

"Conscience Doth Make Subjects of Us All"

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“Conscience Doth Make Subjects
of Us All”¹

Althusser’s doctrine of interpellation continues to structure contemporary debate on subject formation, offering a way to account for how a subject comes into being after language, but always within its terms. The theory of interpellation appears to stage a social scene in which a subject is hailed, the subject turns around, and then accepts the terms by which he or she is hailed. This is, no doubt, a scene both punitive and reduced, for the call is made by an officer of “the Law” and this officer is cast as singular and speaking. Clearly we might object that the “call” arrives severally and in implicit and unspoken ways, that the scene is never quite as dyadic as Althusser claims, but these objections have been rehearsed, and “interpellation” as a doctrine continues to survive its critique. If we accept that the scene is exemplary and allegorical, then it never needs to happen for its effectivity to be presumed. Indeed, if it is allegorical in Benjamin’s sense, then the process literalized by the allegory is precisely that which resists narration, that is, that exceeds the narrativizability of events.² Interpellation, in this account, is not an event, but a certain way of *staging the call*, where the call, as staged, becomes deliteralized in the course of its exposition or *Darstellung*. The call itself is also figured as a demand to align oneself with the law, a turning around (to face the law, to find a face for the law?), and an entrance into the language of self-ascription—“Here I am”—through the appropriation of guilt.

Why is it that subject formation appears to take place only upon the

1. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, act 3, scene 1.

2. See Walter Benjamin, *On the Origins of German Tragic Drama*, trans. Peter Osborne (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987).

acceptance of guilt, that there is no "I" who might ascribe a place to itself, who might be announced in speech, without first a self-attribution of guilt, a submission to the law through an acceptance of its demand for conformity? The one who turns around in response to the call does not respond to a demand to turn around. The turning around is an act that is, as it were, conditioned both by the "voice" of the law and by the responsiveness of the one hailed by the law. The "turning around" is a strange sort of middle-ground (taking place, perhaps, in a strange sort of "middle-voice"³) that is determined both by the law and the addressee, but by neither unilaterally or exhaustively. Although there would be no turning around without first having been hailed, neither would there be a turning around without some readiness to turn. But where and when does the calling of the name solicit the turning around, the anticipatory move toward identity? How and why does the subject turn, anticipating the conferral of identity through the self-ascription of guilt? What kind of relation already binds these two such that the subject knows to turn, knows that something is to be gained from such a turn? How might we think of this "turn" as prior to subject formation, a prior complicity with the law without which no subject emerges? The turn toward the law is thus at once a turn against oneself, the turning back on oneself that constitutes the movement of conscience. But how is it that the reflex of conscience is precisely what paralyzes the critical interrogation of the law at the same time that it figures the subject's uncritical relation to the law as a condition of subjectivation? The one addressed is compelled to turn toward the law prior to any possibility of asking a set of critical questions: Who is speaking? Why should I turn around? Why should I accept the terms by which I am hailed? This means that, prior to any possibility of a critical understanding of the law, there is an openness or vulnerability to the law, exemplified in the turn toward the law, in the anticipation of culling an identity through identifying with the one who has broken the law. Indeed, the law is broken prior to any possibility of having access to it, and so, "guilt" is prior to knowledge of the law and is, in this sense, always strangely innocent. The possibility of a critical view of the law is thus limited by what might be understood as a prior desire for the law, a passionate complicity with law, without which no subject can exist. For the "I" to launch its critique, it must first understand that the "I" itself is dependent upon

3. I thank Hayden White for this suggestion.

its complicitous desire for the law for the possibility of its own existence. A critical review of the law will not, therefore, undo the force of conscience unless the one who offers that critique is willing, as it were, to be undone by the critique that he or she performs.

It is important to remember that the turn toward the law is not necessitated by the hailing; it is compelling, in a less than logical sense, because it promises identity. If the law speaks in the name of a self-identical subject (Althusser cites the utterance of the Hebrew God: "I am that I am"), how is it that conscience might deliver or restore a self to oneness with itself, to the postulation of self-identity that becomes the precondition of that linguistic consolidation: "Here I am"?

On the other hand, how might we site the vulnerability of subjectivation precisely in that turn (toward the law, against the self) which precedes and anticipates the acceptance of guilt, a turn that eludes subjectivation even as it conditions it? How is it that this "turn" figures a conscience that might be rendered less conscientious than Althusser would render it? And how is it that Althusser's sanctification of the scene of interpellation makes the possibility of becoming a "bad" subject more remote and less incendiary than it might very well be?

The doctrine of interpellation appears to presuppose a prior and unelaborated doctrine of conscience, a turning back upon oneself in the sense that Nietzsche described in *On the Genealogy of Morals*.⁴ And this readiness to accept guilt to gain a purchase on identity is linked to a highly religious scenario of a nominating call that comes from God and that constitutes the subject through appealing to a need for the law, an original guilt that the law promises to assuage through the conferral of identity. How is it that this religious figuration of interpellation restrains in advance any possibility of a critical inter-

4. Nietzsche distinguished between conscience and bad conscience in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, linking the first with the capacity to promise and the second to the problem of internalization and of debt. The distinction appears not to be sustained as it becomes apparent that the promising being can only stand for his/her future through first becoming regular, that is, through the process of internalizing the law or, to be precise, "burning it into the will." Internalization, introduced in the second essay, section 16, involves the turning of the will (or instincts) against itself. In section 15, he introduces freedom as that which turns against itself in the making of bad conscience: "This instinct for freedom forcibly made latent. . . this instinct for freedom pushed back and repressed, incarcerated within and finally able to discharge and vent itself only on itself: that, and that alone, is what the *bad conscience* is in its beginnings" (Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann [New York: Vintage, 1969], 87).

vention in the workings of the law, the undoing of the subject without which the law cannot proceed?

The mention of conscience in Althusser's "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses"⁵ has received little critical attention, even though the term, taken together with the example of religious authority to illustrate the force of ideology, suggests that the theory of ideology is supported by a complicated set of theological metaphors. Although Althusser explicitly introduces "the Church" merely as an *example* of ideological interpellation, it appears that ideology in his terms cannot be thought except through the metaphors of religious authority. The final section of "Ideology. . ." is entitled "An Example: The Christian Religious Ideology" and makes explicit the exemplary status that religious institutions have occupied in the preceding section of the essay. Those examples include: the putative "eternity" of ideology; the explicit analogy between the "obviousness of ideology" and St Paul's notion of the "Logos" in which we are said to "live, move and have our being"; Pascal's prayer as an instance of ritual in which assuming the posture of kneeling gives rise over time to belief; belief itself as the institutionally reproduced condition of ideology; and the deifying capitalization of "Family," "Church," "School," and "State."

Although the last section of the essay seeks to explicate and expose the example of religious authority, this is not an exposure with the power to defuse the force of ideology. Althusser's own writing, he concedes, invariably enacts what it thematizes,⁶ and thus promises no enlightened escape from ideology through this articulation. To illustrate the power of ideology to constitute subjects, Althusser seeks recourse to the example of the divine voice that names, and in naming, brings its subjects into being. In claiming that social ideology operates in an analogous way, Althusser inadvertently assimilates social interpellation to the divine performative. The example of ideology thus

5. Louis Althusser, "Idéologie et appareils idéologiques d'état," in *Positions* (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1976), 67–126; or in English, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Toward an Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 127–88.

6. Althusser implicates his own writing in the version of ideological interpellation that he explains: "It is essential to realize that both he who is writing these lines and the reader who reads them are themselves subjects, and therefore ideological subjects (a tautological proposition), i.e. that the author and the reader of these lines both live 'spontaneously' or 'naturally' in ideology" ("Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," 171). This remark is especially noteworthy insofar as Althusser presumes the authoritative capacities of the voice, and insists that his writing, to the extent that it is ideological, addresses its reader as would a voice.

assumes the status of a paradigm for thinking ideology as such, whereby the inevitable structures of ideology are established textually through religious metaphor: the authority of the "voice" of ideology, the "voice" of interpellation, is figured as a voice almost impossible to refuse. The force of interpellation in Althusser is derived from the examples by which it is ostensibly illustrated, most notably, God's voice in the naming of Peter (and Moses) and its secularization in the postulated voice of the representative of state authority: the policeman's voice in the hailing of the wayward pedestrian with "Hey you there!"

In other words, the divine power of naming structures the theory of interpellation that accounts for the ideological constitution of the subject. Baptism exemplifies the linguistic means by which the subject is compelled into social being. God names "Peter," and this address establishes God as the origin of Peter ("Ideology," 177); the name remains attached to Peter permanently by virtue of the implied and continuous presence in the name of the one who names him. Within the terms of Althusser's examples, however, this naming cannot be accomplished without a certain readiness or anticipatory desire on the part of the one addressed. To the extent that the naming is an address, there is already an addressee, prior to the address; but given that the address is a name that creates what it names, there appears to be no "Peter" without the name, "Peter." Indeed, "Peter" does not exist without the name that supplies that linguistic guarantee of existence. In this sense, as a prior and essential condition of the formation of the subject, there is a certain readiness to be compelled by the authoritative interpellation, a readiness that suggests that one is, as it were, already in relation to the voice before the response, already implicated in the terms of the animating misrecognition by an authority to which one subsequently yields. Or perhaps one has already yielded before one turns around, and that turning is nothing other than a sign of an inevitable submission by which one is established as a subject positioned in language as a possible addressee. In this sense, the scene with the police is a belated and redoubled scene, one that renders explicit a founding submission for which no such scene would prove adequate. For if that submission is what brings the subject into being, then the narrative that seeks to tell the story of that submission can proceed only through exploiting grammar for its fictional effects. The narrative that seeks to account for how the subject comes into being presumes the grammatical "subject" prior to the account of its genesis. And yet,

the founding submission that has not yet resolved into the subject would be precisely that nonnarrativizable prehistory of the subject, a paradox that calls the very narrative of subject formation into question. If there is no subject except as a consequence of this subjection, the narrative that would explain this requires that the temporality not be true, for the grammar of that narrative presupposes that there is no subjection without a subject who undergoes it.

Is this founding submission a kind of yielding prior to any question of psychological motivation? How are we to understand the psychic disposition at work at the moment in which the pedestrian responds to the law—what conditions and informs that response? Why would it be that the person on the street responds to the “Hey you there!” by turning around? What is the significance in turning to face the voice that calls from behind? This turning toward the voice of the law is a sign of a certain desire to be beheld by and perhaps also to behold the face of authority, a visual rendering of an auditory scene—a mirror stage or, perhaps more appropriately, an “acoustic mirror”⁷—that allows that misrecognition without which the sociality of the subject cannot be achieved. This subjectivation is, according to Althusser, a *misrecognition*, a false and provisional totalization. What precipitates this desire for the law, this lure of misrecognition offered in the reprimand that establishes subordination as the price of subjectivation? This account appears to imply that social existence, existence as a subject, can be purchased only through a guilty embrace of the law, where guilt guarantees the intervention of the law and, hence, the continuation of the subject’s existence. If the subject can only assure his/her existence in terms of the law, and the law requires subjection for subjectivation, then it may be, perversely, that one (always already) yields to the law in order to continue to assure one’s own existence. The yielding to the law might then be read as the compelled consequence of a narcissistic attachment to one’s continuing existence.

Althusser takes up guilt explicitly in the narrative, however reli-

7. See Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988). Silverman notes the “theological” dimension of the “voice-over” in film that always escapes the viewer’s gaze (49). Silverman also makes clear that the voice recognized in the cinematic presentation of voice is not only the maternal voice, but a repudiated dimension of the masculine subject’s own voice (80–81). Silverman’s analysis sheds light on the “voice” of ideology insofar as the subject who turns around already knows the voice to which he responds, suggesting an irreducible ambiguity between the “voice” of conscience and the “voice” of the law.

able, of his murder of his wife H el ene, in which he recounts, in a telling reversal of the police scene in "Ideology," how he rushed into the street calling for the police in order to deliver himself up to the law.⁸ This calling for the police is a peculiar inversion of hailing, which "Ideology" presupposes without explicitly thematizing. Without exploiting the biographical, I want to pursue the theoretical importance of this reversal of the scene with the police in which the man on the street calls for the police rather than responding to the police's call. In "Ideology," guilt and conscience operate implicitly in relation to an ideological demand, an animating reprimand, in the account of subject formation. What follows here is an attempt to reread that essay in order to understand how interpellation is essentially figured through the religious example. The exemplary status of religious authority underscores the paradox of how the very possibility of subject formation depends upon a passionate pursuit of a recognition which, within the terms of the religious example, is inseparable from a condemnation.

Another way of posing this question is as follows: How is Althusser's text implicated in the "conscience" that it seeks to explain? And to what extent is the persistence of the theological model a symptom, one that compels a symptomatic reading? In his introductory essay to *Lire le Capital*, Althusser suggests that every text must be read for the "invisible" that appears within the world that theory renders visible.⁹ In a recent consideration of Althusser's notion of "symptomatic reading," Jean-Marie Vincent remarks that "a text is not only interesting because it organizes logically, by the arguments it develops in an apparently rigorous fashion, but also because of everything that disorganizes its order, because of everything that weakens it."¹⁰ Neither Althusser nor Vincent considers the possibility that the exemplary status of certain metaphors may become occasions for a symptomatic reading that "weakens" rigorous argument. But it seems that in relation to Althusser's own text, a reconsideration of the central religious tropes of the voice of the law and conscience provides a way to question what has become, within recent literary studies, an unnecessary tension between the reading of metaphor and the reading of ideology. To the

8. See section one in Althusser, *L'avenir dure longtemps, suivi de les faits* (Paris: Editions STOCK/IMEC, 1992).

9. Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Lire le Capital* (Paris: Fran ois Maspero, 1968), vol. 1, 26; or in English, *Reading "Capital,"* trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 1970), 26.

10. Jean-Marie Vincent, "La lecture symptomale chez Althusser," in *Sur Althusser: Passages* (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, collection Futur Ant rieur, 1993), 97.

extent that Althusser's religious analogies are understood as merely illustrative, they are set apart from the rigorous argumentation of the text itself, offered in pedagogical paraphrase. And yet, the performative force of the voice of religious authority becomes exemplary for the theory of interpellation, thus extending through example the putative force of divine naming to those social authorities by which the subject is hailed into social being. This argument does not mean to suggest that the "truth" of Althusser's text can be discovered in the disruptive effects of the figural on its "rigorous" conceptualization. Such an approach romanticizes the figural as essentially disruptive, where it may well be the case that figures compound and intensify conceptual claims. The concern here has a more specific textual aim, namely, to show how the figures—the examples and the analogies—inform and extend the conceptualizations, implicating the text in an ideological sanctification of religious authority which it can expose only through its reenactment.

For Althusser, the efficacy of ideology consists in part in the formation of *conscience*, where the notion of conscience is understood to place restrictions on what is speakable or, more generally, representable. Conscience cannot be conceptualized as a self-restriction, if that relation is construed as a pre-given reflexivity, a turning back upon itself performed by a ready-made subject, but designates a kind of turning back—a reflexivity—which constitutes the conditions for the possibility of the subject's formation. In this sense, reflexivity is constituted through this moment of conscience, this turning back upon oneself, one which is simultaneous with a turning toward the law. This self-restriction is something other than the internalization of an external law: the model of internalization takes for granted the "internal" and the "external" as already formed. This self-restriction is prior to the subject, constituting the inaugurating reflexive turn of the subject, enacted in anticipation of the law and, hence, determined in relation to that law, with a prejudicative foreknowledge of the law. Conscience is fundamental to the production and regulation of the citizen-subject, for it is conscience that turns the individual around to make itself available to that subjectivating reprimand, but the law will represent the redoubling of the reprimand: a turning back and a turning toward. How are these turns to be thought together, without reducing the one to the other?

Before the police or the church authorities arrive on the Althusserian scene, there is a reference to prohibition which, in a Lacan-

ian vein, is linked with the very possibility of speech. Althusser links the emergence of a consciousness—and a conscience—[*la conscience civique et professionnelle*]—with the problem of speaking properly [*bien parler*] (“Ideology,” 132). “Speaking properly” appears to be an instance of the ideological work of skill acquisition, a process central to the formation of the subject. The “diverse skills” of labor power have to be reproduced. This reproduction of the skills of labor power happens more and more often “outside the firm” and *in school*, that is, outside production and in educational institutions. The skills to be learned are, in the first instance, *the skills of speech*. The first mention of “conscience,” which will turn out to be quite central to the success or efficacy of interpellation, is linked to the acquisition of mastery, learning how to “speak properly.” The reproduction of the subject takes place through the reproduction of linguistic skills, constituting, as it were, the rules and attitudes observed “by every agent in the division of labour.” In this sense the rules of proper speech are also the rules by which *respect* is proffered or withheld. Workers are taught to *speak* properly and managers learn to speak to workers “in the right way” [*bien commander*] (131–32).

Language skills are said to be mastered and masterable, and yet, this mastery is figured by Althusser quite clearly as a kind of submission: “. . . the reproduction of labour power requires not only a reproduction of (the labourer’s) skills, but also, at the same time, a reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established order [*soumission à l’idéologie dominante*]” (132). This submission to the rules of dominant ideology leads in the next paragraph to the problematic of *subjection*, which carries the double meaning of having submitted to these rules, and becoming constituted within sociality by virtue of this submission.

He writes that “the school teaches ‘know-how’ (skills) [*des ‘savoir-faire’*]. . . in forms which ensure *subjection* to the ruling ideology [*l’assujettissement à l’idéologie dominante*] or the mastery of its ‘practice.’”¹¹ Consider the logical effect of this disjunctive “or” [*ou*] in the middle of this formulation: “subjection *to* the ruling ideology or—put in different, yet equivalent terms—the mastery *of its* ‘practice’” (my emphases). The more a practice is mastered, the more fully subjection is achieved. Submission and mastery take place simultaneously, and it is this paradoxical simultaneity that constitutes the ambivalence of

11. Althusser, *Positions*, 73; *Lenin and Philosophy*, 133.

subjection. Where one might expect submission to consist in a yielding to an externally imposed dominant order, and to be marked by a loss of control and mastery, it is paradoxically marked by mastery itself. The binary frame of mastery/submission is forfeited by Althusser as he recasts submission precisely and paradoxically as a kind of mastery. In this view, neither submission nor mastery is *performed by a subject*; the lived simultaneity of submission as mastery, and mastery as submission, is the condition of possibility for the emergence of the subject itself.

The conceptual problem here is underscored by a grammatical one in which there can be no subject prior to a submission, and yet there is a grammatically induced "need to know" *who* undergoes this submission in order to become a subject. Althusser introduces the term "individual" as a place-holder to satisfy provisionally this grammatical need, but what might ultimately fit the grammatical requirement will not be a static grammatical subject. The grammar of the subject emerges only as a consequence of the very process we are trying to describe. Because we are, as it were, trapped within the grammatical time of the subject [e.g., "we are trying to describe," "we are trapped"], it is almost impossible to ask about the genealogy of its construction without presupposing that construction for the asking of the question itself.

What is there, then, prior to the subject that accounts for its formation? Althusser begins the "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" essay by referring to the reproduction of social relations; he then specifies this reproduction of social relations as the reproduction of social skills and distinguishes between those skills reproduced in the firm, and those reproduced in education. With respect to these latter, the subject is formed. In a sense, this reproduction of relations is prior to the subject who is formed in the course of this reproduction. And yet, the two cannot, strictly speaking, be thought without each other.

The reproduction of social relations, the reproduction of skills, is the reproduction of subjection, but here it is not the reproduction of labor that is central, but a reproduction proper to the subject, one that takes place in relation to *language* and to the formation of *conscience*. For Althusser, to perform tasks "conscientiously" is to perform them, as it were, again and again, to reproduce those skills and, in reproducing them, acquire mastery. "Conscientiously" is placed in quotation marks by Althusser ("pour s'acquitter 'consciencieusement'

de leur tâche"), thus bringing into relief the way in which labor is moralized. Significant here, however, is the moral sense of "s'acquitter" lost in its translation as "to perform": if the mastery of a set of skills is to be construed as *an acquitting of oneself*, then this mastery of "savoir-faire" will constitute a defense of oneself against an accusation or, quite literally, a declaring of innocence on the part of the accused. To acquit oneself "conscientiously" of one's task is, then, to construe labor as a confession of innocence, a display or proof of guiltlessness in the face of the demand for confession implied by an insistent accusation.

The "submission" to the rules of dominant ideology might then be understood as a submission to the necessity to prove innocence in the face of accusation, a submission to the demand for proof, an execution of that proof, and the acquisition of the status of the subject in and through a compliance with the terms of the interrogative law. To become a "subject" is, thus, to have been presumed guilty, then tried and declared innocent. And because this declaration is not a single act, but a status incessantly *reproduced*, to become a "subject" is to be continuously in the process of acquitting oneself of the accusation of guilt. It is to have become an emblem of lawfulness, a citizen in good standing, but one for whom that status is tenuous, indeed, one who has known—somehow, somewhere—what it is *not* to have that standing and, hence, to have been cast out as guilty. And yet, because this guilt conditions the subject, it constitutes the prehistory of that subjection to the law by which the subject is produced. Here one might usefully conjecture that the reason there are so few references to "bad subjects" in Althusser is that the term tends toward the oxymoronic within the terms of his text. To be "bad" is not yet to be a subject, not yet to have acquitted oneself of the allegation of guilt.¹²

And yet this performance is not simply *in accord* with these skills, for there is no subject prior to the performing of those skills; it is the performing of the skills that laboriously works the subject into its status as a social being, a guilt, and then a repetitive practice by which skills are acquired, and then and only then the assumption of the grammatical place within the social as a subject.

Yet the subject may be said to perform according to a set of skills, that is, as it were, to take grammar at its word: first there is a subject

12. One might usefully compare Weber's *The Protestant Ethic* with Althusser on this point in which labor is effectively guaranteed through a Protestant ethic, although in Althusser the religious inflection appears to be more Catholic.

who encounters a set of skills to be learned, learns them or fails to learn them, and then and only then can be said either to have mastered those skills or not. To master a set of skills is not simply to accept a set of skills, but to reproduce them in and as one's own activity; this is not simply an acting according to a set of rules, but the embodying of rules in the course of action, and the reproduction of those rules in embodied rituals of action.¹³

What leads to this reproduction? Clearly, it is not merely a mechanistic appropriation of norms, and neither is it a voluntaristic appropriation. It would be as wrong to account for this reproduction in terms of a simple behaviorism as it would to account for it in terms of a deliberate project. To the extent that it precedes the formation of the subject, it is not yet of the order of consciousness, and yet this involuntary compulsion is not the same as a mechanistically induced effect. The notion of ritual suggests that it is performed, and that in the repetition of performance a belief is spawned, which is then incorporated into the performance in its subsequent operations. But inherent to any performance is a compulsion to "acquit oneself," and so prior to any performance is an anxiety and a knowingness that becomes articulate and animating only on the occasion of the reprimand.

Is it possible here to separate the psychic dimension of this ritualistic repetition from the "acts" by which it is animated and reanimated? The very notion of ritual is meant to render belief and practice insepar-

13. Pierre Bourdieu elaborates the conception of the *habitus* in *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 66–79. He analyzes the embodied rituals of everydayness by which a given culture produces and sustains belief in its own "obviousness." In this way, Bourdieu underscores the place of the body, its gestures, its stylistics, its unconscious "knowingness" as the site for the reconstitution of a practical sense without which social reality would not be constituted as such.

Bourdieu's notion of the *habitus* might well be read as a reformulation of Althusser's notion of ideology. Whereas Althusser will write that ideology constitutes the "obviousness" of the subject, but that this obviousness is the effect of a *dispositif*, that same term, reemerges in Bourdieu to describe the way in which a *habitus* generates certain beliefs. For Bourdieu, dispositions are generative and transposable. Note in Althusser's "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" the inception of this latter reappropriation: "An individual believes in God, or Duty, or Justice, etc. This belief derives (for everyone, i.e. for all those who live in an ideological representation of ideology, which reduces ideology to ideas endowed by definition with a spiritual existence) from the ideas of the individual concerned, i.e. from him as a subject with a consciousness which contains the ideas of his belief. In this way, i.e. by means of the absolutely ideological 'conceptual' device (*dispositif*) thus set up (a subject endowed with a consciousness in which he freely forms or freely recognizes ideas in which he believes), the (material) attitude of the subject concerned naturally follows" ("Ideology," 167).

able. And yet, here is where the Slovenian critic Mladen Dolar will argue that Althusser fails to account for the psyche as a separate dimension. Dolar counsels a return to Lacan, much in the same way that Slavoj Žižek suggests a necessary complementarity between Althusser and Lacan.¹⁴ To insist on the separability of the psyche from social practice is to intensify the religious metaphors in Althusser, that is, to figure the psyche as a pure ideality, not unlike the ideality of the soul. I turn, then, to Dolar's reading of Althusser in order to consider the tension between the putative ideality of subjectivity and the claim that ideology, including psychic reality, is part of the expanded domain of materiality in the Althusserian sense.

Mladen Dolar's essay, "Beyond Interpellation,"¹⁵ suggests that Althusser, despite his occasional use of Lacan's theory of the imaginary, failed to appreciate the disruptive potential of psychoanalysis, in particular, the notion of the Real as designating that which never becomes available to subjectivation. Dolar writes, "To put it 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" (75). The use of "*materia prima*" here is significant, for with this phrase Dolar explicitly contests the social account of materiality that Althusser provides. In fact, this "*materia prima*" never *materializes* in the Althusserian sense, never emerges as a practice, a ritual, or a social relation; from the point of view of the social, the "*materia prima*" is radically *immaterial*. Dolar thus criticizes Althusser for eliding that dimension of subjectivity that remains radically immaterial, barred from an appearance within materiality. According to Dolar, interpellation can only explain the formation of the subject in a partial way: "For Althusser, the subject is what makes ideology work; for psychoanalysis, the subject emerges where ideology fails. . . . The remainder produced by subjectivation is also invisible from the point of view of interpellation." "Interpellation," he writes, "is a way of avoiding [that remainder]" (76). At stake for Dolar is the need to strengthen the distinction between the domain of the symbolic, understood as communicable speech and social bonds, and that of the psychic, which is

14. See Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 1–2.

15. Published in English in *Qui Parle* 6/2 (Spring/Summer, 1993): 73–96. The English version is a revision of the original, published in German as "Jenseits der Anrufung," in *Gestalten der Autorität*, ed. Slavoj Žižek (Vienna: Hora Verlag, 1991).

ontologically distinct from the social, defined as that remainder of which the notion of the social cannot take account.

Dolar offers a distinction between materiality and interiority which he loosely aligns with the Althusserian division between the materiality of the state apparatus and the putative ideality of subjectivity. In a formulation with strong Cartesian resonance, Dolar defines subjectivity through the notion of interiority, and identifies as material the domain of exteriority (exterior to the subject). Presupposed here is the notion that subjectivity consists in both interiority and ideality, whereas materiality belongs to its opposite, the countervailing exterior world.

This manner of distinguishing interior from exterior may well seem strange as a characterization or extrapolation of Althusser's position. It was, after all, Althusser's distinctive contribution to undermine the ontological dualism presupposed by the conventional Marxist distinction between a material base and an ideal or ideological superstructure. This undermining took place by asserting the materiality of the ideological: "An ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices. This existence is material" ("Ideology," 166).

The constitution of the subject is *material* to the extent that this constitution takes place through *rituals*, and these rituals materialize "the ideas of the subject" (169). What is called "subjectivity," understood as the lived and imaginary experience of the subject, is itself derived from the material rituals by which subjects are constituted. Pascal's believer kneels more than once, necessarily repeating the gesture by which belief is conjured. To understand, more broadly, "the rituals of ideological recognition" (173) by which the subject is constituted is central to the very notion of ideology. But if belief follows from the posture of prayer, if that posture conditions and reiterates belief, then how are we to separate the ideational sphere from those ritual practices by which it is incessantly reinstated?

Although the question of the subject is not the same as the question of subjectivity, in Dolar's essay it nevertheless remains unclear how precisely those two notions are to be thought together. The notion of "subjectivity" does not have much play in Althusser, except perhaps in the critique of subjectivism, and it is unclear how that term might be transposed onto the terms he does use. This may well be precisely Dolar's critical point, namely, that there is not enough of a place for subjectivity in Althusser's text. Dolar's primary critical concern is

that Althusser cannot fully take into account the “remainder” produced by subjectivation (76), the nonphenomenal “kernel of interiority.” In fact, Dolar will argue that the distinction between the interior and the exterior is produced through “the introjection of the object” (79). Hence, a primary object is introjected, and that introjection becomes the condition of possibility for the subject. The irrecoverability of that object is, thus, not only the supporting condition of the subject but the persistent threat to its coherence. The Lacanian notion of the Real is cast as the first act of introjection as well as the subject’s radical limit.

In Dolar, the ideality of this kernel of interiority sets the limit to both materialization and subjectivation; it constitutes the constitutive lack or the nonsymbolizable Real. As foreclosed or introjected, the primary object is lost and idealized at once; the ideality acquired by this object through introjection constitutes the founding ideality of subjectivity. This insight is the one that Althusser appears to miss, and yet Dolar seems to attribute to him the very distinction between materiality and ideality that is insufficiently realized in Althusser’s theory:

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 subjectivity, 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. [88]

Dolar refers to this as a “senseless ritual,” and then reverses the Althusserian account in order to establish that the creed and the ritual are *the effects* of “a supposition,” that ritual *follows* belief, but is not—in the first instance—its condition of production. Dolar underscores the inability of Althusser’s theory of ritual practice to account for the motivation to pray: “What made him follow the ritual? Why did he/she consent to repeat a series of senseless gestures?” (89).

Dolar’s questions are impossible to satisfy in Althusser’s terms, but the very presuppositions of Dolar’s questions are countered through an Althusserian explanation. That Dolar presumes a consenting subject prior to the performance of a ritual suggests that he already presumes that a volitional subject must first be in place to give an

account of motivation. But how does this consenting subject come to be? This subject appears to be a supposing and consenting one who precedes and conditions the "entrance" into the symbolic and, hence, the becoming of a subject. The circularity is clear, but how is it to be understood? Is it a failing of Althusser's that he did not provide the subject prior to the formation of the subject, or does his "failure" indicate only that the grammatical requirements of the narrative work against the account of subject formation that the narrative attempts to provide? To literalize or to ascribe an ontological status to the grammatical requirement of "the subject" is to presume a mimetic relation between grammar and ontology that misses the point, both Althusserian and Lacanian, that the anticipations of grammar are always and only retroactively installed. The grammar that governs the narration of subject formation is one that presumes that the grammatical place for the subject has already been established. In an important sense, then, the grammar that the narrative requires is a result of the narrative itself. The account of subject formation is thus a double fiction at cross-purposes with itself, symptomatizing repeatedly what resists narration.

If, as Wittgenstein has remarked, "we speak, we utter words, and only later get a sense of their life," then the sense of that "empty" ritual which is speech is anticipated, and that anticipation governs its iterability. In this sense, then, we must neither first believe before we kneel nor know the sense of words before we speak. On the contrary, both are performed "on faith" that sense will arrive in and by the articulation itself—an anticipation that is not for that reason governed by a guarantee of noematic satisfaction. If supposing and consenting are unthinkable outside of the language of supposing and consenting, and this language is itself a sedimentation of ritual forms—the rituals of Cartesianism—then the act by which we might "consent" to kneel is no more and no less ritualistic than the kneeling itself.

Dolar makes his objection explicitly theological by suggesting that Althusser's reformulation of the notion of materiality to include the domain of ideology is too inclusive, that it makes no room for a non-materializable ideality: the lost and introjected object that inaugurates the formation of the subject. It remains unclear, however, how precisely Dolar reads "materiality" in Althusser, and whether the ritual and, hence, *temporal dimension* of materiality in Althusser is effaced in favor of a reduction of materiality to the empirically or socially given:

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 covers 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. . . what counts is ultimately not that they are material, but that they are ruled by a code and by a repetition. [89]

This last remark formulates an opposition between materiality and repetition that appears in a direct tension with Althusser's own argumentation. If ideology is material to the extent that it consists in a set of practices, and practices are governed by rituals, then materiality is defined as much by ritual and repetition as it is by more narrowly empiricist conceptions. Moreover, the rituals of ideology are material to the extent that they acquire a *productive* capacity and, in Althusser's text, what rituals produce are subjects.

Dolar explains that rituals can produce not subjects, but subjectivity only to the extent that they are themselves governed by a symbolic or reiterative logic, a logic that is immaterial. Subjectivity for Dolar is said to "spring up from materially following certain rituals," where the "springing up" is not itself material, but where the notion of "following" a ritual does have a material dimension. Subjectivity arises immaterially from a material ritual performance, but this can happen only on the condition that a logic precedes and supports this ritual performance, an immaterial logic, one that encodes and reenacts the idealizing effects of introjection. But how are we to distinguish the repetition proper to ritual and the repetition proper to the "symbolic automatism"?

Consider the inseparability of those two repetitions in Althusser's description of the materiality of ideas and the ideal in ideology:

Ideas have disappeared as such (insofar as they are endowed with an ideal or spiritual existence), to the precise extent that it has emerged that their existence is inscribed in the actions of practices governed by rituals defined in the last instance by an ideological apparatus. It therefore appears that the subject acts insofar as he is acted by the following system (set out in the order of its real determination): ideology existing in a material ideological apparatus, prescribing material practices governed by a material ritual, which practices exist in the material actions

of a subject acting in all consciousness according to his belief. ["Ideology," 169–70]

It appears that ideas have their existence as what is "inscribed" in those acts which are part of practices regulated by rituals. Can they appear any other way, and can they have an "existence" outside of ritual? And what might it mean to rethink the material not only as a regulated repetition, but as one which produces a subject acting in full consciousness according to his belief? The subject's belief is no different from Pascal's; they are both the result of that repetitious conjuring that Althusser calls "materiality."

Dolar argues that Althusser fails to take into account the distinction between materiality and the symbolic, but where would we place "interpellation" on this mapping of the divide? Is it the voice of the symbolic or is it the ritualized voice of the state, or is the problem precisely that the two have become indissoluble? If, to use Dolar's term, the symbolic acquires its "existence" only in ritual, then what is to establish the ideality of that symbolic domain apart from the various modes of its appearance and iterability? Ritual takes place through repetition, and repetition implies the discontinuity of the material, and the irreducibility of materiality to phenomenality. The interval by which any repetition takes place does not, strictly speaking, *appear*; it is, as it were, the absence by which the phenomenal is articulated. But, this nonappearance or absence is not for that reason an "ideality," for it is bound to the articulation as its constitutive and absent necessity.

If the theological resistance to materialism is exemplified in Dolar's explicit defense of Lacan's Cartesian inheritance (78), insisting upon the pure ideality of the soul, the theological impulse structures Althusser's work in the figure of the punitive Law. Over and against the law that successfully regulates its subjects, Dolar suggests that the law cannot touch a certain interior register of love: "There is a remainder involved in the mechanism of interpellation, the left-over of the clean cut, and. . . this remainder can be pinpointed in the experience of love" (85). A bit further on, he asks, "Could one say that love is what we find beyond interpellation?"

Here love is, in his words, a "forced choice," suggesting that what Dolar expected from the notion of a subject who "consents" to kneel and pray is an account of a "forced consent" of some kind. Love is beyond interpellation precisely because it is understood to be compelled by an immaterial law—the symbolic—over and above the ritu-

alistic Laws that govern the various practices of love: "The Other that emerges here, the Other of the symbolic order, is not material, and Althusser covers up this nonmateriality by talking about the materiality of institutions and practices" (89). The Other who is lost, introjected, who is said to become the immaterial condition of the subject, inaugurates, as it were, the repetition specific to the symbolic, the punctuated fantasy of a return that is never completed or completable.

Let us provisionally accept this psychoanalytic account of subject formation, and concede that the subject cannot form except through a barred relation to the Other, and even consider that this barred Other reappears as the introjected condition of subject formation, splitting that subject at its inception. Are there other forms of "losing" the Other that are not introjection, and are there various ways of introjecting that Other? Are these terms not culturally elaborated, indeed, ritualized, to such a degree that no metascheme of the symbolic logic escapes the hermeneutics of social description?

Significantly, where social interpellations are described by Dolar as always "failing" fully to constitute subjects, it seems that no such "failure" is at work in the compulsory character of love. To the extent that primary introjection is an act of love, it is, I would suggest, not an act performed only once, but a reiterated and, indeed, ritual affair. But what is to keep us from making the analogy that we fall in love in much the same way we kneel and pray or that we may well be doing one when we think we are doing the other?

And yet, Dolar's suggestion that love might be what is "beyond" interpellation is an important one. And it seems that Althusser himself would have benefited from a better understanding of how the law itself becomes the object of passionate attachment, a strange scene of love. For the conscience that compels the wayward pedestrian to turn around upon hearing the policeman's address, or the one that ushers the murderer into the streets in search of the police, appears to be driven by a love of the law that can be satisfied only by ritual punishment. To the extent that Althusser gestures toward this analysis, he begins to explain how a subject is formed through the passionate pursuit of the reprimanding recognition of the state. That the subject turns round or rushes toward the law suggests that the subject lives in passionate expectation of the law. This would be a kind of love not beyond interpellation, but, rather, one that forms the passionate circle by which the subject becomes ensnared by its own state.

The failure of interpellation is clearly to be valued, but to figure

that failure in terms that rehabilitate a structure of love outside the domain of the social is to risk the reification of particular social forms of love as eternal psychic facts. It is also to leave unexplained the passion that precedes and forms conscience, that precedes and forms the possibility of love, one that accounts for the failure of interpellation fully to constitute the subject it names. Interpellation is "barred" from success not by a structurally permanent form of prohibition (or foreclosure), but by its inability to determine the constitutive field of the human. If conscience is one form that the passionate attachment to existence takes, then the failure of interpellation is to be found in precisely the passionate attachment that also lets it work. According to the logic of conscience, one in which Althusser appeared fully constrained, that passionate attachment to the law is that without which the linguistic guarantee of existence for the subject proves impossible. This complicity at once conditions and limits the viability of a critical interrogation of the law. One cannot criticize too far the very terms by which one's existence is secured.

But what if the discursive possibilities for existence exceed the reprimand voiced by the law, would that not lessen the need to confirm one's guilt and embark on a path of conscientiousness as a way to gain a purchase on identity? What are the conditions under which our very sense of linguistic survival depends upon our willingness to turn back upon ourselves, that is, in which attaining recognizable being requires self-negation, requires existing as a self-negating being in order to attain to and preserve a status as "being" at all?

It may be, in a Nietzschean vein, that such a slave morality is predicated upon that sober calculation that it is better to "be" enslaved in such a way than not "to be" at all. But the terms that constrain the option to "being" and "not being" are precisely those that "call for" another kind of response. Under what conditions does a law monopolize the terms of existence in quite so thorough a way? Or is this a theological fantasy of the law? Perhaps there is a possibility of being elsewhere or otherwise, without denying our complicity in the law that we oppose. Such knowledge will only be answered through a different kind of turn, one that, enabled by the law, turns away from the law, resisting its lure of identity; an agency that outruns and counters the conditions of its existence. Such a turn demands a willingness *not* "to be"—a critical desubjectivation—in order to expose the law as less powerful than it seems. What forms might linguistic survival take in this desubjectivized domain? How would one know one's existence?

Through what terms would it be recognized and recognizable? Such questions cannot be answered here, but they do indicate a direction for thinking that is perhaps prior to the question of conscience, namely, the question that preoccupied Spinoza, Nietzsche, and most recently, Giorgio Agamben: how are we to understand the desire to be as a constitutive desire? Resituating conscience and interpellation within such an account, we might then add to this question another: how is such a desire exploited not only by a law in the singular, but by laws of various kinds?

In conclusion, Agamben offers us one direction for rethinking ethics along the lines of the desire to be and, hence, at a distance from any particular formation of conscience:

If human beings were or had to be this or that substance, this or that destiny, no ethical experience would be possible. . . . This does not mean, however, that humans are not, and do not have to be, something, that they are simply consigned to nothingness and therefore can freely decide whether to be or not to be, to adopt or not to adopt this or that destiny (nihilism and decisionism coincide at this point). There is in effect something that humans are and have to be, but this is not an essence nor properly a thing: *It is the simple fact of one's own existence as possibility or potentiality. . .*¹⁶

Agamben might be read as claiming that this is a possibility that must resolve itself into something, but that cannot undo its own status as possibility through such a resolution. Or, rather, we might reread "being" as precisely that potentiality that remains unexhausted by any particular interpellation. Such a failure of interpellation might well undermine the capacity of the subject to "be" in a self-identical sense, but it may well mark the path toward a more open, even more ethical, kind of being, one of or for the future.

16. Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), section 11 (no pagination in text).