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## LOUIS ALTHUSSER

1918-1990

One of the most influential and distinctive Marxist thinkers of the second half of the twentieth century, Louis Althusser came to prominence in the volatile 1960s. His work combined the new, scientifically oriented methods of structuralism developed by CLAUDE LÉVI-STRAUSS, JACQUES LACAN, and others with a commitment to political engagement and social transformation, laying the groundwork for a revolution in theory that affected fields ranging from literary criticism and cultural studies to history and politics. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)" (1970), his most influential essay and our second selection, analyzes how dominant social systems enforce their control—subtly molding human subjects through ideology—and how they reproduce themselves. "A Letter on Art in Reply to André Daspre" (1966), though less widely known, succinctly explores the relation of art to ideology.

Born in French-held Algeria, Louis Althusser was educated in Marseilles and at the Lycée du Parc in Lyons. In 1939 he was admitted to the prestigious École Normale Supérieure in Paris, but his academic career was delayed when he was drafted into the military during the early days of World War II. Captured in 1940 and held for five years in a German prisoner-of-war camp, he returned to the École Normale after the war, completing a master's thesis on the philosopher G. W. F. HEGEL (1770-1831) in 1948. He then joined the faculty at the school, also doing doctoral work under the supervision of the celebrated Hegelian philosopher Jean Hyppolite. His membership in the French Communist Party from 1948 on was also decisive for his future work. His relations with the Party hierarchy were never easy, and his writings were often attacked by official Communist philosophers—he was almost expelled in 1966 in a dispute over China's Cultural Revolution—but Althusser remained a life-long member. In *For Marx* (1965; trans. 1969), he encapsulates his intellectual career and how he became, in a famous phrase, "a Marxist in philosophy," noting three coordinates: the underdevelopment of Marxist theory within French communism, the impoverishment of French philosophy since the Enlightenment, and the political situation of the international communist movement in the post-Stalin era. Also formative were the political events in France during his lifetime, which he called "the terrible education of deeds"; these included the Spanish Civil War, World War II, and the cold war that followed.

Publishing little before the 1960s, Althusser undertook during the 1950s a long march through both the Marxist classics and KARL MARX's influences (notably Hegel and Ludwig Feuerbach, 1804-1872). His research culminated in a series of important texts, gathered in *For Marx* and *Reading Capital* (the latter coauthored with his student Étienne Balibar, 1965; trans. 1970), both of which quickly captured the attention of French and later British intellectuals. Althusser's interventions changed the face of Western Marxist theory, shattering the pieties of Stalinist dogmatism and the newer Marxist humanism, which, influenced by Hegel and the twentieth-century philosophers GYÖRGY LUKÁCS and JEAN-PAUL SARTRE, saw Marxism as an effort to recover an alienated humanity. Elevating the individual as its center of concern, humanism generally stresses human freedom and self-determination; in contrast, many structuralist thinkers argue that freedom of thought and action is limited by linguistic, psychological, or socioeconomic systems. Propounding an "antihumanism," Althusser emphasizes the scientific aspects of Marxism, in particular its investigation of how societal structures determine lived experience. His critique of humanism continues to help shape postmodern and poststructuralist theory.

Following Marx and FRIEDRICH ENGELS's central claim in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848; see above) that "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history



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Althusser undertook during the 1950s a long project to re-examine KARL MARX'S influences (notably Hegel and Engels) in his research culminated in a series of important books: *Reading Capital* (the latter coauthored with Edgar Morin, 1970), both of which quickly captured the attention of intellectuals. Althusser's interventions changed the landscape of the humanities, challenging the pieties of Stalinist dogmatism and the influence of Hegel and the twentieth-century philosopher JEAN-PAUL SARTRE, saw Marxism as an ideology that elevates the individual as its center of gravity. He argued that freedom and self-determination; in other words, that freedom of thought and action is not determined by socioeconomic systems. Propounding an epistemological break, he argued that scientific aspects of Marxism, in particular, are determined by lived experience. His critique of modern and poststructuralist theory. His central claim in *The Communist Manifesto* is that all hitherto existing society is the history

of class struggles,” Althusser held that philosophy was bound by political obligations and that the task of the philosopher was to “represent the class struggle in theory,” taking the side of the oppressed in ongoing ideological struggles with representatives of the ruling class. His injunction inspired the participants in the May 1968 student and worker uprising in France; but Althusser himself was absent during the turbulent events of May, recuperating in a sanatorium from a recurrence of the clinical depression that had plagued him following his experiences in World War II. After recovering he embarked on an ambitious new theoretical project addressing two questions: how a society achieves stability over time by reproducing its dominant relations of production and what conditions make social revolution possible. “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” stems from this larger project, which was never completed. Althusser would continue to teach and to write throughout the 1970s, but his illness worsened, and in 1980 he murdered his wife in a manic fit of rage. Declared mentally incompetent, he was sentenced to house arrest under psychiatric care and isolated from all but a few friends. At the time of his death a decade later, Althusser's reputation had reached a low point.

Althusser's major concepts—“ideological state apparatuses,” “interpellation,” “imaginary relations,” and “overdetermination”—permeate the discourse of contemporary literary and cultural theory, and his theory of ideology has influenced virtually all subsequent serious work on the topic. The problem that Althusser sets out to solve in “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses”—to determine how a society reproduces its basic social relations, thereby ensuring its continuing existence—is a perennial one in social theory, raised as early as PLATO'S *Republic* (ca. 373 B.C.E.). Plato thought that the key to sustaining a just state was controlling the education of its citizens, particularly its ruling class. Althusser concurs, while emphasizing that the dominant values in a society are for the most part endorsed by the majority of its members. Winning their endorsement is the work of ideology, and Althusser employs a structuralist account of the societal mechanisms that inculcate such consent, as well as a psychoanalytic account of how ideology makes individuals “subjects” of the dominant social order. Contrary to its colloquial sense, which suggests a set of ideas or beliefs that one chooses to espouse or reject, ideology for Althusser is not voluntary but the result of structural factors in society; he thus dispenses with the standard humanist notion of free will.

Althusser famously terms the societal mechanisms for creating pliant, obedient citizens who practice dominant values “ideological state apparatuses” (ISAs). Complex, numerous, and differing from one society to another, they are civil institutions that have legal standing (hence their designation as “state” apparatuses), including churches, schools, the family, courts, political parties, unions, the media, sports, and the arts. ISAs differ from “repressive state apparatuses” (RSAs), such as the police, the military, the prison system, and government, in several key ways: they are not unified, they operate primarily in the private sphere, and they attain their power not by means of explicit coercion or force but through implicit consent realized in accepted “practices.” One tacitly learns the practice of obedience to authority, for example, in church, in school, at home, or on sports teams. As Althusser notes, a dominant social order would not survive if it relied only on force, and he traces the rising influence of schools as the dominant ISA in modern society. Schools have supplanted the church in this role, instilling in students the habits that will make them productive workers in modern capitalist societies, so that they show up at the factory or office day after day without question.

Althusser's theory revises the standard Marxist definition of ideology as “false consciousness,” the explanation of why people willingly participate in the capitalist exploitation seen to undergird modern society. Many Marxists argue that we simply misunderstand what is really going on: believing that the economic system is fair and offers equal opportunity, rather than favoring those who control the means of production and capital, we identify with and emulate the owners and capitalists. Althus-







cultural over the economic. Although the breadth of his influence has dissipated some of the Marxist political charge of his social critique, Althusser's theory of ideology remains a touchstone in contemporary criticism.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Althusser's major essays are collected in three influential books: *For Marx* (1965; trans. 1969); *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (1969; trans. 1971), which contains "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses"; and *Reading Capital*, a reconsideration of Marx's masterwork written with his student Étienne Balibar (1968; trans. 1970). Subsequent collections in English, gathering his many essays, are *Politics and History: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Hegel, and Marx* (1972), which includes the long essay published as his first book, *Montesquieu: Politics and History* (1959); *Essays in Self-Criticism* (1974; trans. 1976); *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists, and Other Essays* (1974; trans. 1990); *Essays on Ideology* (1984); *Writings on Psychoanalysis: Freud and Lacan* (1993; trans. 1996); *The Spectre of Hegel: Early Writings* (1977); and *Machiavelli and Us* (1999). *Journal de captivité: Stalag XA 1940-1945* (1992, *Journal of Captivity*) records Althusser's experiences as a prisoner of war. Written during the mid-1980s, the autobiographical texts collected in *The Future Lasts Forever*, edited by Olivier Corpet and Yann Moulier Boutang (1992; trans. 1993), should be approached with caution, since many passages bear witness to Althusser's mental decline. The definitive biography is Yann Moulier Boutang, *Louis Althusser: Une Biographie (Louis Althusser: A Biography)*; only the first volume, *La Formation du mythe (1918-1956)* (1992, *The Formation of the Myth*) has appeared to date.

For early applications of Althusserian theory to literature, see *A Theory of Literary Production* (1966; trans. 1978), by his student Pierre Macherey; Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology* (1976); and Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981). The famous critique by the English historian E. P. Thompson, "The Poverty of Theory or an Orrery of Errors" (1978), declared Althusserian theory to be Stalinist. Perry Anderson recuperates Althusser against Thompson's charges in *Arguments within English Marxism* (1980). Of the many accounts of Althusser's use of structuralism, the best is Ted Benton's *Rise and Fall of Structural Marxism* (1984). For a central document in feminist debates over Althusserian Marxism, see Juliet Mitchell, *Women: The Longest Revolution* (1984). In *Althusser: The Detour of Theory* (1987), the best single critical account, Gregory Elliott helpfully traces the political background that shaped Althusser's work. *Imaginary Relations: Aesthetics and Ideology in the Theory of Historical Materialism* (1987) by Michael Sprinker is an influential treatment of the relation of Althusserian theory to poststructuralist aesthetics. See also Eagleton's overview *Ideology: An Introduction* (1991).

Gregory Elliott also edited an excellent collection of critical essays from a range of political and theoretical perspectives, *Althusser: A Critical Reader* (1994); see especially the essay by Francis Mulhern considering Althusser's impact on literary studies. *The Althusserian Legacy*, edited by E. Ann Kaplan and Michael Sprinker (1994), contains several important essays on Althusser's impact across the disciplines, together with a revealing interview with his onetime student Jacques Derrida. Elliott's *Althusser: A Critical Reader* includes a comprehensive bibliography of all Althusser's publications up to 1993.

conomic causes, which he says are decisive ISAs presents a fuller explanation of the allows for more complexity: ISAs operate ferent and contradictory ends (they are ties with the thought a generation earlier those concept of hegemony explains the ion through cultural institutions. ry relationship of individuals to their real urns to a subtle psychoanalytic account, maginary, mirroring, and subject forma- of the unconscious, ego, and superego, nagnary, the Real, and the Symbolic— ginary constitutes the preverbal realm in s; it is not a false but a primordial struc- y takes the place of the Imaginary, which lian unconscious, deeply influences how idual's subjectivity as generated through ing and recognition, Althusser describes s subjects." A pivotal stage in character when an infant recognizes him- or herself through our tacit recognition of being he call, "Hey, you there!" tical theory, and his writings on art and "A Letter on Art" briefly investigates the ith the Marxist "reflection" theory of art, t Lukács, Althusser observes that art is v materials; but he also reasons that it gies "to which it alludes." He thus grants ak[ing] us see" the ideologies "from which e sense from the inside." Other twentieth- defamiliarization, as defined by the Rus- or Shklovsky, and especially *estrangement*, ight Bertolt Brecht. Although Althusser cognizes that the arts are embedded in media, recording companies, Hollywood , shoring up the ideas and values of the ions. oted following, Althusser's work has had his reliance on a structural account of ly E. P. Thompson, the English historian ltural studies, have criticized his lack of npon's disavowal, Althusser's concept of as recounted in STUART HALL's "Cultural 2; see below) and as evidenced in DICK e (1979; see below). Althusser's concept he leading contemporary Marxist literary LETON and FREDRIC JAMESON. Eagleton's draws heavily on Althusser, though focus- ian how ideology informs art. Jameson's ocially Symbolic Act (1981; see below), f the ideological implications of the mod- s Althusser. Less faithfully, the French luence of Althusser in his focus on edu- "distinction" and creating "cultural cap- litional Marxist analyses by stressing the



ver abandoned his political positions. ctionary political positions played a ontent of his work. This is certainly provides us with a number of exam- (on Balzac, I refer you to the article ber of *Europe*). These are examples y found in the dialectic of ideologies. fucherey's article): Tolstoy's personal f the deep-lying causes of the *content* of the work of Balzac and Tolstoy is and in some way makes us 'see' it y a distantiatio inside that ideology, rtainly possible to say that it is an produces this distance inside their ut it is not possible to say, as you do, *Balzac abandon his political concep- e retained them could he produce his tical ideology could he produce in it* critical 'view' of it.

of the questions posed for us by the e are forced to produce an adequate which produce the 'aesthetic effect' rder to answer the question of the we must produce a *knowledge of art*. But you ought also to know that in ). The *recognition* (even the political ortance of art does not constitute a at it is possible to take as the begin- r to, or even Joliot-Curie quoted by e sentence attributed to Joliot-Curie, *reation, scientific creation*—a term- ), but one which in my opinion must in order to be able to pose the prober way. I know that the artist, and mselves in terms of 'creation', etc. It ow from Marx and Lenin that every language, the vehicle of an ideology, ivity productive of aesthetic effects. rt presupposes a preliminary *rupture neity* and the constitution of a body is essential to be conscious of the y to be able to undertake the consti-art.

is a sharp reservation about what you

scientific creation, which he thought might eventually prove an identity in their procedures" [translator's note]. Jean-Frédéric Joliot-Curie (1900–1958), Nobel Prize-winning French physicist and also member of the French Communist Party. Paul Éluard (1895–1952), French surrealist and lyric poet.

say. I am not perhaps speaking about exactly what you *want* or *would like* to say, but about what you *actually* do say. When you counterpose 'rigorous reflection on the concepts of Marxism' to 'something else', in particular to what art gives us, I believe you are establishing a comparison which is either incomplete or illegitimate. Since art in fact provides us with *something else* other than science, there is not an opposition between them, but a difference. On the contrary, if it is a matter of *knowing* art, it is absolutely essential to begin with 'rigorous reflection on the basic concepts of Marxism': there is no other way. And when I say, 'it is essential to begin . . .', it is not enough to say it, it is essential to do it. If not, it is easy to extricate oneself with a passing acknowledgement, like 'Althusser proposes to return to a rigorous study of Marxist theory. I agree that this is indispensable. But I do not believe that it is enough.' My response to this is the only real criticism: there is a way of declaring an exigency 'indispensable' which consists precisely of *dispensing with it*, dispensing with a careful consideration of all its implications and consequences—by the acknowledgement accorded it in order to move quickly on to 'something else'. Now I believe that the only way we can hope to reach a real knowledge of art, to go deeper into the specificity of the work of art, to know the mechanisms which produce the 'aesthetic effect', is precisely to spend a long time and pay the greatest attention to the 'basic principles of Marxism' and not to be in a hurry to 'move on to something else', for if we move on too quickly to 'something else' we shall arrive not at a *knowledge* of art, but at an *ideology* of art: e.g., at the latent humanist ideology which may be induced by what you say about the relations between art and the 'human', and about artistic 'creation', etc.

If we must turn (and this demands slow and arduous work) to the 'basic principles of Marxism' in order to be able to pose correctly, in concepts which are not the *ideological* concepts of aesthetic spontaneity, but *scientific* concepts adequate to their object, and thus necessarily *new* concepts, it is not in order to pass art silently by or to sacrifice it to science: it is quite simply in order to *know* it, and to give it its due.

1966

From Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses  
(Notes towards an Investigation)<sup>1</sup>

From *On the Reproduction of the Conditions of Production*

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As Marx said, every child knows that a social formation which did not reproduce the conditions of production at the same time as it produced would not last a year.<sup>2</sup> The ultimate condition of production is therefore the reproduction of the conditions of production. This may be 'simple' (reproducing exactly the previous conditions of production) or 'on an extended scale' (expanding them). Let us ignore this last distinction for the moment.

What, then, is the reproduction of the conditions of production?

1. Translated by Ben Brewster, who sometimes retains the French word or phrase in parentheses.  
2. Marx to Kugelmann, July 11, 1868, *Selected Correspondence* (Moscow, 1955), p. 209 [Althus-

ser's note]. KARL MARX (1818–1883), German social, economic, and political theorist. Some of the author's notes have been edited, and some omitted.



formula which will enable us to invert the order of the notional schema of ideology. Pascal says more or less: 'Kneel down, move your lips in prayer, and you will believe.' He thus scandalously inverts the order of things, bringing, like Christ, not peace but strife, and in addition something hardly Christian (for woe to him who brings scandal into the world!)—scandal itself. A fortunate scandal which makes him stick with Jansenist defiance to a language that directly names the reality.

I will be allowed to leave Pascal to the arguments of his ideological struggle with the religious ideological State apparatus of his day. And I shall be expected to use a more directly Marxist vocabulary, if that is possible, for we are advancing in still poorly explored domains.

I shall therefore say that, where only a single subject (such and such an individual) is concerned, the existence of the ideas of his belief is material in that *his ideas are his material actions inserted into material practices governed by material rituals which are themselves defined by the material ideological apparatus from which derive the ideas of that subject*. Naturally, the four inscriptions of the adjective 'material' in my proposition must be affected by different modalities: the materialities of a displacement for going to mass, of kneeling down, of the gesture of the sign of the cross, or of the *mea culpa*, of a sentence, of a prayer, of an act of contrition, of a penitence, of a gaze, of a hand-shake, of an external verbal discourse or an 'internal' verbal discourse (consciousness), are not one and the same materiality. I shall leave on one side the problem of a theory of the differences between the modalities of materiality.

It remains that in this inverted presentation of things, we are not dealing with an 'inversion' at all, since it is clear that certain notions have purely and simply disappeared from our presentation, whereas others on the contrary survive, and new terms appear.

Disappeared: the term *ideas*.

Survive: the terms *subject, consciousness, belief, actions*.

Appear: the terms *practices, rituals, ideological apparatus*.

\* \* \*

But this very presentation reveals that we have retained the following notions: subject, consciousness, belief, actions. From this series I shall immediately extract the decisive central term on which everything else depends: the notion of the *subject*.

And I shall immediately set down two conjoint theses:

1. there is no practice except by and in an ideology;
2. there is no ideology except by the subject and for subjects.

I can now come to my central thesis.

### → Ideology Interpellates Individuals as Subjects

This thesis is simply a matter of making my last proposition explicit: there is no ideology except by the subject and for subjects. Meaning, there is no ideology except for concrete subjects, and this destination for ideology is only made possible by the subject: meaning, *by the category of the subject and its functioning*.

By this I mean that, even if it only appears under this name (the subject)

with the rise of bourgeois ideology, ab the category of the subject (which ma the soul in Plato,<sup>9</sup> as God, etc.) is the whatever its determination (regional date—since ideology has no history.

I say: the category of the subject is the same time and immediately I add th *constitutive of all ideology insofar as defines it*) of 'constituting' concrete in of this double constitution exists th being nothing but its functioning in functioning.

At work in this reaction is the id one of the two functions of ideology of *misrecognition—méconnaissance*)

To take a highly 'concrete' exam knock on our door and we ask, throu answer (since 'it's obvious') 'It's me 'her'. We open the door, and 'it's tr take another example, when we acquaintance ((*re*)-*connaissance*) in recognized him (and have recogniz to him 'Hello, my friend', and shaki ideological recognition in everyday l are other rituals).

In this preliminary remark and tl point out that you and I are *always* practice the rituals of ideological l we are indeed concrete, individual, able subjects. The writing I am cu currently<sup>1</sup> performing are also in t tion, including the 'obviousness' wi tions may impose itself on you.

But to recognize that we are sub rituals of the most elementary e calling you by your name, the fact is, that you 'have' a name of your ( as a unique subject, etc.)—this re of our incessant (eternal) practice ness, i.e. its *recognition*—but in *knowledge* of the mechanism of t that we have to reach, if you will,

8. Which borrowed the legal category of "sub in law" to make an ideological notion: man is nature a subject [Althusser's note].  
9. In discussing the structure of the ideal cit his *Republic*, the Greek philosopher PLATO 427—ca. 347 B.C.E.) analyzed the structure of inhabitants' souls.



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with the rise of bourgeois ideology, above all with the rise of legal ideology,<sup>8</sup>  
 the category of the subject (which may function under other names: e.g., as  
 the soul in Plato,<sup>9</sup> as God, etc.) is the constitutive category of all ideology,  
 whatever its determination (regional or class) and whatever its historical  
 date—since ideology has no history.

I say: the category of the subject is constitutive of all ideology, but at the  
 same time and immediately I add that *the category of the subject is only*  
*constitutive of all ideology insofar as all ideology has the function (which*  
*defines it) of 'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects.* In the interaction  
 of this double constitution exists the functioning of all ideology, ideology  
 being nothing but its functioning in the material forms of existence of that  
 functioning.

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At work in this reaction is the ideological *recognition* function which is  
 one of the two functions of ideology as such (its inverse being the function  
 of *misrecognition—méconnaissance*).

To take a highly 'concrete' example, we all have friends who, when they  
 knock on our door and we ask, through the door, the question 'Who's there?',  
 answer (since 'it's obvious') 'It's me'. And we recognize that 'it is him', or  
 'her'. We open the door, and 'it's true, it really was she who was there'. To  
 take another example, when we recognize somebody of our (previous)  
 acquaintance ((*re*)-*connaissance*) in the street, we show him that we have  
 recognized him (and have recognized that he has recognized us) by saying  
 to him 'Hello, my friend', and shaking his hand (a material ritual practice of  
 ideological recognition in everyday life—in France, at least; elsewhere, there  
 are other rituals).

In this preliminary remark and these concrete illustrations, I only wish to  
 point out that you and I are *always already* subjects, and as such constantly  
 practice the rituals of ideological recognition, which guarantee for us that  
 we are indeed concrete, individual, distinguishable and (naturally) irreplace-  
 able subjects. The writing I am currently executing and the reading you are  
 currently performing are also in this respect rituals of ideological recogni-  
 tion, including the 'obviousness' with which the 'truth' or 'error' of my reflec-  
 tions may impose itself on you.

But to recognize that we are subjects and that we function in the practical  
 rituals of the most elementary everyday life (the hand-shake, the fact of  
 calling you by your name, the fact of knowing, even if I do not know what it  
 is, that you 'have' a name of your own, which means that you are recognized  
 as a unique subject, etc.)—this recognition only gives us the 'consciousness'  
 of our incessant (eternal) practice of ideological recognition—its conscious-  
 ness, i.e. its *recognition*—but in no sense does it give us the (scientific)  
*knowledge* of the mechanism of this recognition. Now it is this knowledge  
 that we have to reach, if you will, while speaking in ideology, and from within

8. Which borrowed the legal category of "subject in law" to make an ideological notion: man is by nature a subject [Althusser's note].

9. In discussing the structure of the ideal city in his *Republic*, the Greek philosopher PLATO (ca. 427—ca. 347 B.C.E.) analyzed the structure of the inhabitants' souls.

1. NB: this double "currently" is one more proof of the fact that ideology is "eternal," since these two "currentlys" are separated by an indefinite interval; I am writing these lines on April 6, 1969, you may read them at any subsequent time [Althusser's note].



ideology we have to outline a discourse which tries to break with ideology, in order to dare to be the beginning of a scientific (i.e. subjectless) discourse on ideology.

Thus in order to represent why the category of the 'subject' is constitutive of ideology, which only exists by constituting concrete subjects as subjects, I shall employ a special mode of exposition: 'concrete' enough to be recognized, but abstract enough to be thinkable and thought, giving rise to a knowledge.

As a first formulation I shall say: *all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects*, by the functioning of the category of the subject.

This is a proposition which entails that we distinguish for the moment between concrete individuals on the one hand and concrete subjects on the other, although at this level concrete subjects only exist insofar as they are supported by a concrete individual.

I shall then suggest that ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there!'<sup>2</sup>

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

Naturally for the convenience and clarity of my little theoretical theatre I have had to present things in the form of a sequence, with a before and an after, and thus in the form of a temporal succession. There are individuals walking along. Somewhere (usually behind them) the hail rings out: 'Hey, you there!' One individual (nine times out of ten it is the right one) turns round, believing/suspecting/knowing that it is for him, i.e. recognizing that 'it really is he' who is meant by the hailing. But in reality these things happen without any succession. The existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing.

\* \* \*

Thus ideology hails or interpellates individuals as subjects. As ideology is eternal, I must now suppress the temporal form in which I have presented the functioning of ideology, and say: ideology has always-already interpellated individuals as subjects, which amounts to making it clear that

2. Hailing as an everyday practice subject to a precise ritual takes a quite "special" form in the policeman's practice of "hailing" which concerns the hailing of "suspects" [Althusser's note].

individuals are always-already interpellated, necessarily leads us to one last proposition: individuals are 'abstract subjects'. Hence individuals are 'abstract subjects' they always-already are. This proposition

That an individual is always-already interpellated nevertheless the plain reality, access to all. Freud shows that individuals are always-already subjects they always-already are, since it surrounds the expectation of a 'birth' how much and in what way an unborn child is saying, very prosaically, if we agree to family ideology (paternal/maternal/child) a child is expected: it is certain in advance and will therefore have an identity as a child is therefore always-already a subject of the specific familial ideological context it has been conceived. I hardly need say that this figure is, in its uniqueness, highly significant and more or less 'pathological' (as assigned to that term) structure that 'finds' its place, i.e. 'becomes' the sex in advance. It is clear that this ideology and all the rituals of rearing and the relationship with what Freud studies as the genital 'stages' of sexuality, i.e. in their effects as being the unconscious. But

Let me go one step further. What way the 'actors' in this *mise en scène* are reflected in the very structure

#### An Example: The Child

As the formal structure of all ideological analysis to a single example, one ideology, with the proviso that the ethical, legal, political, aesthetic ideology

Let us therefore consider the Child as a rhetorical figure and 'make it speak' what it 'says' not only in its two dimensions but also in its practices, its rituals, its content. In religious ideology says something

It says: I address myself to you (the individual is called by his name, provides his own name), in order to be answerable to Him. It adds: God answers (Scripture having collected the Word), Papal Infallibility fixing it for ever: you are Peter! This is your origin, although you were born in t



which tries to break with ideology, scientific (i.e. subjectless) discourse

category of the 'subject' is constitutive of the concrete subjects as subjects, in that it is 'concrete' enough to be recognizable and thought, giving rise to a

ideology hails or interpellates concrete subjects as subjects, in that it is 'concrete' enough to be recognizable and thought, giving rise to a

at we distinguish for the moment between the abstract and concrete subjects on the one hand and the objects only exist insofar as they are

or 'functions' in such a way that it recruits them all), or 'transforms' (recruits them all) by that very precise definition or hailing, and which can be in no way nonplace everyday police (or other)

have imagined takes place in the world. By this mere one-hundred-and-thirty comes a *subject*. Why? Because he is addressed to him, and that 'it was not for me (or anyone else). Experience shows that it is not as if such that they hardly ever miss the hailing always recognizes that it is not a strange phenomenon, and one of the 'feelings', despite the large numbers of

ty of my little theoretical theatre I have presented in a sequence, with a before and an after, and a succession. There are individuals (and them) the hail rings out: 'Hey, you, it is for you (out of ten it is the right one) turns out to be it is for him, i.e. recognizing that it is not for him. But in reality these things happen in the ideological and the hailing or interpellation and the same thing.

individuals as subjects. As ideology is the ideological form in which I have presented ideology has always-already interpellates subjects to making it clear that

It takes a quite "special" form in the policeman's uniform. [Althusser's note].

individuals are always-already interpellated by ideology as subjects, which necessarily leads us to one last proposition: *individuals are always-already subjects*. Hence individuals are 'abstract' with respect to the subjects which they always-already are. This proposition might seem paradoxical.

That an individual is always-already a subject, even before he is born, is nevertheless the plain reality, accessible to everyone and not a paradox at all. Freud shows that individuals are always 'abstract' with respect to the subjects they always-already are, simply by noting the ideological ritual that surrounds the expectation of a 'birth', that 'happy event'. Everyone knows how much and in what way an unborn child is expected. Which amounts to saying, very prosaically, if we agree to drop the 'sentiments', i.e. the forms of family ideology (paternal/maternal/conjugal/fraternal) in which the unborn child is expected: it is certain in advance that it will bear its Father's Name, and will therefore have an identity and be irreplaceable. Before its birth, the child is therefore always-already a subject, appointed as a subject in and by the specific familial ideological configuration in which it is 'expected' once it has been conceived. I hardly need add that this familial ideological configuration is, in its uniqueness, highly structured, and that it is in this implacable and more or less 'pathological' (presupposing that any meaning can be assigned to that term) structure that the former subject-to-be will have to 'find' 'its' place, i.e. 'become' the sexual subject (boy or girl) which it already is in advance. It is clear that this ideological constraint and pre-appointment, and all the rituals of rearing and then education in the family, have some relationship with what Freud studied in the forms of the pre-genital and genital 'stages' of sexuality, i.e. in the 'grip' of what Freud registered by its effects as being the unconscious. But let us leave this point, too, on one side.

Let me go one step further. What I shall now turn my attention to is the way the 'actors' in this *mise en scène* of interpellation, and their respective roles, are reflected in the very structure of all ideology.

#### An Example: The Christian Religious Ideology

As the formal structure of all ideology is always the same, I shall restrict my analysis to a single example, one accessible to everyone, that of religious ideology, with the proviso that the same demonstration can be produced for ethical, legal, political, aesthetic ideology, etc.

Let us therefore consider the Christian religious ideology. I shall use a rhetorical figure and 'make it speak', i.e. collect into a fictional discourse what it 'says' not only in its two Testaments, its Theologians, Sermons, but also in its practices; its rituals, its ceremonies and its sacraments. The Christian religious ideology says something like this:

It says: I address myself to you, a human individual called Peter (every individual is called by his name, in the passive sense, it is never he who provides his own name), in order to tell you that God exists and that you are answerable to Him. It adds: God addresses himself to you through my voice (Scripture having collected the Word of God, Tradition having transmitted it, Papal Infallibility fixing it for ever on 'nice' points). It says: this is who you are: you are Peter! This is your origin, you were created by God for all eternity, although you were born in the 1920th year of Our Lord! This is your







st do! By these means, if you observe  
, Peter, and will become part of the

nal discourse, but at the same time

that religious ideology is indeed  
nsform them into subjects', by inter-  
to make him a subject, free to obey  
andments; if it calls these individuals  
they are always-already interpellated  
the extent that Pascal's Christ says:  
of my blood!'); if it interpellates them  
'Yes, it really is me!' if it obtains from  
lo occupy the place it designates for  
sidence: 'It really is me, I am here, a  
of tears; if it obtains from them the  
life or damnation) according to the  
od's Commandments', Law become  
his way (in the practices of the well-  
communion, confession and extreme  
all this 'procedure' to set up Christian  
ange phenomenon: the fact that there  
ole religious subjects on the absolute  
lute, *Other Subject*, i.e. God.

ew and remarkable Subject by writ-  
ish it from ordinary subjects, with a

ion of individuals as subjects presup-  
entral Other Subject, in whose Name  
ll individuals as subjects. All this is  
l the Scriptures. 'And it came to pass  
sh) spoke to Moses in the cloud. And  
d Moses replied "It is (really) I! I am  
isten!" And the Lord spoke to Moses

ject *par excellence*, he who is through  
m'), and he who interpellates his sub-  
y his very interpellation, i.e. the indi-  
erpellated-called by his Name, having  
was called by God, recognizes that he  
et subjected to God, *a subject through*  
t. The proof: he obeys him, and makes  
is.

and the innumerable subjects of God's  
terpellates: his *mirrors*, his *reflections*.  
od? As all theological reflection proves,  
e done without men, God needs them,  
e men need God, the subjects need the  
great Subject needs subjects, even in

the terrible inversion of his image in them (when the subjects wallow in  
debauchery, i.e. sin).

\* \* \*

Let us decipher into theoretical language this wonderful necessity for the  
duplication of *the Subject into subjects* and of *the Subject itself into a subject-  
Subject*.

We observe that the structure of all ideology, interpellating individuals as  
subjects in the name of a Unique and Absolute Subject is *speculary*, i.e. a  
mirror-structure, and *doubly* specular: this mirror duplication is constitutive  
of ideology and ensures its functioning. Which means that all ideology is  
*centred*, that the Absolute Subject occupies the unique place of the Centre,  
and interpellates around it the infinity of individuals into subjects in a double  
mirror-connexion such that it *subjects* the subjects to the Subject, while giv-  
ing them in the Subject in which each subject can contemplate its own image  
(present and future) the *guarantee* that this really concerns them and Him,  
and that since everything takes place in the Family (the Holy Family: the  
Family is in essence Holy), 'God will *recognize* his own in it', i.e. those who  
have recognized God, and have recognized themselves in Him, will be saved.

Let me summarize what we have discovered about ideology in general.

The duplicate mirror-structure of ideology ensures simultaneously:

1. the interpellation of 'individuals' as subjects;
2. their subjection to the Subject;
3. the mutual recognition of subjects and Subject, the subjects' recogni-  
tion of each other, and finally the subject's recognition of himself;
4. the absolute guarantee that everything really is so, and that on condi-  
tion that the subjects recognize what they are and behave accordingly, every-  
thing will be all right: Amen—'So be it'.

Result: caught in this quadruple system of interpellation as subjects, of  
subjection to the Subject, of universal recognition and of absolute guarantee,  
the subjects 'work', they 'work by themselves' in the vast majority of cases,  
with the exception of the 'bad subjects' who on occasion provoke the inter-  
vention of one of the detachments of the (repressive) State apparatus. But  
the vast majority of (good) subjects work all right 'all by themselves', i.e. by  
ideology (whose concrete forms are realized in the Ideological State Appa-  
ratuses). They are inserted into practices governed by the rituals of the ISAs.  
They 'recognize' the existing state of affairs, that 'it really is true that it is so  
and not otherwise', and that they must be obedient to God, to their con-  
science, to the priest, to de Gaulle, to the boss, to the engineer; that thou  
shalt 'love thy neighbour as thyself', etc. Their concrete, material behaviour  
is simply the inscription in life of the admirable words of the prayer: 'Amen—  
So be it'.

Yes, the subjects 'work by themselves'. The whole mystery of this effect  
lies in the first two moments of the quadruple system I have just discussed,  
or, if you prefer, in the ambiguity of the term *subject*. In the ordinary use of  
the term, subject in fact means: (1) a free subjectivity, a centre of initiatives,  
author of and responsible for its actions; (2) a subjected being, who submits  
to a higher authority, and is therefore stripped of all freedom except that of  
freely accepting his submission. This last note gives us the meaning of this



ambiguity, which is merely a reflection of the effect which produces it: the individual is *interpellated* as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i.e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection, i.e. in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection 'all by himself'. There are no subjects except by and for their subjection. That is why they 'work all by themselves'.

'So be it! . . .' This phrase which registers the effect to be obtained proves that it is not 'naturally' so ('naturally': outside the prayer, i.e. outside the ideological intervention). This phrase proves that it *has* to be so if things are to be what they must be, and let us let the words slip: if the reproduction of the relations of production is to be assured, even in the processes of production and circulation, every day, in the 'consciousness', i.e. in the attitudes of the individual-subjects occupying the posts which the socio-technical division of labour assigns to them in production, exploitation, repression, ideologization, scientific practice, etc. Indeed, what is really in question in this mechanism of the mirror recognition of the Subject and of the individuals interpellated as subjects, and of the guarantee given by the Subject to the subjects if they freely accept their subjection to the Subject's 'commandments'? The reality in question in this mechanism, the reality which is necessarily *ignored* (*méconnue*) in the very forms of recognition (ideology = misrecognition/ignorance) is indeed, in the last resort, the reproduction of the relations of production and of the relations deriving from them.

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P.S.

\* \* \*

I have suggested that the ideologies were *realized* in institutions, in their rituals and their practices, in the ISAs. We have seen that on this basis they contribute to that form of class struggle, vital for the ruling class, the reproduction of the relations of production. But the point of view itself, however real, is still an abstract one.

In fact, the State and its Apparatuses only have meaning from the point of view of the class struggle, as an apparatus of class struggle ensuring class oppression and guaranteeing the conditions of exploitation and its reproduction. But there is no class struggle without antagonistic classes. Whoever says class struggle of the ruling class says resistance, revolt and class struggle of the ruled class.

\* \* \*

It is only from the point of view of the classes, i.e. of the class struggle, that it is possible to explain the ideologies existing in a social formation. Not only is it from this starting-point that it is possible to explain the realization of the ruling ideology in the ISAs and of the forms of class struggle for which the ISAs are the seat and the stake. But it is also and above all from this starting-point that it is possible to understand the provenance of the ideologies which are realized in the ISAs and confront one another there. For if it is true that the ISAs represent the *form* in which the ideology of the ruling class must *necessarily* be realized, and the form in which the ideology of the