

Comedy from *a* to *Z*

On the Subject-Matter of Ideological Interpellation

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Preston Sturges' *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek* (1944) is not merely an illuminating cinematic study in ideological interpellation, a study that precedes Althusser's invention of this notion by more than two decades, but also a surprisingly accurate anticipation of the Lacanian critique of this key Althusserian concept. The duality of interpellation, on the one hand, and its failure or inherent impossibility, on the other, that accounts for the core of the said Lacanian critique is felicitously inscribed already in the title of Sturges' film. The title oscillates between *miracle* and *creek*, between a miracle and an entry point, or a gap undermining it, hollowing it out, as it were, and marking its irreducible interiority, an interiority of an exceptional event defying natural laws with a gap of a paradoxical materiality blurring the boundary between the Inner and the Outer, while opening up the paradoxical domain of the Extimate (to deploy Lacan's useful neologism). In Sturges, *the miracle* of ideological interpellation, of an instantaneous recognition of oneself as the addressee of the call of social authority, finds itself *up the creek*, i.e. faced with its own impossibility.

Surplus-interpellation: Sturges, Critic of Althusser

According to Althusser's famous formula, "ideology interpellates individuals into subjects" (Althusser 1971, p. 170; translation corrected). The process of translating the pre-ideological individuality into ideological subjectivity is based upon a simple mechanism of

the call addressed to the individual by a figure of social authority. And as soon as the individual recognizes him- or herself as its addressee, he or she is immediately constituted as the subject of ideology; moreover, he or she is immediately constituted as an always-already ideological subject. And for Althusser the notion of an ideological subject is a pleonasm. As soon as it emerges, the subject emerges as the effect of ideology so that there is no other subject *except for* the subject of ideology, just as there is in turn no other ideology *apart from* the one actualized in the form of subjectivity.¹ To briefly summarize the Lacanian critique of Althusser's concept of interpellation as it was formulated by Mladen Dolar, its core amounts to the thesis that this process of subjectivity's frictionless emergence cannot transpire without a remainder. The miracle of the automatic process of interpellation finds itself "up the creek" insofar as interpellation is structurally marked with a failure, with an inner heterogeneous declination from its own inherent function.² The philosophical stakes of this critique are as high as it gets: what is at stake here is the very subject matter of subjectivity, and more particularly the concept of "the subject of the unconscious," which Lacan so uncompromisingly defends against the prevalent rejection of the very notion of subjectivity amongst his contemporaries. And this subject is nothing but the name for interpellation's inner heterogeneous declination, for the symptomatic embodiment of its failure and inherent impossibility.³

¹ "[T]here is no ideology except by the subject and for subjects. [...] I only wish to point out that you and I are *always already* subjects" (Althusser 1971, pp. 170, 172).

² "[T]his sudden passage is never complete—the clean cut always produces a remainder." (Dolar 1993, p. 77)

³ "In short: the subject is precisely the failure to become the subject—the psychoanalytic subject is the failure to become an Althusserian one." (Dolar 1993, pp. 77-78) Or, to put it in Eric Santner's concise terms, the Lacanian subject "informs" the subject matter of Althusserian subjectivity as its inner heterogeneous "*subject-matter*: a peculiar and often unnerving materiality, a seemingly formless or *informe* remainder of processes of subject-formation." (Santner 2015, p. 23)

However, the Lacanian critique of Althusser, as I aim to demonstrate, does not amount to a simple rejection of the ideological nature of subjectivity. The central point of this critique is in many respects compatible with Althusser, but at the same time—in its very compatibility—all the more at odds with the Althusserian position. This critique does not amount to a simple claim that in his theory of ideology Althusser fails to grasp the impossibility underlying any ideological interpellation. What is at issue in this critique is rather the fact that Althusser fails to notice how this point of impossibility of ideology is precisely the point at which ideology effectively holds us in its grasp. The ultimate example of this impossibility of the ideological machine's clean passage into the self-transparent domain of pure Meaning is provided by Kafka's notion of the Law. Therefore, it is no coincidence that in his first English book Žižek should formulate his critique of Althusser's notion of ideology by recourse to the example of Kafka. Kafka's heroes *fail* precisely to recognize themselves within the call of the bearers of social authority. However, this misrecognition as the mark of the failure of interpellation does not lead to their liberation from the constraints of authority and ideology, for *ideological interpellation is structurally a surplus-interpellation* that mobilizes not only the mechanisms of recognition but also the subject's enjoyment, i.e., the point of radical un-recognition as the lever of ideological efficacy (see Žižek 1989, p. 43). And it is precisely this leftover of un-recognition in the constitution of ideological subjectivity, or the ideological subjectivity's inner heterogeneous "subject-matter," that gets lost in Althusser's account.

The Lacanian critique insists on the point that the frictionless translation of the external materiality of ideological institutions into the inner self-transparency of an ideological subject never fully succeeds. And it is this failure that provides the key to the basic plot of Sturges' film. So, what is the plot? The United States are drawn into the maelstrom of World War II, the mobilization is in full effect, the boys are leaving for the front in millions. And

although there is a clear-cut difference between the *repressive* state apparatuses that govern “by force” and the *ideological* state apparatuses that govern “by ideology,” it is nevertheless the case that no repressive apparatus, including the army, can do without an ideological-ritual intervention, which secures its inner cohesion and the conditions of its reproduction.⁴ Consequently, the mobilization is accompanied by the institute of *farewell parties*, by ideological rituals that attract large crowds of American girls determined—in an act of conjuration and in an atmosphere of relaxed entertainment—to wish to the boys a safe return home. Trudy, the main female character, feels obliged to attend one of these parties. Her father, a single parent raising two daughters, is opposed to the idea, but Trudy—while pretending to go on a date with an innocuous local boy Norval Jones who, in her father’s eyes, presents no threat to his daughter’s innocence and the family’s good name—decides nevertheless to attend the party. Trudy admits to Norval her true intentions, and although reluctant, Norval eventually lets her go on with her little plan. What follows is a patchwork of scenes from the party, which Trudy visits by borrowing Norval’s car and where we see her dancing and drinking with the boys in uniforms. She finally returns home early the next morning, still visibly drunk, and notices that she is wearing a wedding ring. However, despite much effort she cannot bring herself to remember the events of the previous night. The ring obviously testifies to the fact that she got married to one of the boys in uniform that already left for the front, but Trudy cannot reconstruct the causality of this surprising effect, i.e., of the ring as a mark of the events that transpired the night before. Despite the lacking reconstruction, the wedding ring eventually suffices to wash ashore a small fragment of a memory, although she is still unable to “historicize” it, to incorporate it

⁴ “There is no such thing as a purely repressive apparatus.” (Althusser 1971, p. 145)

into a consistent narrative: the name of the boy she married, she suddenly remembers, “*had a ‘Z’ in it.*” From here her situation is complicated even further. Trudy eventually discovers that she is pregnant, thus revealing that the wedding ring and the fragment of a memory of the boy’s name were neither a coincidence nor an illusion or a screen-memory.

If we read the farewell party (which is a party organized by the State, by one of its principal repressive apparatuses) as an integral part of the repressive apparatus in its ideological function, then this provides us with the first opportunity at formulating a critique of the Althusserian notion of an ideological institution. It is self-evident that in her determination to attend the party, a determination that surpasses her respect for her father (the local constable), Trudy is not simply following the official ideological message of the army. And it is equally obvious that she cares more about the party itself than about attesting her devotion to the sublime messages of heroism, military power, or the nearing final victory. In short: what propels Trudy to attend the party and—consequently—to reaffirm the conditions for the reproduction of the state apparatus are not the official ideological messages as such but rather *the transgression of official ideology*.⁵ There are in fact two transgressive moments at work in her attending the party. First, Trudy transgresses against the prohibition of the father and thus betrays the paternal, familial ideology. However, what is more important is that she does so by way of a pretext, such that her transgression is not explicit (thus leaving the paternal ideology intact), but is an example of what Žižek termed “inherent transgression” (*cf.* Žižek 1994, p. 55), i.e., transgression as an inner declination from the norm which, however, does not thwart it but rather strengthens it. Second, the party itself constitutes a transgressive moment that follows the same logic, for it does

⁵ This transgressive moment is indicated in the film already by the fact that the said party takes place in the church basement.

not follow the rules of military behavior with its strict discipline and hierarchy, but precisely the transgression of these very rules. However, this transgression is once again not external but inherent in the sense that it does not thwart the coherence of the repressive apparatus but rather enables it.

Hence, if “ideology never says, ‘I am ideology’” (Althusser 1971, p. 175; translation corrected), this absence of a statement does not exhaust its denegational function. Quite the opposite: ideology repeats over and over again the statement “I am ideology,” but it does so not in a straightforward, frontal manner but rather by means of denegation. Ideology is like Freud’s famous patient who, upon being asked who this person in his dream might be, answers that he has no idea but is sure of one thing: “It’s *not* my mother.” (Freud 2001 [1925]) If ideology never says “I am ideology,” then it can be seen to reveal its ideological nature precisely by negating its own ideological character; in other words, ideology bears its true face *through* the act of masking itself, by saying: “I am *not* ideology.” And the points of the “inherent transgression” are precisely the places of this negation’s inscription, the traces of ideology’s negation by ideology, the loci of its supposed violation and impossibility, which effectively form *the scene of ideology’s surplus-operativity*. The interpellation of individuals into subjects always relies upon this structural moment of a “non-ideological” surplus of ideology itself.

This last point is irreducible to Althusser’s claim according to which those who are in ideology remain structurally blind as to their embeddedness in ideology, i.e., that “those who are in ideology believe themselves by definition outside ideology” (Althusser 1971, p. 175). One should radicalize Althusser’s point: it is not only that those “inside” (ideology) believe themselves “outside” (of it); the point is rather that they can believe themselves “outside” of it precisely because there exists a field of an “internal exteriority” of ideology, i.e., because ideology is not a realm of a pure, unthwarted interiority, but is rather marked by the Real

of an extimate “inherent transgression” as the singular point of ideological mystification. Put differently: a person subjected to the ideology of the Church of course does not consider his or her views to be ideological (insofar he or she believes him- or herself “outside” ideology, despite the fact that he or she is drowning in it). However, my point is subtler and it does not refer to the phenomenon of immediate, fanatical “self-deception,” but rather to the deception that appears *only in the form* of its opposite, i.e., in the form of a transgressive, critical distance towards ideology and its apparatuses. To paraphrase Dolar, the ideological subject in this reflexive sense of the term, which relies on the remainder of the mechanism of “inherent transgression,” this ideological subject is the impossibility of becoming an ideological subject. “Inherent transgression” is the field of an inner heterogeneous *declination of ideology from ideology by ideology itself*, it is the inner constitutive gap of ideology, a gap at once enabling and disabling its ideological self-enclosing. This inherent split effectively splits nothing, for it is only through it that ideology comes into being and gains its efficiency, and this inherent gap is now the place of the inscription of *the subject*, on the one hand, and the production of *the surplus*, on the other.

From here let us return to the film and to its two transgressions, the second of which in fact mirrors the first. The farewell party is internally transgressive; although suspending the rigorous rules of military ideology, it nevertheless serves its reproduction and guarantees for its cohesion. However, in the film this “inherent transgression” is related to another, analogous transgression of the paternal, or familial, ideology. And the paternal prohibition (of attending the farewell party) is inherently transgressed (inherently because it is transgressed by way of deceit) via the “inherent transgression” of the military ideology. Yet in an interesting reversal the transgression of military ideology is once again possible only in the form of that particular familial ideology which it had to subvert by means of deceit.

Here lies the emphatically *critico-ideological character* of the film's basic plot. Without this reversal, we would be dealing with a melodrama, which might unfold as follows: despite her father's prohibition, the girl attends the party, breaking with the constraints of paternal ideology. There, the soldiers get her drunk and abuse her (Sturges' film already hints at all of this), she returns home not remembering the night's events, whereupon she discovers that she is pregnant. Then the local "4-F boy" who is in love with her decides to help her, proposing to her so as to preserve her honor, and she reluctantly—knowing that she is merely using him—either agrees to the proposal or rejects him, but in either case remains confined to her solitude and excluded from the local community. Such an outcome would effectively rely upon a clear separation between the "interiority" of adhering to the familial ideology, on the one hand, and a pure "exteriority" of its transgression, on the other. The whole film after the event (of becoming pregnant) would insist on this pure cut between the "outer" and the "inner," on the impossibility of mediation or reconciliation. But what we get with Sturges' film is precisely the impossibility to ever step outside into a pure "exteriority." We instead receive the lesson that this "exteriority" is a mirage, depriving us of the insight into a more radical, extimate nature of every ideology. When Sturges' Trudy presumably steps out of the circle of familial ideology (i.e., when she transgresses her father's prohibition), she effectively enters the ideological space of the "inherent transgression" of the military ideology; she can only step out of ideology by stepping right back into it. Moreover, even as she transgresses her father's prohibition, she does so under the very conditions of this prohibition itself, which is why she returns home from the party as an "ideologically faultless" married woman and soon-to-be mother. Trudy's desire propels her to transgress her father's prohibition, it propels her to undermine the paternal-familial ideology. However, in a reversal, this desire ends up only being able to realize itself in the form of what it transgresses, viz., in the form of the familial-paternal ideology itself.

But Trudy's faultlessness is, of course, not entirely faultless. By way of a sheer automatism, without her consent and will, Trudy is interpellated into the subject of conjugal-familial ideology, assuming the role of a faultless soon-to-be mother. However, the interpellation does not unfold smoothly, for something is missing in it, namely her husband and the father of her child, who exists but merely as a blind spot of Trudy's knowledge. Hence, the whole plot is made up of the sequence of three institutions of 1) the paternal-familial, 2) the military and 3) the conjugal-familial ideology. What binds these three akin but nonetheless different elements of the ideological state apparatus into a sequence is precisely the inner point of their impossibility, of the "inherent transgression," the inner heterogeneous split that persists through the alterations of disparate ideological institutions. The plot begins with the impossibility, or "inherent transgression," of the paternal-familial ideology, continues with the "inherent transgression" of the military, and concludes with the "inherent transgression" of the conjugal-familial ideology.

What we defined as *the inner heterogeneous declination of ideology from ideology by ideology itself* therefore forms the homogeneous background of the sequence described above. Yet despite this central homogeneity, the three elements of the sequence nonetheless differ from one another such that their succession is not only a matter of their external co-placement, but rather of an inner structure and dialectical movement. The succession of the three transgressions of the paternal-familial, military, and conjugal-familial ideology is effectively presented to us as a passage from a naïve, pre-Althusserian, through to an Althusserian and thence to the Lacanian notion of ideology. In case of the first transgression of the paternal Law, ideology is presented as embodied in the *pater familias* as the bearer of authority who burdens the subject from the outside with the weight of ideological demands. Here, we are confronted with ideology in the pre-Marxian sense of a system of principles that the subject

can either accept or refuse, but always with a full awareness of this acceptance or refusal. In the second example of the farewell party we pass onto the level of the Marxian-Althusserian notion of ideology. Here, ideology is no longer conceived as an external constraint and a system of principles, but as something that inhabits the interiority of the subjects without them ever being aware of it. But there follows the third example that leads us to the concept of ideology proper. In this final example, ideology appears neither as something merely external that is forced upon us by figures of authority and ideological apparatuses, nor simply as a purely inner self-transparency of ideological belief, but rather as extimate, as at once within and without. If we formulate this development in terms of knowledge, we can say that it leads from the “knowledge that knows itself,” through the “ignorance that is ignorant of itself,” to finally resulting in the “knowledge that doesn’t know itself,” which is the true locus of the unconscious ideological belief. When Trudy transgresses her father’s injunction, she knows that she knows that she is rejecting an ideological injunction, i.e., *she knows that she knows that she is outside ideology*. Conversely, when she attends the party she doesn’t know that she doesn’t know that she is following an ideological ritual, i.e., *she doesn’t know that she doesn’t know that she is inside ideology*. At last, when she arrives home from the party and discovers that she is married and pregnant, she finally—and paradoxically—*knows neither that she knows nor what she knows*; knowledge and ignorance cease to form two clearly demarcated disparate fields relying on the difference between the inner and the outer and instead coincide within the extimacy of a belief as the inner constituent of knowledge itself. And it is precisely at this point of a knowledge that doesn’t know itself that we finally witness the emergence of the subject of ideology as the “subject-matter” of ideological interpellation.

It is only in this last subjectal form that we reach the core of the Lacanian critique of interpellation and the true meaning of

its remainder. As we have seen, in Sturges' film this remainder of interpellation, which undermines the distinction between the exteriority of ideological apparatuses and the interiority of ideological belief, is granted a very plastic embodiment and depiction. First, it takes the form of the wedding ring that betrays the existence of some knowledge of which Trudy, paradoxically, knows nothing; then it takes the form of a partial memory of her husband's name; and finally, it takes the form of the embryo. This triad coincides with the Lacanian triad of the *Imaginary* (the image of a shining ring), the *Symbolic* (the remainder of a name, not even a full name but merely a letter, a tiny "Z" as the phallic signifier, the signifier without the signified), and the *Real* (the ontologically unrealized embryo as an instance of *objet petit a*).

Matrixes and Discourses, or: How to Do Things Without Words

Before continuing along the outlined path, let me first proceed with a more detailed analysis of the critique of the Althusserian notion of ideological interpellation. We have seen that no repressive apparatus can do without its ideological supplement. Its mechanisms and technologies are necessarily accompanied by a discursive ideological practice that functions as the lever of its efficiency. Althusser conceives of the ideological mechanism of the reproduction of Power as relying upon the relation between the Subject (as the instance of social authority) and the subject (of interpellation), or—respectively—upon the relation between the Subject-addresser (S) and the subject-addressee (s):⁶

⁶ "It is convenient to designate this new and remarkable Subject by writing Subject with a capital S to distinguish it from ordinary subjects, with a small s. / It then emerges that the interpellation of individuals as subjects presupposes the 'existence' of a Unique and central Other Subject, in whose Name the religious ideology interpellates all individuals as subjects." (Althusser 1971, pp. 178–9)

$$S \rightarrow s$$

The Simple Matrix of Althusserian Interpellation

If we read this duality in terms of the relationship between S (the signifier), on the one hand, and s (the meaning), on the other, then it becomes possible to identify what already follows from Althusser's own description of the process of interpellation: First, that the subject (s) emerges as the subject of ideological *meaning* and, second, that this emergence relies on the *signifying duality* of a hailing or a call of the social authority, on the one hand, and a reply or a recognition, on the other. This is consistent with what is perhaps Althusser's most famous example of ideological interpellation (Althusser 1971, pp. 174–5): the policeman's hail rings out "Hey, you there!" and the subject answers "Yes? I'm here." The signifying game of hailing, or addressing, and recognition thus includes in its minimum form two signifiers, namely the signifying dyad of an "address" or a "call," and a "reply" or a "response." And for Althusser the subject of ideological meaning (s) is precisely *the product* of this signifying duality of the call "Hey, you there!" (S) and the response to it "I'm here" (S'). The above schema of the relationship between the Subject of the signifier (S) who issues the call and the subject of ideological meaning (s) who is the retroactive product of recognition in this call can be further explained with the following, "extended" matrix of ideological interpellation:

$$\frac{S}{\quad} \rightarrow \frac{S'}{s}$$

The Extended Matrix of Althusserian Interpellation

Both matrixes of Althusserian interpellation (i.e., the "simple" and the "extended" one) open up the possibility of introducing the Lacanian critique. The Althusserian subject of ideological

interpellation is constituted as the subject of “ideological meaning,” and this meaning first appears as the obverse of the signifying call, i.e., it appears as something that automatically results from it ($S \rightarrow s$). Despite the linearity of this matrix, Althusser is nevertheless fully aware—and not merely aware, but explicitly states—that the subject of ideological meaning is not simply the linear *result* of the progress from S through S’ to s, i.e., from the “call” through the “response” to the constitution of subjectivity.⁷ This progress involves a retroactive temporal loop pertaining to the process of signification and the constitution of subjectivity. That is why Althusser insists on the fact that the subject, although constituted as the product of the linear temporality of a “call” and a subsequent “response,” is constituted as an *always-already* ideological subject. Although the subject only *will have been* the subject, although it paradoxically only becomes what it has always-already been, in retrospect it nevertheless appears as a seeming foundation or origin of the interpellation process. Thus, the linear progressivity, on the one hand, and the retroactive causality, on the other, are two aspects of Althusser’s concept of interpellation. In short: the linear matrix $S \rightarrow s$ must also be read as $S(s)$.

The shortcomings of Althusser’s concept of ideological interpellation are not reducible to its supposed focus (via the key notion of recognition) upon the mere *imaginary relation* between the subject and the Subject (or, to put it in psychoanalytic terms, between the Ego and the ideal Ego), which then supposedly leads Althusser to overlook how this relationship is overdetermined by a symbolic relation, and more specifically by a relation to the symbolic place or the Ego-Ideal that is the precondition of

⁷ “Naturally for the convenience and clarity of my little theoretical theater I have had to present things in the form of a sequence, with a before and an after, and thus in the form of a temporal succession. [...] But in reality these things happen without any succession. The existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals into subjects are one and the same thing.” (Althusser 1971, pp. 174-5; translation corrected)

establishing the imaginary mirror-relation. As we have seen, in Althusser the imaginary relation is grounded in a symbolic relation, i.e. in a dynamic of the signifying “call” and “response” that constitutes the subject as the retroactive product of the constitution of meaning. Hence, the Lacanian critique of Althusser can be based *neither* on the reproach of overlooking the symbolic dimension by way of focusing on a mere imaginary dynamic of recognition *nor* on the reproach of missing the retroactive character of the emergence of subjectivity. On what precisely, then, does this critique rest? Effectively, what is missing in Althusser is not a theory of the Symbolic, but rather *the concept of the Real*.

If we once again take a look at our “extended” matrix of Althusserian interpellation, we see that its “upper floor” corresponds precisely with the “upper floor” of Lacan’s matrix of the master’s discourse (Lacan 2007; 1999):

$$S_1 \rightarrow S_2$$

The basic signifying dyad can be read as the elementary matrix of ideological hailing, as conceived by Althusser. S_1 , the master-signifier, functions as the discursive agent of addressing the individual who—in a gesture of recognition in the call—is automatically constituted as a subject. The subject of meaning (s), as the result of the signifying address issued by the social authority (S_1), essentially appears as the subject of “ideological knowledge” (S_2). It appears as a subject constituted in an “instance of seeing,” or more precisely in an “instance of hearing” as the addressee of social authority. As soon as it hears the call (“Hey, you there!”) and by replying to it (“I’m here”), it recognizes itself as the addressee and constitutes itself as an obedient subject. The act of hearing the hailing of social authority automatically passes into obedience to social authority.⁸ This subject corresponds precisely

⁸ In Slovene, as well as some other languages, for example German, “obedience” derives from the verb “to hear;” “to hear” is “to obey.”

to the particular subjectivity of the “instance of seeing” (or “instance of the glance”) that Lacan introduces and develops in his text on “Logical Time.” This subject is essentially an impersonal subject or, put differently, the subject of subjectivization without the subject, i.e., without the subject in the proper, psychoanalytic sense of the term—the subject of a “one-knows-that,” of an impersonal, anonymous, automated “knowledge.”⁹ The impersonal nature of this form of subjectivity is perfectly in line with Althusser’s notion of ideology as the “interpellation of individuals into subjects.” Specifically, it is in line with the concept of ideological interpellation insofar as it relies on *a de-individuation of the individual as correlative with the emergence of the subject*.

What is lacking in this Althusserian schema of interpellation as a de-individuating subjectivization is precisely the “lower floor” of Lacan’s matrix of the mater’s discourse which essentially alters and complicates the simple Althusserian duality of the call ($S_1 \rightarrow S_2$), on the one hand, and, on the other, the impersonal, de-individualized subject of ideological knowledge (S_2/s) as *the product* of this call. S_1 and S_2 remain mutually irreducible, resisting passing into one another; between them there insists a gap depicted in the “lower floor” of Lacan’s matrix:

$$\frac{S_1 \rightarrow S_2}{\mathcal{S} \leftarrow a}$$

Matrix of the Master’s Discourse

The passage from S_1 to S_2 does not transpire without a remainder (a) as the product of ideological interpellation. And the psychoanalytic subject (\mathcal{S}) emerges precisely as correlative to this product/remainder and as the truth of the interpellation process,

⁹ “[...] the subjectivization, albeit impersonal, which takes form here in the ‘one knows that...’ [...]” (Lacan 2006, p. 167)

i.e., as *the truth of its impossibility*.¹⁰ A comparison of the two matrixes, viz., of the Althusserian matrix of interpellation and Lacan's matrix of the discourse of the master, shows a key difference between them, a difference that implies two different notions of subjectivity. As a subject of meaning, the Althusserian subject of ideological interpellation is *the product* of a successful passage from the call (S_1) to the response (S_2), while the Lacanian subject ($\$$) emerges as *the truth* of this passage, *the product* of which is not an ideological meaning (s) but precisely the impossibility of meaning, a nonsensical and non-signifying remainder (*a*) of the constitution of meaning. *For Lacan, the subject is not the product of interpellation, or ideological signification, but its truth, i.e. the truth of its impossibility.*

After this detour let us return to Sturges. The impossibility of interpellation which suspends the logic of the "instance of seeing," or the "instance of hearing," as the lever of obedience and ideological submission is hence placed at the very beginning of Sturges' film functioning as the motor of its basic plot. And if we follow Lacan's succession of the three "evidential moments" from his text on "Logical Time,"¹¹ we can say that this suspension of the "instance of the glance," this inner obstacle of interpellation, opens up the domain of the "time for comprehending" which makes up most of the film and in which the subject attempts to

¹⁰ When Lacan defines the fixed places of the permutations of the four elements in his matrix of the four discourses, he presents them as follows: $\frac{\text{agent}}{\text{truth}} \quad \frac{\text{other}}{\text{production}}$; in the master's discourse the place of the "agent" is occupied by S_1 , the call of social authority, confronted at the other end by the "other" of the Althusserian subject of ideological knowledge (S_2). However, this matrix "produces" a remainder (*a*) as correlative to the "truth" of the subject ($\$$), i.e., of the subject as the impossibility of the Althusserian subject of interpellation. Lacan writes down this "impossibility" right above the vector linking—in the discourse of the master—the place of the "agent" with the place of the "other": $S_1 \xrightarrow{\text{impossibility}} S_2$.

¹¹ The instance of the glance—the time for comprehending—the moment of concluding (cf. Lacan 2006).

confront this extimate remainder as at once the product and the point of impossibility of ideology. This passage from the “instant of hearing” to the “time for comprehending” is correlative to the particular “progress” indicated by Lacan in his matrix of the four discourses as a quarter-turn of the master’s discourse that explicates the “subject-matter,” or the properly subjectal logic, of its functioning. And in this passage or “progress” the place of the agent is now occupied by the subject, namely by the subject as the truth of the impossibility of ideological interpellation:

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \mathcal{S} & \rightarrow & S_1 \\ a & \leftarrow & S_2 \end{array}$$

Matrix of the Hysteric’s Discourse

The said “progress” explains the structural position in which Trudy finds herself as the subject of surplus-interpellation, confronted with the “enigmatic” object in its imaginary (the ring), symbolic (“Z”), and real (embryo) function. When Trudy (\mathcal{S}) returns from the farewell party she is immediately confronted with the enigma of the night before, with the “Z” (S_1) as a residuum of a memory, with the enigmatic signifier without the signified: $\mathcal{S} \rightarrow S_1$. In this “relationship,” in this impossible relation to the enigmatic signifier, Trudy emerges as a split subject, and even though this impossible relation produces knowledge (S_2), this knowledge is structured as a knowledge that doesn’t know itself, a knowledge that cannot be subjectively assumed, and which as such—i.e., as unconscious—is “impotent” in grasping the remainder (a), the piece of the Real, that would—Trudy believes—heal up the universe of Meaning.¹²

¹² Once again, Lacan writes down this “impotence” right bellow the vector linking—in the discourse of the hysteric—the place of “production” (S_2) with that of the “truth” (a): $a \xleftarrow{\text{impotence}} S_2$.

Another note is required here. I have said that Trudy can only enact the transgression of ideology in the form of ideology itself. That is why she returns from the party as a married woman and soon-to-be mother. However, this enactment is thwarted and testifies to the inherent impossibility of the reproduced ideological form that is literally lacking. What is lacking in it is precisely—the father. Why not interpret Trudy’s pregnancy as a symptom of her interpellation into the paternal-familial ideology? More precisely: why not read it as a realization of desire? Not as a realization of Trudy’s desire or the desire of “the unknown soldier” but precisely the desire of her father, i.e., as a realization of the desire of the big Other, whose Prohibition she violated only to enact—in a symptomatic reversal—his desire?¹³ If interpellation is inherently failed and unsuccessful and if the subject of this failure coincides with the point of impossibility of interpellation, then this subject is nothing other than its symptom. To claim that a successful interpellation relies on the structurally necessary moment of failure, on an “inherent transgression,” or to claim that every interpellation is a surplus-interpellation that mobilizes not only the automatism of recognition and “rational” consent but also enjoyment, a passionate attachment to the ideological message—all of this amounts to claiming that there is *no interpellation without its symptoms*.

From the very beginning of the film the aforementioned main male character finds himself caught in the same ideological situation. Norval Jones is the embodiment of a failed interpellation, he is a creature of “a crisis of symbolic investiture,” to use Santner’s term (see Santner 1996, p. 26), however, in relation to Trudy he seems to display the other side of the same impossibility. Norval wants nothing more than to be accepted into the army,

¹³ It is not unimportant that her father is a single parent, and a widower; and also not irrelevant is his name, Mr. Kockenlocker, keeping his “chickens” locked away, at a safe distance from “cocks” ...

but unfortunately, he proves himself unqualified every time. On the one hand, we have a massive draft, a massive call of Uncle Sam who wants “You!”. Then, on the other hand we have Norval Jones who—in a very peculiar way—is left out each time. His interpellation fails not because he would fail to recognize himself in the call of the big Other. Norval more than recognizes himself in the call, but *the social authority fails to recognize him as the addressee of its own interpellation*. Norval recognizes himself in the call excessively, but the experts who are called upon to determine whether or not he is cut out for the job fail to see in Norval the particular object, the agalma, which is the condition for acceptance into the army. Put differently, Norval is interpellated, the interpellation is successful in the Althusserian sense of the term, the call passes without any friction or without any gap into the constitution of the ideological subject of “knowledge.” However, this mechanism of the master’s discourse does not suffice, and that which for the majority of interpellated American boys who easily pass the tests conducted by expert knowledge is but a formality becomes, for Norval, an unbridgeable obstacle. Moreover, as a successful example of Althusserian ideological interpellation Norval only becomes a split subject as a product of the functioning of expert knowledge:

$$\begin{array}{c} S_2 \rightarrow a \\ S_1 \leftarrow g \end{array}$$

Matrix of the University Discourse

In the matrix of the “university discourse” the place of the “agent” is occupied by knowledge (S_2), which in this case is the expert military knowledge that decides whether the interpellated subject (i.e., the subject as the truth of interpellation) possesses the *je ne sais quoi* (a), that “special something” that qualifies him or her as the subject of interpellation and as a bearer of the military post with its uniforms, signifying ranks and insignia (S_1) that form

the basis of its hierarchical relations. And Norval wants nothing more than the uniform, this insignia of power and authority, and it is precisely at this point that he stumbles upon an obstacle, upon an “impotence” as a subject to seize the symbolic mandate.¹⁴ And this mobilizes him into the discourse of the hysteric (\mathcal{S}) who wants to take possession of the symbolic mandate, the investiture (S_1), but does not know what he is lacking, what that agalma (a) might be that would, in the eyes of the expert knowledge, grant him the dignity of a military post:

$$\begin{array}{c} \mathcal{S} \rightarrow S_1 \\ a \leftarrow S_2 \end{array}$$

Matrix of the Hysteric’s Discourse

In Norval’s case this split is, as it were, redoubled. The successful interpellation from the master’s discourse, its “upper floor” ($S_1 \rightarrow S_2$), relies on the “lower floor” of Norval’s fantasy ($\mathcal{S} \diamond a$), it relies upon an “ideological fantasy” as the condition of interpellation. And what is the content of this fantasy? Norval believes that the military post—or more precisely, the uniform as the mark of authority and power, the military rank as the “phallic signifier”—would grant him access to Trudy’s heart. His amorous impotence, or “lack of qualification,” is inherently linked to the “lack of qualifications” for assuming the military post. Because he is “unqualified” in war, he is “disqualified” in love, or that is at least what he has himself believe.¹⁵ Norval mistakenly believes that

¹⁴ This “impotence” is once again explicitly indicated just below the vector that—in the university discourse—links the place of “production” (\mathcal{S}) with that of the “truth” (S_1): $S_1 \xleftarrow{\text{impotence}} \mathcal{S}$.

¹⁵ *Make love, not war*—the slogan misses the point. Norval’s corollary states that the hippies got it all wrong and that love and war go hand in hand. For Norval, the war is an opportunity to prove himself in love; and in a crazy extrapolation World War II perhaps only happened so as to enable Norval and Trudy to get together.

Trudy would have desired him if only he were a soldier, but he fails to see that *it is in fact he who can only desire her on the condition that he is desired by her as a soldier*. The social authority, the big Other, the “military expert knowledge,” thus assumes the role of what Freud has called *Störer der Liebe*, the role of the “disturber” of the production of the couple (*cf.* Freud 2001 [1919]). But this disturber is merely an externalization of the inner condition of Norval’s desire that can only sustain itself in this suspense. In order to come to terms with the impossibility of a relationship, with the inner blockage of the production of the couple, Norval transposes it onto an external barrier to the realization of his own desire.

Psychoanalytic Interpellation

In Sturges’ film, the succession of the three transgressions of the paternal-familial, military, and conjugal-familial ideology is presented as a passage from the naïve, pre-Althusserian, through the Althusserian, and finally to the Lacanian notion of ideology. This succession of the three notions of ideology, a succession in which each step produces an inherent critique of the preceding one, is obviously grounded in a repetition of the ideological mechanism. However, it is crucial to add that what triggers the series of repetitions is not the form of interpellation itself, but rather its inherent impossibility. Hence, what is repeated in this succession is the very impossibility of repetition. This particular form of repetition as the impossibility of affirmative repetition, as well as the particular succession of the three notions of ideology, are repeated once again against the backdrop of the problem of *the triply repeated marriage*, the analysis of which enables us to answer the key question: How does the film eventually solve all these deadlocks, blockages, impotencies, and impossibilities? How does it manage to produce this utterly curious couple, this pseudo-couple (to deploy Beckett’s term)?

Since Trudy, as we have seen, can remember neither where nor whom she married, and since she is convinced that she got married under a false name, thus placing her future child at risk of being branded a “bastard,” an illegitimate child, she and Norval come up with the following plan: they will visit the appropriate office, Norval will pose as “Z” (who, after a long play of free associations,¹⁶ was branded by Trudy as private Ratzkiwatzki), he will put on the military uniform and *they will repeat the marriage*. Norval, who is unable to grab a hold of the symbolic insignia and who again and again is faced by the Other with the fact of his “castration,” of not being up to the mark, unable to assume the symbolic mandate, is now granted the opportunity to stage that which again and again eluded his grasp, and to occupy—if only for a brief moment, in a game of pretense and mimicry—the place of a soldier, lover, future husband, and father of Trudy’s child.

But the well thought out plan fails miserably. When it is time for him to sign the marriage certificate, Norval forgets about the role he is playing, he takes the whole thing a bit too seriously, and signs with his real name. The authorities immediately discover his deception, and Norval is exposed as a fraud, an intruder, an impostor. In the scene Norval finds himself once again face to face with the expert, administrative knowledge, which once again deems him unqualified to assume the desired role. Here, the value of the aforementioned link between sexual competence, on the one hand, and the military competence, on the other, becomes obvious. Being “unqualified” in matters of war, his inaptness to assume the symbolic position of “Z,” the “unknown soldier,” “disqualifies” him in matters of love, thus depriving him of that particular mandate (of the “husband”) that would enable him to “consume” his love object. However, the failure of the plan they forged, the failure of the marriage ritual of ideological interpel-

¹⁶ Ratzkiwatzki—Zitzkiwitzki—Razly-Wazly—Razzby-Wadsby—Katzenjammer.

lation, does not imply that the interpellation was not a success. Quite to the contrary, the failed remarriage was a twofold success.

First, by signing the wrong, i.e., the right, name, Norval left undisturbed the “ideological fantasy” as the support of his reality, the fantasy that if only he was able to assume the symbolic mandate he would become the object of Trudy’s desire. Without being aware of it, Norval sabotages the marriage ceremony so as to preserve the phantasmatic conditions of possibility of a successful relationship. His slip of the pen, his failed signature, is a symptom betraying the truth about his desire.¹⁷ And second: even though they were unable to reproduce the wedding, they nevertheless were able *to repeat it*—to repeat it precisely in the Kierkegaardian sense of repetition as the “impossibility of repetition.” And they have repeated the core, or the gist, of the “first” wedding, namely *its very failure*. The exposal of Norval as an impostor, the unmasking and the failure of the logic of pretense and deception was itself in the service of pretense, of the reproduction or mimesis of the very failure of the “first” wedding. The reproduction did not fail because it missed the mark, but rather because it hit the mark all too successfully, so that the “copy” coincided with the “original” and Trudy found herself once again in the position of a future mother lacking a husband.

Hence, the impossibility of a remarriage is not entirely without its consequences. The failed act of repeating the marriage is the condition of the successful marriage that occurs at the very end of the film. What happens? After posing as a soldier and attempting to get married under a false name, Norval first finds himself in jail and then on the run. When after six months he is still unable to track down “Ratzkiwatzki,” who could deliver Trudy of her

¹⁷ Norval is the embodiment of a parapraxis, his stuttering emerges each time he is faced with the task of assuming a symbolic mandate (of a soldier, husband, co-conspirator, father, etc.) and it betrays the truth about his desire which can only sustain itself at a distance towards its object, i.e., only as essentially unrealized, unsatisfied.

scandalous predicament, he returns home only to be arrested once again. In the meantime, Trudy and her family withdraw from the local community so as to conceal her pregnancy. The childbirth ensues. The viewer is witness to the events in the hallway of the maternity ward where Trudy's father, sister, a family friend, and a journalist are in expectation of the happy news. A nurse enters the hallway and announces that a baby boy has been born. A few moments later the scene is repeated, we now have twins. Once again: quadruplets; and finally: sextuplets, all boys. The news shocks the local community (and the world), it reaches the state administration, and mobilizes—in a gesture of etatization of sexuality—the repressive (military), the judicial, the political, and the information ideological apparatus, all of which are instantaneously set in motion to declare Norval to be the father of the children, to withdraw the arrest warrant, to legalize the failed wedding attempt with Trudy and to retroactively promote him to the rank of a colonel.

How are we to interpret this comical outcome that disentangles all the complications and impossibilities that fueled the film's narrative? Do we witness another attempt at interpellating the individual into the subject, which, following a series of failures finally succeeds without a remainder? Here, I believe a different reading is possible. What we eventually witness is not an interpellation without a remainder but rather a paradoxical structure of interpellation in which the remainder itself comes to occupy the place of the dominant, or the agent, of the discourse. More precisely: the end of the film can be read as *a passage from ideological to psychoanalytic interpellation*:

$$\frac{a}{S_2} \rightarrow \frac{\$}{S_1}$$

Matrix of the Analyst's Discourse

In the film, the remainder of interpellation is embodied in the incomprehensible message of the Other which the subject cannot integrate into the universe of ideological meaning; and this remainder appears in the imaginary form of a shining ring, in the symbolic form of “Z,” this “signifier without the signified,” and in the real form of an embryo, the object *a*. And this objectal remainder of interpellation is the lever of the plot’s unfolding and the cause of all the intersubjective displacements. In the analysis of the discursive matrixes it has hereto occupied three different places, and at the end of the film this remainder is placed center stage and is transformed from the motor of the plot into a lever of its resolution. And if we say that this remainder as the agent of the final resolution is embodied in a child, we say too little. Namely: why not one, two, three etc., but six newborns? Is it not obvious that what counts here is not the count as such but rather something that exceeds it? Is it not obvious that Sturges’ emphasis is not that as many as six children are born but that they are simply *too many* and that the mere addition produces at some point a new quality, the quality of an object which exceeds the count as such, resisting as it is the “count-as-one”? This excessive remainder, this “toomanyness” (or “toomuchness,” to deploy Eric Santner’s useful term)—i.e., the object *a*—finally occupies the place of the agent of a psychoanalytic interpellation resulting in the production of the (pseudo)couple (or perhaps a para-couple in the sense of logical, or paramilitary, paraconsistency).

It is interesting to note that Lacan, in *Seminar XX*, perhaps surprisingly describes the mode of functioning of the psychoanalytic discourse with recourse to the notion of interpellation:

In the little writing I gave you of analytic discourse, *a* is written in the upper left-hand corner, and is supported by S_2 , in other words, by knowledge insofar as it is in the place of truth. It is from that point that it interpellates [l’interpelle] \mathcal{S} , which must lead to the production of S_1 , that is, of the signifier by which can be resolved what? Its relation to truth. (Lacan 1999, p. 91; translation corrected)

The psychoanalytic subject, the subject of the unconscious, was produced as the subject of the impossibility of ideological interpellation, and the psychoanalytic discourse now interpellates the subject of the impossibility of ideological interpellation itself so as to produce the lacking signifier which can resolve the subject's relation to the truth, i.e., to the truth which the subject was unable to symbolize and which hence remained present and persisted in the unreadable form of its symptoms. The key difference between ideological and psychoanalytic interpellation lies in the fact that the analytic interpellation breaks the link between identification and the object *a*, or between the Althusserian Subject (as the agent of submission) and its remainder which undermines the recognition of the subject in the Subject, as well as the subject's self-recognition.¹⁸ The secretion of object *a*, its separation, mentioned by Lacan, is indicated in the film with the birth of the children, i.e., with their separation from their mother as the first Other.

Remember that Norval's immersion into ideology rested precisely upon the relation between the "phallic signifier," or the symbolic insignia, on the one hand, and the objectal remainder, the object-cause of desire, on the other, i.e., upon the relation between *a* and "Z." And if this relation was the foundation of the fundamental fantasy (of the presupposition that the insignia of symbolic power provide the key to a successful sexual relationship), then the introduction of a distance between "Z" and *a* is the necessary condition for the traversing of the fantasy, or for the radical transfiguration of the mode of enjoyment which subjected the subject to the shackles of the ideological fantasy. At the end of the film, Norval's desire is confronted with a radical test, and the only way to remain true to it, the only way "not to give up on his desire," is to resolve his relation to the truth. And

¹⁸ "For the fundamental mainspring of the analytic operation is the maintenance of the distance between the I—identification—and the *a*." (Lacan 1998, p. 273)

what is this truth if not that “Z,” who appeared all along to be an external “disturber of love” or the condition of (im)possibility of the production of the couple, was none other than *Norval himself*? This point also provides an answer to the question of why the remarriage had to fail. It had to fail because Norval was pretending to be “Z” without knowing that he *is* “Z.” What he always-already was, he could only become through a series of failed attempts.

One evening Trudy and Norval go out on a date and lose each other. She supposedly goes to a party in honor of the soldiers leaving for the front, while he goes to the cinema where he awaits her return. And when after a long night of drinking and dancing Trudy finally arrives back, she finds Norval in front of the cinema where he had slept through the night. Was the farewell party a mere apparition, a fantasy; was all of this simply Norval’s dream?¹⁹ Were they only able to come to terms with the truth of the night spent together by forgetting, or repressing it? And is the fact of a night spent together not signaled by the plate they unknowingly leave behind, a plate with the inscription “Just married,” that is only seen by us, the viewers, and which we get to see *only after* Norval joins Trudy in his car and they drive home? I am pregnant, Trudy discovers, and married; however, I cannot remember the name of my husband and father of my child. This missing memory finds its only support in a meaningless signifier, in the “Z,” a mere “sound bite,” which triggers a series of associations, a series of attempts to grant it a proper meaning: Ratzkiwatzki–Zitzkiwitzki–Razly–Wazly–Razzby–Wadsby–Katzenjammer. However, not a single signifier out of this bundle of knowledge Trudy (§) is able to produce is the right one, none of the names can measure up to the missing “Z,” the chain of knowledge cannot exhaust

¹⁹ The party-scenes are effectively filmed like so many episodes out of a dream-life. And when driving from one scene of the party to the next the company of soldiers and girls repeatedly sings: *Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily, life is but a dream...*

its meaning, the translation of S_1 into S_2 , of “Z” into the chain of knowledge, produces a remainder of non-meaning, a meaningless remainder (a), which undermines it from within and hinders its self-totalization:

$$\frac{\text{Trudy}}{a} \rightarrow \frac{Z}{\text{Ratzkiwatzki, Zitzkiwitzki itd.}}$$

Matrix of the Hysteric's Discourse

This chain is brought to a halt and consolidated in a contingently chosen name, the first that comes to Trudy's mind and that she takes as her “own”: “Ratzkiwatzki.” But the scene of remarriage, in which Norval must assume the role of private Ratzkiwatzki, demonstrates that this name, Ratzkiwatzki, is not entirely adequate. And it is here that Norval's proper name emerges for the very first time as a kind of return of the repressed, as a symptom of the quest for the proper name that could determine “Z's” elusive meaning:

$$\frac{\text{Ratzkiwatzki}}{Z} \rightarrow \frac{a}{\text{Jones}}$$

Matrix of the University Discourse

It emerges in the form of a signature, a writing, a letter, as opposed to a word, to the signifier “Ratzkiwatzki,” with which Norval identifies himself when trying to repeat the marriage. And it is perhaps this difference between the letter and the voice, between the writing, or the signature, on the one hand, and the signifier, or the auditory image, on the other, that finally provides the answer to all the entanglements of the story, as well as the key that can resolve them. That which—in confrontation with the administrative, or expert, knowledge—was momentarily produced

as a symptom, namely as *symptom of the signature*, is resolved in the final reversal of the film when the floor is taken over by the remainder that suddenly finds itself in the place of the agent and from here—supported by the knowledge that up until now had remained inaccessible to the subject—*triggers the subject's analytic interpellation and produces its proper name*. The “Z” they were after throughout the film never resided in a letter, neither did it resign in a proper meaning, that was their error; it resided in the “sound object,” in the sonorous image they were unable to read properly, i.e., by the letter. “His name had a ‘Z’ in it,” says Trudy when trying to find her husband and the father of her children, and this triggers a series of failed attempts of pinpointing the proper name. However, the real and proper father and husband, the real father and husband with a properly proper name, was present all along, but could only be found after a number of detours and failed repetitions. Even though he was there from the very beginning, he could only be found at the very end—at the end of the film and at the end of the name. But of course: dʒounz.

$$\begin{array}{ccc} a & \rightarrow & \text{Norval} \\ \hline Z & \leftarrow & \text{dʒounz} \end{array}$$

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