancipation.” It lives in all “citizens,” from the moment they engage in a cause, if only for a moment, advancing as spokespersons in charge of

enunciation. It haunts “conscientious” citizens, all those who have lifted, however little, the veil of ideology. And it doubles as a secret fear that we finally discovers that we too are in some way, prey to corruption.

A weak reading of Althusserian interpellation would be to rely on the finding of its immediately theological generic content. And to please them: “Yes, that’s right, I must recognize that I am a subject only when kneeling.” In reality, the fable, in all its force, refers, on the contrary, *to the modern claim to have broken the paradoxical spell of the subjected subject. And to the doubt that nonetheless haunts* the statement that “we are free and equal,” from the moment that it is caught in the amphiboly of class discourse. It refers to the confession of a modern Jansenist guilt, predestined for freedom, subjected to the vocation of being free, and in fact in chains, always guilty and unhappy, to live outside of the freedom that it announces, – and it is in this sense that the “unhappy consciousness” is a “bad conscience” (Sartre). Guilty of *obeying* and submitting. Of having always already betrayed the cause it proclaims, that of the truth announced in modern times, that of equality-justice among equally reasonable persons, that of the permanent revolution that modernity declares. And it is indeed the only thing of which Althusser could be recognized as historically guilty. In the name of which he once, as we know, denounced himself as a vulgar “impostor.” He could do no less.

Interpellation from Althusser to Spinoza

It is by taking up the Althusserian legacy of “interpellation” in this metastructural sense that we can envision the program that Butler outlines *in fine*, turning, under the invocation of Agamben, toward a Spinozist problematic of “power (*puissance*).” The metastructural presupposition of an inter-interpellation among those who are free-equal-and-rational in fact has for a counterpart a position of common power. This “original position” is not to be conceived as a simple *thought experiment*, à la Rawls. It imposes itself on us, as a position of a metastructural illocutionary that we cannot escape, because it is historically our own, the presupposition posed by all our public actions, in that they are also speech acts in the modern structure of society. Not a thought experiment of everyone as a philosopher. But the experience of everyone as a citizen in modern society. Elsewhere I have tried to formulate, in the encounter between Rawls and Habermas, this anarcho-spinozist principle U, of “equality-power,” immanent to modern inter-interpellation. In its pure generality,

in its abstraction of thought, it is stated as a *principle of power*: “To the greatest glory and power of the least among us!”¹⁸ *Ad majorem pauperum gloriam!*, if I am permitted this imitation. To which should still be added: *et potestatem*.¹⁹ “Abolish all forms of inequality, except those which would raise the power and the glory of the least among us!” Let us wager that this account prevails to a maximum of equality. Only such an injunction can be common to us, can be stated in terms of “us,” being only as such irrefutable. Only such an inter-interpellation can from this moment on be understood as a legitimate injunction to a common emancipation.

It remains to give it the positive content that it requires. Of course, this is what modern forms of thought that turn toward the future have worked on. Those, for example, that fall within the registers of “radical democracy,” “socialism,” “communism” or the “common,” depending on the meaning given to these terms, or even of a political ecology. They seek to define the positive conditions of the emergence of the new “subject” thus interpellated, who would escape alienations and dispossessions, pathologies and forms of suffering inherent in the destructive nature of capitalist modernity. Thus is deployed a social critique in multiple registers, which is only as valuable, however, as the theory of society on the basis of which it defines itself.

This is what the metastructural hypothesis tries to do.²⁰

Translated by Ted Stolze

18 This point is argued in Bidet 1999, p. 442 et passim.

19 The imitation pertains to both the famous motto of the Jesuits, *Ad majorem Dei gloriam*, “to the greater glory of God”, and to the fragment of the Book of Revelation [17:13] that Marx cites in the Latin of Jerome, in chapter 2 of Volume I, as a form of remaking the Hobbesian pact: “illi unum consilium habent et virtutem et potestaten suam bestiae tradunt...” [“These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast.” – Trans.]

20 I can only refer to the writings through which this research has developed: Bidet 1999; Bidet 2004; Bidet 2011; Bidet 2016.

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