Returning to Althusser’s rather speculative text on ideology, ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes towards an Investigation’² may perhaps appear to be a demand that one engages in a repetition of a movement towards an impasse. Indeed, despite the permeation of the concepts developed by Althusser therein, and despite the recognition that this initial attempt of Althusser to arrive at a ‘scientific’ theory of ideology, one that accounted for its fundamental role of ensuring the reproduction of the conditions of production strictly within the field of materialist philosophy without an implicit ideality polluting exposition or conception, set the groundwork for and gave impetus to an array of thinkers who would analyse and write the materiality of ideology and clarify, expound and problematise this initial analysis,³ there has likewise been various criticisms of Althusser’s conception of ideology. Such criticisms span condemnation from certain Marxists claiming it is restrictively functionalist and, due to this, Althusser’s conception leaves no non-interpellated space for the subject of resistance,⁴ with other thinkers such as Badiou and

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Žižek—though both for different reasons—coming to similar conclusions, as well as more nuanced, less reductive critiques which bring into relief the internal inconsistencies and difficulties within the text itself in order to revise and further develop Althusser’s theory.

It is my contention, however, that the recent resurgence of interest in the work of Althusser can instigate a return to the fundamental insights developed by therein in a way that can be utilised to appropriately inform left theory and, pertinent to this discussion in particular, the significance of and how one understands ideology, without becoming mired in impasses or rebukes and criticism which entail outright dismissals; of course, there are plenty of people (contemporaneously) who engage with and who cannot be accused of taking such a stance towards Althusser as well as committed Althusser scholars—for those who are neither, I hope the following can inform their approach to the subject, and for those who are I hope it is interest.

What is of primary significance in this return is that, despite the flaws in Althusser’s own account, however one might situate these flaws, there is nonetheless the possibility—with Althusser as the point of departure—in considering ideology in its form, actuality and materiality, against the naïve and/or mystifying conception of ideology which abounds, especially among the left, which might be summarised as either or both of the following: ideology is the dominant discourse of power in its ubiquity, e.g., simply what the state says or what society and its dominant discourses say; and, ideology as false consciousness, that is, thought and behaviour corresponding to and merely reflecting the given reality of a social organization which effectively misrecognise the (‘unthought’) real material conditions of social organization, including the worker who sees his reality as ‘natural’ and cannot think his or her exploitation, the capitalist who is convinced of his beneficence and believes in the ‘free market,’ the woman who makes her own body an object of consumption, unenlightened to modes of patriarchal oppression, or the woman who believes that her submission to prostitution, conceived of as work, is an act of liberation because, effacing the selling of bodies and instead understanding the activity as a contract relation with monetary exchange for labour or services as in any other form of work, financial compensation for the supply of her body to the

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5 Regarding Badiou’s relationship to Althusser and his critique that Althusser cannot account for the revolutionary subject, as well as an analysis and discussion of the ISA text in relation to this, see: <http://www.academia.edu/20302539/Althusser's_Lacan_Alain_Badious_Critique_of_Althusser's_Theory_of_the_Subject_2013_Revised_2016_>

In regards to Žižek’s critique of Althusser, the most pertinent elaboration is contained in The Sublime Object of Ideology (London & New York: Verso, 1989) [hereafter cited as Žižek 1989]. It should be stated that Žižek’s critique encompasses more than hitherto stated, albeit, arguably, he still fosters a reductive understanding of Althussierian interpellation. Cf. Won Choi, ‘From or Toward the Symbolic? A Critique of Žižek’s The Sublime Object of Ideology’: <http://scholar.oxy.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1022&amp;context=decalages>.

market’s demand\footnote{One can add: the notion of ‘supply and demand’ \textit{qua} capitalist economic form or function embedded in this position of ideological misrecognition is an ideological misrecognition itself.} is \textit{eo ipso} an individual possessing and asserting agency and thus an act of liberation, the ideologue who concerns him- or herself with producing, say, economic theory in the capacity of a professional academic, university teacher or intellectual in the service of justifying the capitalist mode of production, and so on. In all cases: the quasi-internalisation of the discourses of power and/or the given reality of the current organization of society is the meaning of the subject of ideology, and one can be made aware, educated, enlightened, to how these discourses of power serve power, as opposed to something like ‘what is really the case,’ or ‘mere facts,’ or ‘the truth,’ and to how ‘false consciousness’ has duped them into thinking that serving another’s
interest is serving their own interest, whereas in actuality it is at the cost of ignoring their own interest.

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8 To be clear, this view of ‘false consciousness’ doesn’t occur in serious Marxian theory, despite it being, at times, evoked by the (naïve) left; certainly Lukács’ use of the term, in inverted commas, in reference to Engel’s letter to Franz Mehring (July 14, 1893) does not signify this nor does his conceptualising of this term simply equate to this notion as described (see ‘Class Consciousness,’ pp. 46–82 in History and Class Consciousness [trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971)], in particular pp. 49–55: ‘…in this historiography with its search for “sociological” laws or its formalistic rationale, we find the reflection of man’s plight in bourgeois society and of his helpless enslavement by the forces of production. “To them, their own social action”, Marx remarks, “takes the form of the action of objects which rule the producers instead of being ruled by them”. This law was expressed most clearly and coherently in the purely natural and rational laws of classical economics. Marx retorted with the demand for a historical critique of economics which resolves the totality of the reified objectivities of social and economic life into relations between men. Capital and with it every form in which the national economy objectifies itself is, according to Marx, “not a thing but a social relation between persons mediated through things”.

‘However, by reducing the objectivity of the social institutions so hostile to man to relations between men, Marx also does away with the false implications of the irrationalist and individualist principle, i.e. the other side of the dilemma. For to eliminate the objectivity attributed both to social institutions inimical to man and to their historical evolution means the restoration of this objectivity to their underlying basis, to the relations between men; it does not involve the elimination of laws and objectivity independent of the will of man and in particular the wills and thoughts of individual men. It simply means that this objectivity is the self-objectification of human society at a particular stage in its development; its laws hold good only within the framework of the historical context which produced them and which is in turn determined by them.

‘It might look as though by dissolving the dilemma in this manner we were denying consciousness any decisive role in the process of history. It is true that the conscious reflexes of the different stages of economic growth remain historical facts of great importance; it is true that while dialectical materialism is itself the product of this process, it does not deny that men perform their historical deeds themselves and that they do so consciously. But as Engels emphasises in a letter to Mehring, this consciousness is false. However, the dialectical method does not permit us simply to proclaim the “falseness” of this consciousness and to persist in an inflexible confrontation of true and false. On the contrary, it requires us to investigate this “false consciousness” concretely as an aspect of the historical totality and as a stage in the historical process.

‘Of course bourgeois historians also attempt such concrete analyses; indeed they reproach historical materialists with violating the concrete uniqueness of historical events. Where they go wrong is in their belief that the concrete can be located in the empirical individual of history (“individual” here can refer to an individual man, class or people) and in his empirically given (and hence psychological or mass-psychological) consciousness. And just when they imagine that they have discovered the most concrete thing of all: society as a concrete totality, the system of production at a given point in history and the resulting division of society into classes-they are in fact at the furthest remove from it. In missing the mark they mistake something wholly abstract for the concrete. “These relations,” Marx states, “are not those between one individual and another, but between worker and capitalist, tenant and landlord, etc. Eliminate these relations and you abolish the whole of society; your Prometheus will then be nothing more than a spectre without arms or legs. . . .”

‘Concrete analysis means then: the relation to society as a whole. For only when this relation is established does the consciousness of their existence that men have at any given time emerge in all its essential characteristics. It appears, on the one hand, as something which is subjectively justified in the social and historical situation, as something which can and should be understood, i.e. as “right”. At the same time, objectively, it by-passes the essence of the evolution of society and fails to pinpoint it and express it adequately. That is to say, objectively, it appears as a “false consciousness”. On the other hand, we may see the same consciousness as something which fails subjectively to reach its self-appointed goals, while furthering and realising the objective aims of society of which it is ignorant and which it did not choose.

‘This two-fold dialectical determination of “false consciousness” constitutes an analysis far removed from the naïve description of what men in fact thought, felt and wanted at any moment in history and from any given point in the class structure. I do not wish to deny the great importance of this, but it remains after all merely the material of genuine historical analysis. The relation with concrete totality and the dialectical determinants arising from it transcend pure description and yield the category of objective possibility. By relating consciousness to the whole of society it becomes possible to infer the thoughts and feelings which men would have in a particular situation if they were able to assess both it and the interests arising from it in their impact on immediate action and on the whole structure of society.

‘That is to say, it would be possible to infer the thoughts and feelings appropriate to their objective situation. The number of such situations is not unlimited in any society. However much detailed researches are able to refine
social typologies there will always be a number of clearly distinguished basic types whose characteristics are determined by the types of position available in the process of production. Now class consciousness consists in fact of the appropriate and rational reactions “imputed” [zugeschrieben] to a particular typical position in the process of production. This consciousness is, therefore, neither the sum nor the average of what is thought or felt by the single individuals who make up the class. And yet the historically significant actions of the class as a whole are determined in the last resort by this consciousness and not by the thought of the individual—and these actions can be understood only by reference to this consciousness.

This analysis establishes right from the start the distance that separates class consciousness from the empirically given, and from the psychologically describable and explicable ideas which men form about their situation in life. But it is not enough just to state that this distance exists or even to define its implications in a formal and general way. We must discover, firstly, whether it is a phenomenon that differs according to the manner in which the various classes are related to society as a whole and whether the differences are so great as to produce qualitative distinctions. And we must discover, secondly, the practical significance of these different possible relations between the objective economic totality, the imputed class consciousness and the real, psychological thoughts of men about their lives. We must discover, in short, the practical, historical function of class consciousness.

Only after such preparatory formulations can we begin to exploit the category of objective possibility systematically. The first question we must ask is how far is it in fact possible to discern the whole economy of a society from inside it? It is essential to transcend the limitations of particular individuals caught up in their own narrow prejudices. But it is no less vital not to overstep the frontier fixed for them by the economic structure of society and establishing their position in it. Regarded abstractly and formally, then, class consciousness implies a class-conditioned unconsciousness of ones own [sic] socio-historical and economic condition. This condition is given as a definite structural relation, a definite formal nexus which appears to govern the whole of life. The “falseness”, the illusion implicit in this situation is in no sense arbitrary; it is simply the intellectual reflex of the objective economic structure. Thus, for example, “the value or price of labour-power takes on the appearance of the price or value of labour itself …” and “the illusion is created that the totality is paid labour. . . . In contrast to that, under slavery even that portion of labour which is paid for appears unpaid for.” Now it requires the most painstaking historical analysis to use the category of objective possibility so as to isolate the conditions in which this illusion can be exposed and a real connection with the totality established. For if from the vantage point of a particular class the totality of existing society is not visible; if a class thinks the thoughts imputable to it and which bear upon its interests right through to their logical conclusion and yet fails to strike at the heart of that totality, then such a class is doomed to play only a subordinate role. It can never influence the course of history in either an conservative or progressive direction. Such classes are normally condemned to passivity [sic], to an unstable oscillation between the ruling and the revolutionary classes, and if perchance they do erupt then such explosions are purely elemental and aimless. They may win a few battles but they are doomed to ultimate defeat.

For a class to be ripe for hegemony means that its interests and consciousness enable it to organise the whole of society in accordance with those interests. The crucial question in every class struggle is this: which class possesses this capacity and this consciousness at the decisive moment? This does not preclude the use of force. It does not mean that the class-interests destined to prevail and thus to uphold the interests of society as a whole can be guaranteed an automatic victory. On the contrary, such a transfer of power can often only be brought about by the most ruthless use of force (as e.g. the primitive accumulation of capital). But it often turns out that questions of class consciousness prove to be decisive in just those situations where force is unavoidable and where classes are locked in a life-and-death-struggle. Thus the noted Hungarian Marxist Erwin Szabó is mistaken in criticising Engels for maintaining that the Great Peasant War (of 1525) was essentially a reactionary movement. Szabó argues that the peasants’ revolt was suppressed only by the ruthless use of force and that its defeat was not grounded in socio-economic factors and in the class consciousness of the peasants. He overlooks the fact that the deepest reason for the weakness of the peasantry and the superior strength of the princes is to be sought in class consciousness. Even the most cursory student of the military aspects of the Peasants’ War can easily convince himself of this.

It must not be thought, however, that all classes ripe for hegemony have a class consciousness with the same inner structure. Everything hinges on the extent to which they can become conscious of the actions they need to perform in order to obtain and organise power. The question then becomes: how far does the class concerned perform the actions history has imposed on it “consciously” or “unconsciously”? And is that consciousness “true” or “false”. These distinctions are by no means academic. Quite apart from problems of culture where such fissures and dissonances are crucial, in all practical matters too the fate of a class depends on its ability to elucidate and solve the problems with which history confronts it. And here it becomes transparently obvious that class consciousness is concerned neither with the thoughts of individuals, however advanced, nor with the state of scientific knowledge. For example, it is quite clear that ancient society was broken economically by the limitations of a system built on slavery. But it is equally clear that neither the ruling classes nor the classes that rebelled against them in the name of revolution or reform could perceive this. In consequence the practical emergence of these problems meant that the society was necessarily and irremediably doomed.
Marcuse seems to be the only serious theorist who really uses the term in such a manner (see, e.g., One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society [Oxon & New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964], i.e.: ‘I have just suggested that the concept of alienation seems to become questionable when the individuals identify themselves with the existence which is imposed upon them and have in it their own development and satisfaction. This identification is not illusion but reality. However, the reality constitutes a more progressive stage of alienation. The latter has become entirely objective; the subject which is alienated is swallowed up by its alienated existence. There is only one dimension, and it is everywhere and in all forms. The achievements of progress defy ideological indictment as well as justification; before their tribunal, the “false consciousness” of their rationality becomes the true consciousness.’ [p. 13] ‘Moreover, this concept is impeccable in its semantic exactness because it means exactly what it says—namely, that it is really the electorate which imposes its directives on the representatives, and not the representatives who impose their directives on the electorate which then selects and re-elects the representatives. An autonomous electorate, free because it is free from indoctrination and manipulation, would indeed be on a “level of articulate opinion and ideology” which is not likely to be found. Therefore, the concept has to be rejected as “unrealistic”—has to be if one accepts the factually prevailing level of opinion and ideology as prescribing the valid criteria for sociological analysis. And if indoctrination and manipulation have reached the stage where the prevailing level of opinion has become a level of falsehood, where the actual state of affairs is no longer recognized as that which it is, then an analysis which is methodologically committed to reject transitive concepts commits itself to a false consciousness. Its very empiricism is ideological.’ [p. 120] ‘Certainly it is quite natural, and does not seem to call for an explanation in depth, that the tangible benefits of the system are considered worth defending—especially in view of the repelling force of present day communism which appears to be the historical alternative. But it is natural only to a mode of thought and behavior which is unwilling and perhaps even incapable of comprehending what is happening and why it is happening, a mode of thought and behavior which is immune against any other than the established rationality. To the degree to which they correspond to the given reality, thought and behavior express a false consciousness, responding to and contributing to the preservation of a false order of facts. And this false consciousness has become embodied in the prevailing technical apparatus which in turn reproduces it.’ [pp. 148–49] And: ‘The neo-positivist critique still directs its main effort against metaphysical notions, and it is motivated by a notion of exactness which is either that of formal logic or empirical description. Whether exactness is sought in the analytic purity of logic and mathematics, or in conformity with ordinary language—on both poles of contemporary philosophy is the same rejection or devaluation of those elements of thought and speech which transcend the accepted system of validation. This hostility is most sweeping where it takes the form of toleration—that is, where a certain truth value is granted to the transcendent concepts in a separate dimension of meaning and significance (poetic truth, metaphysical truth). For precisely the setting aside of a special reservation in which thought and language are permitted to be legitimately inexact, vague, and even contradictory is the most effective way of protecting the normal universe of discourse from being seriously disturbed by unfitting ideas. Whatever truth may be contained in literature is a
Now, it isn’t that these notions fail to capture something about ideology, more or less, directing attention to something on the surface, so to speak; rather, ideology is fundamentally more than such notions allow. Moreover, such notions fail to capture and describe what ideology is and, with this, fail to properly address the relation between ideology and the subject of ideology in its most radical form. Admitting this and pursuing the question of ideology beyond these general terms not only has consequences for how we conceive of and think ideology, it also opens up a space of critique in relation to how one addresses the problem of ideology, at least if one is concerned with critiquing and overcoming (the dominant) ideology, e.g., those committed to left politics.

What I aim to do here is to explicate the Althusserian position on how ideology functions and how the process of interpellation should be understood, providing a reading of the ISA text which is committed to the aims of Althusser’s materialism over and against what can be deemed misinterpretations of the text. With this, it will become apparent that psychoanalytic theory, Lacan in particular, is essential to understanding the Althusserian conception of ideology, though, importantly, not in the manner which Althusser himself stipulated.

“poetic” truth, whatever truth may be contained in critical idealism is a “metaphysical” truth—its validity, if any, commits neither ordinary discourse and behavior, nor the philosophy adjusted to them. This new form of the doctrine of the “double truth” sanctions a false consciousness by denying the relevance of the transcendent language to the universe of ordinary language, by proclaiming total non-interference. Whereas the truth value of the former consists precisely in its relevance to and interference with the latter.’ [pp. 188–89]).

Suffice it to say, the phrase ‘false consciousness’ does not occur in Marx and is not a category the analysis of capitalism; whether a Marxist theory of ideology occurs in Marx is addressed by Althusser thus: ‘The German Ideology does offer us, after the 1844 Manuscripts, an explicit theory of ideology, but … it is not Marxist [. . . .] As for Capital, although it does contain many hints towards a theory of ideologies (most visibly, the ideology of the vulgar economists), it does not contain that theory itself, which depends for the most part on a theory of ideology in general.’ (Althusser 1971, p. 158)

9 I’ve refrained from mentioning the more general use of the term ‘ideology,’ referring—in the most general way imaginable—to any coherent or otherwise political position or ‘belief’ which stems from a liberalist notion of politics as the representation of interest groups and the resolution of antagonisms arising from different ‘ideological’ commitments. I’ve also ignored the use of the term ‘ideology’ employed as a pejorative, as exemplified by D. D. Raphael: ‘Ideology ... is usually taken to mean, a prescriptive doctrine that is not supported by rational argument.’ (Problems of Political Philosophy [New York: Praeger, 1970].)

10 I will not comment here on how Althusser further develops his thinking on ideology in later texts; I will attempt to address this in a future writing.
The ‘theatrical’ illustration in Althusser\(^{11}\) is often presented as the exemplar of interpellation per se; one becomes an ideological subject through the subjectivisation of the call. This typically produces the following interpretation: in a basic sense, a relation of power situates one as a subject and, effectively, one receives their ideological position through the action of an authority or an appeal to authoritative power. The interpellation, which makes material individuals into (ideological) subjects, proclaims: ‘You are this.’ In this act, one is subjected to a relation of recognition and is thus placed within the coordinates of ideology, recognising him- or herself as a subject of ideology and, in turn, one is subjectivised as an ideological subject. The logic inherent in this interpellative process is said to be speculative, imaginary (in the Lacanian sense) and logically analogous to—at least structurally—the mirror stage.\(^{12}\)

Let me briefly present what in Althusser this interpretation is taking as its material before problematizing this view and moving towards a different account of how one can understand ideological interpellation—one which emphasises the interrelational quality of the ideological interpellative process, that it is a structure involving the relation of (at least) two elements rather than the action of an individual acting on another, or an individual being acted on by… (i.e., what might be termed an (liberal) ‘individualist’ construction as opposed to a structural account), and one which situates the response, where responsibility is granted to the one who is interpellated, as central to the effect of interpellation in contradistinction to the above description.

The text reads as follows: ‘I shall […] 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)—note the inverted commas around these terms\(^{13}\)—by that very precise operation which I have called interpellation’—note too this term, often understood as a coinage of Althusser (and its technical use here can be given the status of a coinage by Althusser), interpellation, is derived from the Latin interpellatio (or, in the accusative, interpellationem), ‘interruption,’ which is derived from the verb interpellāre (interpellō), ‘to interrupt,’ ‘to interrupt by speaking’ (interpellation in English first signified ‘an appeal’ [late 15c.], though this

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\(^{11}\) What Althusser refers to as ‘my little theoretical theatre’. (Althusser 1971, p. 174)


\(^{13}\) Note too that the parenthetical qualifications here which stipulate *all* will need to be interpreted in light of the meaning of the qualification which follows in the text regarding the ‘nine times out of ten’ stipulation. I will address this in the proceedings.
word is obsolete; the word was adopted in English as a parliamentary term, from French, signifying ‘to question formally,’ ‘to publicly question’ in 1874); this root sense of the term should be kept in mind (though the semantic resonance of the term should not be entirely delimited by this more narrow meaning)—‘or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: “Hey, you there!”’ And Althusser adds in a footnote: ‘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”.’

He goes on:

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’.

This description is immediately clarified; namely, the temporal succession which is necessarily inhabited by the expression of the concrete example which evokes the nature of interpellation is to be bracketed in order to comprehend what the expression is attempting to signify. ‘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.’

With this admission, the temporality of this piece of ‘theoretical theatre’ can be placed under erasure in order to comprehend this petite histoire as an attempt to direct one’s attention to the logical structure of interpellation and the relation of elements within this structure.

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
without any succession. The existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing.\textsuperscript{17}

Hence, we should be careful to read this piece of ‘theatrical theory’ as a way of approaching the logic of structural relations or logical structure.\textsuperscript{18} Perhaps this is stating the obvious, though it immediately becomes clear that it is important to emphasise this way of reading Althusser’s illustration. In the first instance at least, when one confronts the way in which it has been interpreted by both those who have made use of this as a theory of ideological interpellation as well as the manner in which certain critiques have approached and reproached Althusser.

Let us look briefly at one significant instance which misses this point.

In the above I made reference to a certain reading of Althusser’s notion of interpellation which takes the aforementioned example in, let us say, a prima facie manner; an attempt to bring into relief the logical structure which this example is attempting to direct us towards does not take place. One possible interpretation which this type of reading generates is what can be termed the ‘disciplinary thesis.’ Henry Krips summarises this astutely:

The appropriation of the concept of interpellation by cultural studies, especially Screen theory, has been dogged by a persistent misreading. It has been and continues to be commonplace to take interpelling as a form of ‘discipline’ (in Foucault’s sense) or even ‘socialization’ in something like a traditional Durkheimian sense: determining who individuals are by pressing them into already formed subject positions.\textsuperscript{19}

Judith Butler, for instance, essentially equates the Althusserian notion of interpellation with the Foucauldian notion of subjectivisation. The most extensive analysis of interpellation in Butler occurs in her \textit{The Psychic Life of Power}.\textsuperscript{20} She identifies submission as a condition of subjectivisation

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{17} Althusser 1971, pp. 174–75.
\item \textsuperscript{18} One might identify a similar approach to the logic of structural relations being brought into relief through a narratological device, though with the relationship between the logical structure and temporality being given a different status, in Lacan’s ‘Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty,’ pp. 161–75 in \textit{Écrits}, trans. Bruce Fink (New York & London: W. W. Norton & Co., 2006).
\item \textsuperscript{19} Henry Krips, \textit{Fetish. An Erotics of Culture} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999). [Hereafter cited as Krips 1999.]
and thus attempts to conceptualise how the psychical apparatus operates in the determination of *subjectivity qua submission*, bolstering Foucault’s view of *subjection qua subjectivisation* with an analysis of the psyche. This view takes the vignette presented in the ISA text, removes it from its discursive function, attaches an applicationary use of psychoanalytic theory\(^\text{21}\) to it in order to invest it in a faux-dialectic of recognition, so as to, in turn, situate it in and make use of it in an individualism (both liberalist and culturalist) *qua* discourse of (internalised, intrapsychic) power relations. This use of Althusser is not only entirely detached from his theory but renders it malleable to the point of making it able to profess an inversion of itself: the centrality of the individual exceeds institutional and social structures, as if the example of a policeman hailing someone, understood narrowly as an authority addressing a concrete individual and thereby constituting a subject via a discursive, performative speech act, could be taken as utterly literal, despite the caveats imposed on it. Butler also outlines certain supposed limitations of Althusser’s theory—arising from an extremely reductive reading of the text—so as to propose the view, supposedly compatible with Althusser, that the ascension to ideological subjectivity depends on interpellation being understood in terms of an intrapsychic function of conscience; i.e., the condition of possibility for ideological interpellation is the individuated prediscursive agency which is called, or, perhaps, hailed by the (super-egoic) conscience so as to arrive at the formation of identity in a faux dialectic of recognition (according to the applicationary use of the *mirror stage*).\(^\text{22}\) This is done in Butler by ventriloquising Althusser. I quote:

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interpellation is in a sense foundational to her *oeuvre*—this is something which is taken up by Geoff Boucher in ‘The Politics of Performativity: A Critique of Judith Butler,’ pp. 112–141 in *Parrhesia*, no. 1 (2006) [hereafter cited as Boucher 2006], which itself can be considered a fairly conclusive critique of Butler (available online here: <http://www.parrhesiajournal.org/parrhesia01/parrhesia01_boucher.pdf>). For instance: ‘Because she locates the central dynamic of contestation in the vicissitudes of hegemonic norms in the “psychic life of power” within an individual, her theory remains confined to the perspective of the isolated individual either resisting their subjectification or confronting their oppressor. Having located the basis for resistance in individual psychology, Butler conceptualises this resistance in phenomenological terms of personal narratives and subjective melancholy, in abstraction from structural determinants such as material interests or crisis tendencies of the social system. These problems are most clearly exhibited in her repeated redrafting of Althusser’s scene of interpellation, which Butler grasps through the phenomenological lens of the “struggle to the death for recognition”. Progressive rewriting of this scene in the successive versions of her theory gradually erased Althusser’s concern with the *institutional* formation of subjectivity, and replaced it, via an exclusively cultural focus, with a concern for the interpersonal and intrapsychic dynamics of identity conflict. The final result of this, I argue, is evacuates the materiality of institutions and the reduces the social field to the sum of dyadic interpersonal collisions.’ (p. 114)

An interesting assessment of Butler’s understanding of Althusser’s notion of interpellation, along different lines, can also be found in Macherey 2014.

\(^{21}\) Note: the ‘applicationary use’ of psychoanalytic theory is essentially the academic application of psychoanalysis as an explanatory or interpretive tool. Hence, it almost always misunderstands psychoanalysis.

\(^{22}\) Cf. Boucher 2006, p. 120.
For Althusser, the efficacy of ideology consists in part in the formation of conscience, where the notion “conscience” is understood to place restrictions on what is speakable or, more generally, representable. Conscience cannot be conceptualized as a self-restriction, if that relation is construed as a pregiven reflexivity, a turning back upon itself performed by a ready-made subject. Instead, it designates a kind of turning back—a reflexivity—which constitutes the condition of possibility for the subject to form. Reflexivity is constituted through this moment of conscience, this turning back upon oneself, which is simultaneous with a turning toward the law.23

And further:

‘Submission’ to the rules of the dominant ideology might then be understood as a submission to the necessity to prove innocence in the face of accusation, a submission to the demand for proof, an execution of that proof, and acquisition of the status of the subject in and through compliance with the terms of the interrogative law. To become a ‘subject’ is thus to have been presumed guilty, then tried and declared innocent. Because this declaration is not a single act but a status incessantly reproduced, to become a ‘subject’ is to be continuously in the process of acquitting oneself of the accusation of guilt. It is to have become an emblem of lawfulness, a citizen in good standing, but one for whom that status is tenuous […]24

There is no justification given to this apparent explication. It is asserted despite the fact that this is clearly not Althusser’s view. In the ISA text (and Butler is in fact referring to the ISA text in this quote), we can read quite clearly: ‘[…] 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”’.25 To be clear, the supposition of guilt that is attributed to each subject in their relation to the law is significant, though understanding this in a rather simplistic sense of ‘the guilty conscience’ (whether the unconscious) is misleading and is such a departure from Althusser’s theoretical commitments that one might conclude that any reliance on Althusser in pursuing this position becomes redundant;26 moreover, we should emphasise the stipulation that the force of interpellation cannot

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25 Althusser 1971, p. 174
26 According to Althusser, ‘by analysing ideology in idealist terms as a form of “consciousness,” it fails to be materialist’. (Krips 1999)
be explained *solely* by feelings of guilty—one must assume Althusser asserts this qualification for a reason.

If one follows Butler one is bound to be lead done a path determined by a wrong turn. To complicate matters, the wrong turn, in one sense, begins with the understanding of interpellation in terms of the imaginary formation of the ego and the logic of the mirror stage, and in this way it is actually inaugurated by Althusser himself. I will come to a critique of this is due course; at this juncture I am simply aiming to outline the misreading and show that it does not overcome any aporia that may be located in the text. In Butler’s case, this consists of, primarily, why it is that people turn around when ‘hailed,’ and it is, as a problematic, taken as the point of departure. As Butler states:

Althusser does not offer a clue as to why that individual turns around, accepting the voice as being addressed to him or her, and accepting the subordination and normalization effected by that voice. Why does this subject turn toward the voice of the law, and what is the effect of such a turn in inaugurating a social subject? Is this a guilty subject and, if so, how did it become guilty? Might the theory of interpellation require a theory of conscience? 27

In the finally analysis, these ‘productive misreadings’ not only fail to overcome the aporia, they produce an aporia of their own. Geoff Boucher summarises this astutely in regards to Butler:

Butler reads Althusser’s vignette and not his theory, to claim that a passionate attachment to the image of the law that *precedes* subjectification is the basis for this identification, which makes it possible for subjects to recognise themselves in the call of conscience. The ‘subject’ is ‘driven by a love of the law that can only be satisfied by ritual punishment.’ This does not solve the problem, of course, but instead merely displaces it from categories of knowledge (the problem of how I can *know* myself before the mirror image) to the register of affect (the problem of how I can *love* my existence sufficiently to want to be called into being by a guilty conscience). 28

27 Butler 1997, p. 5.
28 Boucher 2006, p. 121.
But, with this said, how exactly does this fall within what has been termed the ‘disciplinary thesis’? Let us approach this more clearly.

In a rather confusing statement about Althusser’s ‘theoretical theatre’ of interpellation, Butler misconstrues Althusser and misrepresents Lacan, situating méconnaissance in the symbolic register and understanding it to be a way of refusing the imposition of recognition called upon by being named by an other—and the error is then compounded by her stating that Althusser then identifies the possibility of one escaping symbolic identification qua ‘misrecognition’ being in the domain of the imaginary. This rather odd account is proffered in order to establish a notion of the imaginary as something which can mediate the subjection to the symbolic, so that one is not entirely consumed or constrained by ideology (because the imaginary does not ‘immediately obey the law,’ i.e., does not obey the symbolic), from this, a kind of ‘respectable’ culturalist liberalism can be defended, wherein the site of resistance to repression is in the way individuals relate to performatives and symbolic constituents. This account is rife with terms taken from Althusser and Lacan, though their significatory value in their original contexts have been almost entirely expunged. And the import of all this to Butler’s view is predicated on an understanding of Althusssarian interpellation as a disciplinary function. The text reads:

Consider the Althusserian notion of interpellation, in which a subject is constituted by being hailed, addressed, named. For the most part, it seems, Althusser believed that this social demand—one might call it a symbolic injunction—actually produced the kinds of subjects it named. He gives the example of the policeman on the street yelling “Hey you there!,” and concludes that this call importantly constitutes the one it addresses and sites. The scene is clearly a disciplinary one; the policeman’s call is an effort to bring someone back in line. Yet we might also understand it in Lacanian terms as the call of symbolic constitution. As Althusser himself insists, this performative effort of naming can only attempt to bring its addressee into being: there is always the risk of a certain misrecognition. If one misrecognizes that effort to produce the subject, the production itself falters. The one who is hailed may fail to hear, misread the call, turn the other way, answer to another name, insist on not being addressed in that way. Indeed, the domain of the imaginary is demarcated by Althusser as precisely the domain that makes misrecognition possible. The name is called, and I am sure it is my name, but it isn’t. The name is called, and I am sure that a name is being called, my name, but it is in someone’s

29 Butler 1997, p. 96.
30 ‘Butler’s theory of performativity lacks a focus on institutions because it constantly gravitates to the pre-social kernel of the individual in primary narcissism; so, it necessarily tends to reinscribe the dualisms characteristic of liberal political theory and neglect the material aspects of the social formation.’ (Boucher 2006, p. 133)
31 Emphasis mine.
incomprehensible speech, or worse, it is someone coughing, or worse, a radiator which for a moment approximates a human voice. Or I am sure that no one has noticed my transgression, and that it is not my name that is being called, but only a coughing passerby, the high pitch of the heating mechanism—but it is my name, and yet I do not recognize myself in the subject that the name, at this moment, installs.

Consider the force of this dynamic of interpellation and misrecognition when the name is not a proper name but a social category, and hence a signifier capable of being interpreted in a number of divergent and conflictual ways. To be hailed as a “woman” or “Jew” or “queer” or “Black” or “Chicana” may be heard or interpreted as an affirmation or an insult, depending on the context in which the hailing occurs (where context is the effective historicity and spatiality of the sign). If that name is called, there is more often than not some hesitation about whether or how to respond, for what is at stake is whether the temporary totalization performed by the name is politically enabling or paralyzing, whether the foreclosure, indeed the violence, of the totalizing reduction of identity performed by that particular hailing is politically strategic or regressive or, if paralyzing and regressive, also enabling in some way.

The Althusserian use of Lacan centers on the function of the imaginary as the permanent possibility of misrecognition, that is, the incommensurability between symbolic demand (the name that is interpellated) and the instability and unpredictability of its appropriation. If the interpellated name seeks to accomplish the identity to which it refers, it begins as a performative process which is nevertheless derailed in the imaginary, for the imaginary is surely preoccupied with the law, structured by the law, but does not immediately obey the law. For the Lacanian, then, the imaginary signifies the impossibility of the discursive—that is, symbolic—constitution of identity. Identity can never be fully totalized by the symbolic, for what it fails to order will emerge within the imaginary as a disorder, a site where identity is contested.32

32 Butler 1997, pp. 95–7; cf. Butler 1993: ‘In Louis Althusser’s notion of interpellation, it is the police who initiate the call or address by which a subject becomes socially constituted. There is the policeman, the one not only who represents the law but whose address “Hey you!” has the effect of binding the law to the one who is hailed. This “one” who appears not to be in a condition of trespass prior to the call (for whom the call establishes a given practice as a trespass) is not fully a social subject, is not fully subjectivated, for he or she is not yet reprimanded. The reprimand does not merely repress or control the subject but forms a crucial part of the juridical and social formation of the subject. The call is formative, if not performative, precisely because it initiates the individual into the subjected status of the subject.

Althusser conjectures this “hailing” or “interpellation” as a unilateral act, as the power and force of the law to compel fear at the same time that it offers recognition at an expense. In the reprimand the subject not only receives recognition but attains as well a certain order of social existence, in being transferred from an outer region of indifferent, questionable, or impossible being to the discursive or social domain of the subject. But does this subjectivation take place as a direct effect of the reprimanding utterance, or must the utterance wield the power to compel the fear of punishment and, from that compulsion, to produce a compliance and obedience to the law? Are there other ways of being addressed and constituted by the law, ways of being occupied and occupying the law, that disarticulate the power of punishment from the power of recognition?

Althusser underscores the Lacanian contribution to a structural analysis of this kind and argues that a relation of misrecognition persists between the law and the subject it compels. Although he refuses to the possibility of “bad
What then follows is a presentation of neurotic symptoms understood as the imaginary resisting symbolic identification in the unconscious, a view which Butler justifies by misconstruing a quote from Jacqueline Rose.\(^{33}\) To be blunt, I don’t think it would be unfair to say that a rather cursory glance at, for example, Lacan’s use of the term ‘shifter’, the je as the designation of the subject of \(\text{énonciation}\) (distinct from the \(\text{énoncé}\)), as well as Lacan’s writing on the formation of the ego in the mirror stage and imaginary identification would clear up a lot of confusion in Butler’s text.

In any case, the meaning of this in terms of the *disciplinary thesis* is well-summarised by Krips:

Butler […] identifies interpellation with the workings of “power” in the Foucaultian sense of discipline […]. This allows her to theorise resistance somewhat differently than Lacan. In particular, she follows Screen theory in taking the imaginary as the site of resistance to interpellation […]. Specifically, Butler claims, the narcissistic wish to be recognized in terms of a particular linguistic category—the wish to have it said who I am—functions as a source of resistance to interpellation.

Butler gives this Lacanian position a novel Hegelian twist, however, by thinking of interpellation as a sublation of the desire for nomination. To be specific, the desire for a name may be thought of as encountering a limit or, in Hegelian terms, as being ‘negated’ by the desire for an injurious name, since such a name cannot be desirable. Interellation—the taking up of an injurious name—emerges, then, as a sublation of the desire for nomination. It follows that the imaginary desire for nomination opposes the symbolic process of interpellation, not in the simple sense of negating or contradicting it, but rather in the dialectical sense of sublating it, that is, incorporating its radical negation. In short, interellation emerges, from a productive tension between a desire for nomination and resistance to an injurious name. From this dialectical structure a further paradox emerges: ‘Only by occupying—that injurious terms can I resist and oppose it’. [sic]

subjects,” he does not consider the range of disobedience that such an interpellating law might produce. The law not only might be refused but might also be ruptured, forced into a rearticulation that calls into question the monotheistic force of its own unilateral operation. Where the uniformity of the subject is expected, where the behavioral conformity of the subject is commanded, the refusal of the law might be produced in the form of the parodic inhabiting of conformity that subdues the legitimacy of the command, a repetition of the law into hyperbole, a rearticulation of the law against the authority of the one who delivers it. Here the performative, the call by the law that seeks to produce a lawful subject, produces a set of consequences that exceed and confound what appears to be the disciplining intention motivating the law. Interellation thus loses its status as a simple performative, an act of discourse with the power to create that to which it refers, and creates more than it ever meant to, signifying in excess of any intended referent.

‘It is this constitutive failure of the performative, this slippage between discursive command and its appropriated effect, that provides the linguistic occasion and index for a consequential disobedience.’ (pp. 121–22)  

\(^{33}\) Butler 1997, p. 97.
Butler claims that this paradoxical conclusion of her line of argument marks a point of agreement with Foucault and departure from Lacan. That is, according to Lacan, Butler claims, the conflict between the narcissistic desire for nomination (which is on the side of the imaginary) and interpellative pressure in favor of an injurious nomination (on the side of the symbolic) must end in the defeat of the imaginary [. . . .]

By contrast, for Foucault (with whom Butler sides on this issue) no conflict between power and resistance ends in such dismal fashion. Instead of the tediously repetitive defeat of the imaginary by the symbolic mandate of the law, Foucault offers us ‘perpetual spirals of power and resistance.’ Butler locates subjects at the site of this endless conflict—an open spiral of imaginary sublations of symbolic mandates—through which individuals reflexively spiral around the question of who they are.34

Now, going to the root of this position, what is required here is to bring into the fore how this view stems from a misreading of Althusser’s notion of interpellation and what, in relation to Lacan, is needed in terms of psychoanalytic theory in order for it to be both coherent and meaningful—without negating the aims of Althusser’s theorisation, i.e., a properly materialist conception of ideology. What is important is to try to formulise, contra the above readings, Althusser’s notion of ideological interpellation in a manner which is true to his own terms and aims, even if such a formulisation yields different results to the ones which Althusser himself produced.35 My aim then is to show that interpellation can be understood in relation to how a subject responds to an antagonism within the symbolic and, with this, ideological interpellation per se can be conceived of as an operation which produces subjectivisation in the anchoring of the subject to their symbolic coordinates, thus providing the support of reality—and in this way, the interpellation is also tied to the imaginary, phantasmatic support conditioning ego relations—to the subject. The ideological operation, then, addresses a site of knotting and is constitutive of one’s ‘reality’. The imaginary is implicated in this operation, but it is neither the site of ideological interpellation nor that which acts as a resistance to ideological interpellation.36 (And, it goes without say, interpellation cannot be understood in terms of performativity.) Such a view, I contend, is in contradistinction to the

34 Krips 1999, pp. 159–60.
35 Given the highly speculative nature of the ISA text, one shouldn’t be surprised that one can come to different results using the same fundamental material.
36 To be clear, the Imaginary obviously plays a significant role in the coordinates of one’s ‘reality’—and the field of the Other does not preclude relation to the Imaginary or the Real. Of particular significance in relation to the Other and the Real is Lacan’s concept of ‘the gaze’ (see: Jacques Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis, trans. Alan Sheridan [New York & London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1977], pp. 65–119). For reasons of space, however, I must defer a discussion of how this relates to the thesis presented here; it should be clear, especially upon conclusion, that such considerations do not contradict the thesis I am proposing.
location of ideological interpellation in the imaginary register—which isn’t to say that the imaginary is not saturated by ideology\(^37\) —as well as the disciplinary thesis of interpellation.

To be clear, despite the criticism I’ve thus far presented, the disciplinary function of ideology can be included within a conception of ideology and ideological interpellation (especially in a manner more akin to [early] Foucault rather than Butler’s view), but, what I hope will become apparent, disciplinarity does not exhaust the stuff of ideology nor its function, and, likewise, it is not what, fundamentally, ideological interpellation is. Perhaps one could state that disciplinarity is a modality of ideology and not its essence.

And now that an alternative thesis has been proposed, it remains to be said precisely what this proposal means. In order to navigate successfully to this point, it is necessary to go via a further discussion of the text. Beyond this point, in the end, we will be able to arrive at a point where we can clarify what, according to Althusser, the actual materiality of ideology looks like.

\(^37\) Cf. Žižek 1989: ‘Ideology is not a dreamlike illusion that we build to escape insupportable reality; in its basic dimension it is a fantasy-construction which serves as a support for our “reality” itself: an “illusion” which structures our effective, real social relations and thereby masks some insupportable, real, impossible kernel [. . . .] The function of ideology is not to offer us a point of escape from our reality but to offer us the social reality itself as an escape from some traumatic, real kernel.’ (p. 45)
MISIDENTIFICATION: THE IMAGINARY SYMBOLIC

In order to progress towards a more coherent understanding of Althusser’s notion of ideological interpellation, first we must essay a clarification of Althusser’s use of the term ‘imaginary’ in the ISA text. Secondly, from this clarification, I contend, we can come to see that, what can be termed, the ‘mirror thesis’—which Althusser himself offers—should be reconsidered. Instead, one should consider Althusser’s ‘imaginary’ as belonging to the symbolic.

Let us then again address the text.

Ideological interpellation functions as follows: it is an operation of interpellation wherein a concrete individual identifies him- or herself with a representation of him- or herself thereby being recognised—read: the subject recognises itself in the other—within an ideological field of relations. It thus takes place within ideology at the same time as it constitutes the individual as an ideological subject. Hence, one can schematically (or, perhaps, topographically) separate two terminological referents which ideology designates: the field in its generality (‘Ideology’) and ideology in its particularity, that is, in the subject-other identification (‘ideology’); or, ideology in the site of the Other and ideology in the site of the other. The production of this operation is the materiality of the subject and, inextricably bound to this, the ideological subject.

What is significant at this juncture, though, is that this operation concerning representation and identification, wherein the subject forms a reflexive correspondence—this (other) is me—is understood as constituting ideological interpellation as an analogue of the mirror stage.38 Before proceeding further, and amending this account, we must address how is this established in the text.

First, moving along with Althusser, the requirement of a materialist account of ideology forces us to situate the subject as in the field of the Other (the symbolic order, the law…). (Note here that, as opposed to the imaginary, the symbolic resists identification, in the strict sense of the term). We read in Althusser:

[T]here 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.

38 See fn. 12.
By this I mean that, even if it only appears under this name (the subject) with the rise of bourgeois ideology, above all with the rise of legal ideology [fn. Which borrowed the legal category of ‘subject in law’ to make an ideological notion: man is by nature a subject,], the category of the subject (which may function under other names: e.g., as the soul in Plato, 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.39

(In regards to the historico-material history of the ‘subject,’ and the particular legal character of the ‘subject’ which is expounded by Althusser in the above quotation in order to emphasise the materiality underpinning this concept, which serves to both distinguish it from and demystify the dominant ideological conceptualisation—that of ‘Humanism’40—of the ‘subject,’ we can further cite, in the aid of elucidation, two commentaries on this text. Boucher writes: ‘we should remember that Foucault’s imaginary “soul” corresponds exactly to Althusser’s ideological “subject,” as a misrecognition of institutional rituals constituted through the category of the subject.’41 And in Richard D. Wolff we read:

[Althusser] sees the ISAs as quite literally imposing very particular subjectivities upon individuals. Had Althusser written later, he might well have used ‘identity’ synonymously with ‘particular subjectivity.’ In any case, he argued that ISAs do more than create subjectivities/identities in the individuals whom

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39 Althusser 1971, pp. 170–71. [Emphasis in the original].
40 ‘Humanism’ in all its guises, including ‘liberal humanism’ and ‘Marxist humanism.’ Cf. ‘The critique of Stalinist “dogmatism” was generally “lived” by Communist intellectuals as a “liberation”. This “liberation” gave birth to a profound ideological reaction, “liberal” and “ethical” in tendency, which spontaneously rediscovered the old philosophical themes of “freedom”, “man”, the “human person” and “alienation”. This ideological tendency looked for theoretical justification to Marx’s Early Works, which do indeed contain all the arguments of a philosophy of man, his alienation and liberation. These conditions have paradoxically turned the tables in Marxist philosophy.’ (Louis Althusser, ‘To My English Readers,’ pp. 9–15 in For Marx, trans. Ben Brewster [London & New York: Verso, 2005], p. 10) As well as: ‘When I say that the concept of humanism is an ideological concept (not a scientific one), I mean that while it really does designate a set of existing relations, unlike a scientific concept, it does not provide us with a means of knowing them. In a particular (ideological) mode, it designates some existents, but it does not give us their essences. If we were to confuse these two orders we should cut ourselves off from all knowledge, uphold a confusion and risk falling into error.’ (Althusser, ‘Marxism and Humanism,’ pp. 219–45 op. cit., p. 223)
41 Boucher 2006, p. 120.
they interpellate. They also aim to have such subjects imagine that their subjectivities/identities are internally self-generated.

 [...] ISAs serve capitalism in so far as they effectively interpellate subjects within meaning systems (including definitions of their own and others’ identities) that make them at least accept and at best celebrate capitalist exploitation.\(^\text{42}\)

As indicated by Wolff, the ideological interpellation addresses, effects, and to a certain extent constitutes the way in which a subject, or an individual, relates to the symbolic coordinates of meaning which condition how they conceive of their ‘identity’—we should here note that, in a Lacanian register, we should distinguish the signification of ‘identity’ indicated here from identification. Though we should be careful not to reduce Althusser’s analysis to what might be conceived of as the basis for a critique of identitarianism, even if it can be utilised in such a way, we can, accepting this proviso, highlight this point made by Wolff and keep it in mind as we come to see the notion of interpellation addresses an individual’s coordinates of meaning as being of central importance.

And following on from the above quotation, with a certain degree of liberalism in our interpretation, we can read the following as a kind of clue as to what Althusser is attempting to formulate here: ‘As St Paul admirably put it, it is in the “Logos”, meaning in ideology, that we “live, move and have out being”.’\(^\text{43}\)

If we move forward in the text, beyond the ‘theoretical theatre’ which proceeds from the above and which I have already quoted at length, we arrive at a further elaboration of how ideological interpellation is situated within the Symbolic. In a discussion on the character of ideology emanating a certain denegation of ideology, Althusser is able to conclude: ‘ideology has no outside (for itself), but at the same time […] it is nothing but outside (for science and reality).’\(^\text{44}\)

At this juncture let us propose an interpretative formulation.

The subjective effect of ideology has value only because the subject takes place within and is mediated by the Other—the Other is the site of ideological interpellation; meaning the interpellation (not ideology in general) addresses the symbolic coordinates of that which is subject


\(^{43}\) Althusser 1971, p. 171.

\(^{44}\) Ibid, p. 175.
to interpellation. In Althusser’s terminology, the *subject*, equated (in ideology) with, but nonetheless distinct from, the concrete individual, is restricted to this field; one must add that this theoretical position, however, *does not exclude the subject of the unconscious*. In fact, unformulated and undesignated as it is, it necessarily must presuppose it for the sake of theoretical coherence.

With this interpretation, we can see why Althusser grants Ideology an ahistorical, eternal character whilst also admitting the historical character of ideology in relation to the way in which particular (concrete) individuals find themselves in relation to ideology—a distinction which is later formulated as: ‘the “mechanism” of ideology *in general* […] this mechanism must be *abstract* with respect to every real ideological formation’—and why, in the following movement by Althusser, we see, in a matter which does not contradict the aforementioned, he gives an *always-already* quality to ideological subjectivisation. If the formulation I have offered is granted, this movement in Althusser has a correspondence to the way in which the Other per se as the condition of history has no history, to the way in which one is always-already conditioned by the Other but nonetheless, in one’s particular ontogeny, must come to individually respond to their entry into the symbolic and thus situate oneself in a relation to the Other. In fact, at this moment in the text Althusser refers to Freud so as to clarify the seemingly paradoxical position he is presenting; one finds oneself caught up in the network of the Other which conditions, even preceding one’s own concrete existence, how one will come to situate themself in this web. One discovers that they

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45 Althusser 1971, p. 184.
46 See also: ‘To give a theoretical reference-point here, I might say that, to return to our example of the dream, in its Freudian conception this time, our proposition: ideology has no history, can and must (and in a way which has absolutely nothing arbitrary about it, but, quite the reverse, is theoretically necessary, for there is an organic link between the two propositions) be related directly to Freud’s proposition that the *unconscious is eternal*, i.e. that it has no history.

 ‘If eternal means, not transcendent to all (temporal) history, but omnipresent, trans-historical and therefore immutable in form throughout the extent of history, I shall adopt Freud’s expression word for word, and write *ideology is eternal*, exactly like the unconscious. And I add that I find this comparison theoretically justified by the fact that the eternity of the unconscious is not unrelated to the eternity of ideology in general.

 ‘That is why I believe I am justified, hypothetically at least, in proposing a theory of ideology *in general*, in the sense that Freud presented a theory of the unconscious *in general.*’ (Ibid, p. 161)

47 The notion I am attempting to express with this statement is a rather difficult one and the articulation of it here is perhaps not entirely correct or adequate and, hence, probably misleading. The following quote from Lacan may enable one to grasp what I am attempting to express with this formulation: ‘When something comes to light, something which we are forced to consider as new, when another structural order emerges, well then, it creates its own perspective within the past, and we say – *This can never not have been there, this has existed from the beginning.* Besides, isn’t that a property which our own experience demonstrates?

 ‘Think about the origins of language. We imagine that there must have been a time when people on this earth began to speak. So we admit of an emergence. But from the moment that the specific structure of this emergence is grasped, we find it absolutely impossible to speculate on what preceded it other than by symbols which were always applicable. What appears to be new thus always seems to extend itself indefinitely into perpetuity, prior to it itself.’ (The *Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II: The Ego in Freud’s Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1934–1935*, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli [New York & London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1988], p. 5) [Emphasis in the original.]
were caught in this long before they approached, perhaps with a crawl, and responded to, this network. The function of interpellation and the *stuff* of ideology is situated therein.

So, returning to the text:

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 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 respects 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 family 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 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.\(^{48}\)

If it is possible, then, to interpret Althusser’s position as relying on the psychoanalytic notion inaugurated by Lacan of the Other, the Symbolic Order, how is it that Althusser proposes the *mirror thesis* as a way in which to interpret interpellation? Primarily, there are two reasons for this. The first concerns the discursive retention of the term ‘*imaginary*’ and its sliding into equivocation.

\(^{48}\) Althusser 1971, p. 176.
In some basic way, we can understand the sense of ‘imaginary relations’ from Marxist discourse hitherto being reapplied in a fundamentally different manner to the conception of ideology presented in the ISA text. Prior to arriving at his central thesis, Althusser distinguishes the ‘imaginary form of ideology’ from the ‘materiality of ideology.’\(^{49}\) The first interpolates the classical notion of ideology as illusionary allusion (the notion which was addressed at the beginning of this text). This is outlined by Althusser as follows:

Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.

We commonly call religious ideology, ethical ideology, legal ideology, political ideology, etc., so many ‘world outlooks’. Of course, assuming that we do not live one of these ideologies as the truth (e.g. ‘believe’ in God, Duty, Justice, etc. . . .), we admit that the ideology we are discussing from a critical point of view, examining it as the ethnologist examines the myths of a ‘primitive society’, that these ‘world outlooks’ are largely imaginary, i.e. do not ‘correspond to reality’.

However, while admitting that they do not correspond to reality, i.e. that they constitute an illusion, we admit that they do make allusion to reality, and that they need only be ‘interpreted’ to discover the reality of the world behind their imaginary representation of that world (ideology = illusion/allusion).

There are different types of interpretation, the most famous of which are the mechanistic type, current in the eighteenth century (God is the imaginary representation of the real King), and the ‘hermeneutic’ interpretation, inaugurated by the earliest Church Fathers, and revived by Feuerbach and the theologico-philosophical school which descends from him, e.g., the theologian Barth (to Feuerbach, for example, God is the essence of real Man). The essential point is that on condition that we interpret the imaginary transposition (and inversion) of ideology we arrive at the conclusion that in ideology ‘men represent their real conditions of existence to themselves in an imaginary form’.\(^{50}\)

Following an explication of the problem of why one ‘needs’ ‘this imaginary transposition of their real conditions of existence in order to “represent to themselves” real conditions of existence’\(^{51}\) and the way this problem was hitherto addressed, Althusser presents his thesis:

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\(^{49}\) Althusser 1971, p. 162.
\(^{50}\) Ibid, pp. 162–63.
\(^{51}\) Ibid, p. 163.
it is not their real conditions of existence, their real world, that ‘men’ ‘represent to themselves’ in ideology, but above all it is their relation to those conditions of existence which is represented to them there. It is this relation which is at the centre of every ideological, i.e. imaginary, representation of the real world. It is this relation that contains the ‘cause’ which has to explain the imaginary distortion of the ideological representation of the real world. Or rather, to leave aside the language of causality it is necessary to advance the thesis that it is the imaginary nature of this relation which underlies all the imaginary distortion that we can observe (if we do not live in its truth) in all ideology.

To speak in a Marxist language, if it is true that the representation of the real conditions of existence of the individual occupying the posts of agents of production, exploitation, repression, ideologization and scientific practice, does in the last analysis arise from the relations of production, and from relations deriving from the relations of production, we can say the following: all ideology represents in its necessarily imaginary distortion not the existing relations of production (and the other relations that derive from them), but above all the (imaginary) relationship of individuals to the relations of production and the relations that derive from them. What is represented in ideology is therefore not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live.

It is from this vantage point that the following question then arises:

[...] the question of the ‘cause’ of the imaginary distortion of the real relations in ideology disappears and must be replaced by a different question: why is the representation given to individuals of their (individual) relation to the social relations which govern their conditions of existence and their collective and individual life necessarily an imaginary relation? And what is the nature of this imaginariness?

We can immediately see then that the retention of the term ‘imaginary’ in this manner enables Althusser to interpret the ‘imaginary distortion’ as having its analogue to the imaginary function of identification; however, the ‘imaginary distortion’ thus referred to properly corresponds to the mediation of the field of the Other for an individual and the way in which their symbolic coordinates are determined. Such a reading is further justified by Althusser’s insistence on ideology’s material existence; that which governs one’s conditions of existence and one’s collective and individual life is the Symbolic, which is the site of ideology, which can be conceived of as

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52 Althusser 1971 p. 165.
‘distorting’ one’s ‘real’ relations to the world if one evokes a state of immediacy prior to the condition of mediation, and, with this, the actuality of ideology is in itself material not just in its existence (‘the “ideas” or “representations”, etc., which seem [emphasis added] to make up ideology do not have an ideal (idéale or idéelle) or spiritual existence, but a material existence\(^{53}\)), but also in that it depends on the materiality of the Symbolic.

With this said, let us turn to the second reason, not disconnected from the first, which serves to establish the mirror thesis interpretation. This concerns the term ‘recognition’ and its relation to ‘méconnaissance’ and comes to the fore in the final pages of the ISA text.

If the text is carefully examined, we can see that the mirror thesis is only explicitly identified by Althusser through the force of the explicationary example (The Christian Religious Ideology). This is not to say, contra Althusser, that the formal structure of ideology is not always the same; rather, the object investigated as exemplar readily proffers this type of interpretation despite the fact that it is not wholly correct.

To be clear—keeping in mind this conditional of careful examination—prior to this section the mirror thesis cannot be defended on the grounds that Althusser uses the term recognition to refer to the way in which an individual engages in interpellation. Common as it may be to refer to imaginary recognition (méconnaissance) when explaining the theory of interpellation, this is not actually formulated until the end of the text. As Althusser makes clear, consciousness of recognition in the symbolic practices of one’s everyday life must be distinguished from ‘knowledge of the mechanism of this recognition.’\(^{54}\) Therefore, if we acknowledge this schematic distinction we are able to say that the ‘mechanism’ of ‘imaginary distortion’ is not necessarily Imaginary.

So why does Althusser indicate the contrary? Via the analysis of the Christian religious ideology, Althusser essentially makes a correspondence between identification as recognition and the psychoanalytic view of the formation of an ideal ego and an ego ideal in the constitution of the individuated \(I\). Let us navigate towards this point. First:

\[^{53}\text{Althusser 1971, p. 165. Further discussion on the materiality of ideology’s existence is undertaken below.}\]

\[^{54}\text{Ibid, p. 173.}\]
way that the subject responds: ‘Yes, it really is me!’ if it obtains from them the recognition that they really
do occupy the place it designates for them as theirs in the world, a fixed residence: ‘It really is me, I
am here, a worker, a boss or a soldier!’ in this vale of tears […] we should note that all this ‘procedure’
to set up Christian religious subjects is dominated by a strange phenomenon: the fact that there can
only be such a multitude of possible religious subjects on the absolute condition that there is a Unique,
 Absolute, Other Subject, i.e., God.55

Here we can say that, in line with our interpretation, the ‘big Other’ is necessarily presupposed by
the function of ideological interpellation. It is however obscured in the presentation by the use of
the term ‘recognition’. Althusser continues:

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 ten 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. All this is clearly written in what is rightly called the Scriptures.56

Thus far, it seems, the text is clearly directing us to the interpretation I’ve formulated against the
mirror thesis. It is at this juncture, however, where Althusser makes a crucial turn towards the
specularity of the subject, imposing in après-coup the ego-ideal/ideal ego structure and méconnaissance
interpretation on what has thus far been established and thus investing the understanding of
interpellation with the mirror thesis. Passing over the initial analysis of God and Moses, we can see
Althusser arriving at the following account:

God is thus the Subject, and Moses and the innumerable subjects of God’s people, the Subject’s
interlocutors-interpellates: his mirrors, his reflections. Were not men made in the image of God? As all
theological reflection proves, whereas He ‘could’ perfectly well have done without men, God needs
them, the Subject needs the subjects, just as […] the subjects need the Subject.57

55 Althusser 1971, p. 178 [emphasis in the original].
57 Ibid, p. 179. [Emphasis in the original.]
And with this Althusser’s analysis is formulated:

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 speculary: 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 giving 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.58

This formulation would situate the Nom du père to the Imaginary—how is this to be made sense of? We can see immediately that Althusser is accounting for the structurality of the symbolic with a descriptive term belonging to another register. The Symbolic is identified but it is explained with the use of Imaginary terms. Indeed, as Krips states: ‘in Lacanian terminology what Althusser calls the “imaginary,” namely, material distortions of the real conditions of existence, belong to the symbolic realm rather than the imaginary, that is, to the domain of symbolizable material realities rather than mental images.’59 Whereas we might refer to this relationship described here by way of references to a ‘master signifier,’ or the ‘point de capiton,’ instead we find Althusser evoking mirror relations and directing us towards the mirror stage and the formation of an ideal ego and an ego ideal in an equivocation between the formation of the I in the image identification and the entry into the Symbolic and a relation to the Other. If we return to Lacan’s text, we identity how this reduction of the Symbolic to the Imaginary obscures the analysis of ideology which has been previously established.

59 Krips 1999, p. 149.
It suffices to understand the mirror stage [...] as an identification, in the full sense analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes [assume] an image—an image that is seemingly predestined to have an effect at this phase, as witnessed by the use in analytic theory of antiquity’s term, ‘imago.’

The jubilant assumption [assumption] of his specular image by the kind of being—still trapped in his motor impotence and nursling dependence—the little man is at the infans stage thus seems to me to manifest in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the I is precipitated in a primordial form, prior to being objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject.\(^{60}\)

Notice that Althusser has subsumed this ‘function of the subject’ into the (logically prior) mirror identification function. Hence there is a reduction in Althusser of (symbolic) subject formation to (imaginary) identification. Whilst Althusser directs us toward the Symbolic, he at once effaces this by proffering the *mirror thesis*. One can compare this analysis to Krips:\(^{61}\)

Althusser’s position [...] corresponds with Freud’s view that the constitution of the subject involves both the formation of an ideal ego, that is, an idealized self-image, and an ego ideal, an externally projected standpoint from which the subject judges himself or herself in relation to that image. The ideal ego corresponds with the self-image in terms of which a subject is interpellated and, more specifically, with an idealised image that a subject has of himself as it is reflected back from the site of the Other. As Lacan puts it, the ideal ego is ‘the point at which he [the subject] desires to gratify himself in himself’ [...] The ego ideal, by contrast, corresponds with the position from which the subject judges himself in relation to his ideal ego, and thus the position from which ‘he will feel himself both satisfactory and loved’ (or not, as the case may be) [...] In short, it is ‘the point [in the space of the Other] from which he looks at himself’ [...]\(^{61}\)

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\(^{60}\) Lacan 2006, p. 76.

\(^{61}\) Krips 1999, p. 145. Cf. Macherey 2014: ‘[…] to become a subject is to be objectified or ideologized, in other words, to be welcomed into the realm of ideology, which is the fate of each child called to transform himself into an adult, according to the lesson that Althusser, along with others, developed in his text on “Freud and Lacan” by proposing a rectified and probably tendentious version of Lacanianism. And to be ideologized is to be socialized, under the authority of a common law that constitutes or “calls” the subject, in the sense that, for example, on the first day of the school year the call is made, as a summons thrown forth that, de facto, addresses itself not to those subjects that are already constituted insofar as it is itself the means by which they are identified as such, as recognized respondents to the call who, once this verification is effected, conform to the proper demands of the label “subject” or the label “student.” […] Of the subject, it is necessary to say in proper terms that “it produces itself,” in the sense that one says of an event that it produces “itself” [sel], by referring “itself” [sel] not to an alleged author of the event in question, upon which this author exercises complete mastery, but as the result of the process through an intermediary out of which the event produced itself, a process that is, as we have come to call it, a process without an anteriorly assignable subject. From here, the dynamic of subjection finds itself objectified, that is to say properly de-subjectified: it does
But what Krips misses is that in the final analysis, the Other is problematically conceived of as the Subject because of this rendering of the Symbolic relation as Imaginary relation; this is why Althusser can state: ‘ideology = misrecognition’. And this is why those who have read Althusser according to the mirror thesis are able to both interpret it in line with the disciplinary thesis and are able to set forth the problematic of identification, that is, the question of how it is possible for the interpellated subject to resist ideological identification.

Significantly, if the mirror thesis is granted, it is virtually impossible to propose a site of resistance, unless one misconstrues the entire theoretical field of reference à la Butler, since at root the Imaginary, in following the logic of méconnaissance, resists resistance to identification. However, if one takes the revised formulation of interpellation as presented, contra the mirror thesis, we can immediately grasp that this means that rather than running up against the problem of the impossibility of dislodging identification, because of the nature of the symbolic and its negativity—its necessary imposition of a space of mediation which is the effect of castration—resistance to (symbolic) ‘identification’ is inextricably bound to symbolic ‘identification.’ Interpellation as situated in the symbolic produces resistance to ‘identification’ whilst at the same time producing ‘identification’.

Because of this twofold process, the success of ideological ‘identification’ must include both the response and responsibility of that which is interpellated and the way in which ideological ‘identification’ is sustained through one’s enjoyment of ideology. This view also allows us to say that the Althusserian conceptualisation of ideology and ideological interpellation is much closer to not depend on the subject in person to become subject, which he achieves only at the close of an operation of which he is not the master, and in regard to it is possible to say that this is effected under constraint, insofar as it leaves no place for initiative coming from the subject himself. According to Althusser, such an approach is that which is most in keeping with a materialist position in philosophy: to neutralize the operation of subjection with a view to objectifying it is to bring to light the fact that it ultimately relies upon material conditions, conditions that produce “of the subject” [du sujet] without being themselves dependent upon the pre-existing position of a subject.’ (pp. 11–12)


63 A similar problematic is established in Rehmann 2013 in a different way, though nonetheless replete with an incredibly superficial reading of Althusser as well as references which display a complete lack of understanding of Lacan and psychoanalytic theory.

64 Cf. Theodore Adorno, ‘The Culture Industry Reconsidered’ (1967): ‘It may also be supposed that the consciousness of the consumers themselves is split between the prescribed fun which is supplied to them by the culture industry and a not particularly well-hidden doubt about its blessings. The phrase, the world wants to be deceived, has become truer than had ever been intended. People are not only, as the saying goes, falling for the swindle; if it guarantees them even the most fleeting gratification they desire a deception which is nonetheless transparent to them. They force their eyes shut and voice approval, in a kind of self-loathing, for what is meted out to them, knowing fully the purpose for which it is manufactured. Without admitting it they sense that their lives would be completely intolerable as soon as they no longer cling to satisfactions which are none at all.’ Online text: <http://www.icce.rug.nl/~soundscapes/DATABASES/SWA/Culture_industry_reconsidered.shtml>. [10] [trans. Anson G. Rabinbach in New German Critique, No. 6 (Autumn, 1975), pp. 12-19.]
Žižek’s than is often thought. If ideology is situated in the Symbolic, its interpellation acts on an antagonism within the Symbolic; with this, Žižek’s main thesis concerning ideology is compatible with the analysis I’ve attempted to direct us towards. For instance, this is Žižek’s main thesis as summarised by Glyn Daly:

[I]deology does not conceal or distort an underlying reality (human nature, social interests etc.) but rather reality itself cannot be reproduced without ideological mystification [. . . .] What ideology offers is the symbolic construction of reality – the ultimate fantasy – as a way to escape the traumatic effects of the Real. Reality is always a ‘virtual’ take on the Real; a virtualization that can never fully overcome the Real or achieve homeostasis. In the language of Laclau and Mouffe, this means that Society as an integrated unity is universally impossible precisely because of the constitutive excess of the Real qua the unmasterable negativity upon which every positivization finally depends.65

If we read ‘reality is always an “imaginary distortion”’66 where we find ‘reality is always a “virtuality”, the above description also follows from the revised analysis I have been presenting throughout. Moreover, this interpretation is also supported by Macherey’s analysis of the ISA text:

What exists in reality is a dynamic of socialization that, following the neutralizing logic adopted by the theory of interpellation, must be itself a process without subject, which means that something like the ‘thesociety’ constitutes its end and in no sense its point of departure. But then, what is to be found at the point of departure, or rather at the base of this process? According to Marx’s decisive observation, it is that which can be found recorded for the first time in the sixth of his ‘theses’ on Feuerbach, ‘the ensemble of the social relations’ [‘das ensemble der gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse’, ‘l’ensemble (en français dans le texte original) des rapports sociaux’], that is to say, not that already constituted and indissoluble organic totality that would be the ‘thesociety’, in the singular, but the unstable complex of antagonistic forces, in the plural, whose conflicts, at each instant, make, unmake, and remake that which is nothing but a precarious resultant. From this point of view, he must move away from the great subject ‘Society’ as he moves away from the small personal subject created in its image, that, the both of them, are manufactured in a context of relations of force in which equilibrium is not at all guaranteed.67

66 To be clear, one should expunge any pejorative sense which may be provoked with the term ‘imaginary distortion.’
Hence, the proposed interpretation I have offered not only accounts for Althusser’s conceptualisation of ideology more adequately than alternative interpretations, it also overcomes the problems which arise in those alternatives. And, I will add, it remains true to the theoretical scope, motivations, and agenda of the text.

Now that we have arrived at the point where Althusser’s *symbolic imaginary* has been brought into relief and the path to situating interpellation within the symbolic has been paved, what remains for us to engage in is an elucidation of what this means and what it looks like in relation to actual individuals and the institutional function of ideology.
Hey, you there! Freely choose your subjection!

[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’.

In this final section let us attempt to bring to the fore this distinction, and what this distinction means, between the all and its interpretation in light of the ‘nine times out of ten’ stipulation; this will lead us to a consideration of how the institutional function of ideology and the way in which individuals are positioned, interpellated, therein—i.e., as the ‘free subject’ who choses their ideological subjection. The significance of this engagement will be to highlight how the revised interpretive position regarding Althusserian interpellation—that it is situated within the Other and addresses an individual’s coordinates of meaning in relation to the Other—is equipped to allow us to comprehend these considerations.

Ideology is a field of relations of which we are all submerged—here we are referring to the general, the all. In its interpellative operation, at the level of ideology, it hits its target and the subject of interpellation ‘identifies’ with the representation, say, nine times out of ten.

Let us exemplify this with a perhaps overly simplified but nonetheless illustrative example. This example is offered by Krips in order to pose the question, how does this interpellation as ‘identification’ ‘hit its target’? Though I will argue that this illustration should be delimited, as will become evident. Krips writes:

This question may be given concrete form in the context of magazine advertisements. How is it that the photograph of a pair of eyes looking into the camera, coupled with the cheesy slogan ‘For the you who is really you,’ manage to make each viewer (‘nine times out of ten it is the right one’) feel that they have been not only personally addressed but also recognized in the innermost core of their being, despite being totally sure at an intellectual level that the advertisement knows nothing of who they are?

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68 Althusser 1971, p. 182.
69 Note my schematic distinction between ‘Ideology’ and ‘ideology’ in the preceding.
70 Krips 1999, p. 146.
It may seem obvious that such an example readily proposes the *mirror thesis* and, with that, it would be an example of ideological interpellation par excellence (this is basically the position adopted by Screen theory, for example). But I must problematize this example. One may assume that advertising like this hits its target by appealing to the ideal ego-ego ideal relation, in short an individual is interpellated by an image addressing an ego’s *imago* and, given the desire of the ego to identify with the representational image, in an imaginative self-projection, in comportment with its ‘ideal image,’ the individual identifies with (in this example) the advertisement image as a representation of their ego. If this is more or less true, in this case, and if this can be seen to (in a very general sense) model relations of this kind, one must see this not as a description of ideological interpellation as such but as a description of a social function which presupposes ideological interpellation. The key to this understanding lies in two consideration: (a) the strict materiality of ideological function and (b) the relationship between the *all* and the individuated relations within the *all*, or the Ideological coordinates which overdetermine the ideological function of identification. In short, the ability of an individual to look at an image and proclaim ‘that is me’ in an act of ideological identification must presuppose that the ideological coordinates and networks of meaning have been actively attired to the individual as a precondition of this ideological identification—otherwise, ideology cannot hit its target. If one is not already an effectively interpellated subject within meaning systems, the image cannot be tied to an ideological signifcatory structure and thus cannot be ideologically meaningful. It would not serve its ideological function, interpellation would have no systemic ideological effect and we would simply equate ideology with particular imaginary relations, effectively reducing the social and socio-political to individual relations. This identification should be seen in a different light: it is an enforcement of the ideological coordinates of meaning which the subject has been interpellated into. The instability, sliding, of signification, due to the fundamental resistance to ‘identification’ that is internal to the Symbolic, needs to be stabilised in a more or less constant fashion. Subjects have to actively engage, reinforce, their interpellation to maintain their symbolic coordinates. The centre cannot hold; ideology, in a basic sense, gives the subject a comforting embrace which says: the centre must hold.

We can also note that where the function of ideological interpellation in the field of the Other, in its addressing the individual’s relation to the Other, is not strictly possible, for example

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71 See fn. 38.
72 A reduction much akin to Butler’s revision.
where a relation to the Other is fundamentally different from what might be called a more ‘normative’ structuration (for example, in the psychoses), the way in which a subject relates to ideology is fundamentally different—e.g., a delusional formation is seen as incompatible with what is ideologically established as reality. Where this is the case, it can often be quite significant in as much as the meaningful concerns of the subject are not entirely restrained by (the dominant) ideology, or at least one’s perspectives, which may fall outside of or be quite at odds with the dominant ideology, and thus not necessarily ideologically bound in regards to their coordinates of meaning. Though it must be said that it is also the case that, in this situation, the subject can be problematically much more reliant on and tied to imaginary identification.

In any case such a notion offered above is by no means absent from Althusser. This is precisely why, though expressed differently, he emphasises the performances, the rituals, the activities of ideological subjection over and above, say, beliefs or ideas in one’s head. Althusser’s notion of dispojitf can be said to formulate this relationship. The notion of dispojitf refers to the relationship between the ideational content of the individual and their material actions governed by material conditions. The conceptual content of individuals is interpreted as the cause of their actions and practices; contrariwise, this conceptual content is the abstracted ideational form of, dependent on and the effect of, their material practices—and their material practices are governed by the materiality of the ideological apparatus which is situated in specific, material ways, e.g. institutions. If we take this in consideration and refer again to the aforementioned example, the consumer’s assent to the ‘recognition’ and representational identification regarding the image relies on their already being an ideological subject who is able to perform this act in a manner which corresponds and reinforces their interpellation into an ideological system of meaning, addressing the dispojitf, and within this framework the individual is able to identify according to the ideological coordinates of meaning. This identification is epiphenomenal to the materiality of that which determines this ‘recognition’ and ‘identification’ and the actions that necessarily must support this ‘identification’: the actions that are engaged in so that the conceptual content attached to them can serve them in distorted form (e.g., ‘the free subject acts in accordance with the ideas in their head’).

In the ISA text, Althusser expounds the dispojitf in the course of distinguishing the material thesis of ideology from the idealist conception. He states: ‘an ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices. This existence is material.’ And the notion of dispojitf occurs in the explication of this (and one should of course not take the references to the religious nature of the dispojitf in this explication to proffer a view of the ideological dispojitf that is strictly bound to an

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73 Althusser 1971, p. 166.
understanding of religious ideology; it is one example, in schematic form, among many that could be offered):

[L]et me move straight on and see what happens to the ‘individuals’ who live in ideology, i.e. in a determinate (religious, ethical, etc.) representation of the world whose imaginary distortion depends on their imaginary relation to their conditions of existence, in other words, in the last instance, to the relations of production and to class relations (ideology = an imaginary relation to real relations). I shall say that this imaginary relation is itself endowed with a material existence.

Now I observe the following.

An individual believes in God, or Duty, or Justice, etc. This belief derives (for everyone, i.e. for all those who live in an ideological representation of ideology, which reduces ideology to ideas endowed by definition with a spiritual existence) from the ideas of the individual concerned, i.e. from him as a subject with a consciousness which contains the ideas of his belief. In this way, i.e. by means of the absolutely ideological ‘conceptual’ device (dispositif) thus set up (a subject endowed with a consciousness in which he freely forms or freely recognizes ideas in which he believes), the (material) attitude of the subject concerned naturally follows.74

We can see here the position of the ideological subject expounded: the dispositif corresponds to the ‘imaginary distortion’ that makes up the conceptual content, the ideational ‘determination,’ of the subject’s practices. The ‘imaginary relations’ of the dispositif is situated within the subject’s symbolic relations and, in its strictly ideological character, it distorts the actuality of the subject’s relation to ideology: the dispositif is produced by the material existence of an ideological apparatus. With this we can say, ideological interpellation, which addresses the individual at this level—the address being situated in the Other—is the precondition of the dispositif; and, likewise, in the final analysis, ideology is at root material.

This is not simply to say in paraphrase or circumlocution that ideology is the ideas in one’s head which reflect (in distorted form) the real of social relations. Rather, it is to say that this conception of ideology as just stated is itself an ideological conception and, in actuality—the real of ideology per se is material. As Althusser goes on to state:

The individual in question behaves in such and such a way, adopts such and such a practical attitude, and, what is more, participates in certain regular practices which are those of the ideological apparatus on which ‘depend’ the ideas which he has in all consciousness freely chosen as a subject. If he believes in God, he goes to Church to attend Mass, kneels, prays, confesses, does penance (once it was material in the ordinary sense of the term) and naturally repents and so on. If he believes in Duty, he will have the corresponding attitudes, inscribed in ritual practices ‘according to the correct principles’. If he believes in Justice, he will submit unconditionally to the rules of the Law, and may even protest when they are violated, sign petitions, take part in a demonstrations, etc.

Throughout this schema we observe that the ideological representation of ideology is itself forced to recognize that every ‘subject’ endowed with a ‘consciousness’ and believing in the ‘ideas’ that his ‘consciousness’ inspires in him and freely accepts, must ‘act according to his ideas’, must therefore inscribe his own ideas as a free subject in the actions of his material practice. If he does not do so, that is wicked.75

And further:

[...] the ideology of ideology thus recognizes, despite its imaginary distortion, that the ‘ideas’ of a human subject exist in his actions, or ought to exist in his actions, and if that is not the case, it lends him other ideas corresponding to the actions (however perverse) that he does perform. This ideology talks of actions: I shall talk of actions inserted into practices. And I shall point out that these practices are inscribed, within the material existence of an ideological apparatus, be it only a small part of that apparatus: a small mass in a small church, a funeral, a minor match at a sports’ club, a school day, a political party meeting, etc. [...] 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.76

We should underscore this notion of being interpellated as a free subject, which is bound to the function of the ideology of ideology, and disclose the way in which this must necessarily implicate

75 Althusser 1971, pp. 167–68.
76 Althusser 1971, pp. 168–69. Note that Althusser does not reduce all the modalities of the materiality of ideology into one notion of the material: ‘Naturally, the four inscriptions of the adjective “material” in my proposition must be affected by different modalities [...]’ (Ibid, p. 169)
what I have been stressing throughout; namely, that ideological interpellation is situated in the field of the Other.

Let us approach this point via another example, though a more pertinent one. We shall orient ourselves to a particular institution of the state within a capitalist organisation of social structure and, with it, orient ourselves to an individual interpellated as an ideological subject therein. This particular institution Althusser deems—and I believe we should be inclined to agree with him on this point—the dominant ideological state apparatus. I am referring to the education system. In the ISA text Althusser writes: ‘I believe that the ideological State apparatus which has been installed in the dominant position in mature capitalist social formations as a result of a violent political and ideological class struggle against the old dominant ideological State apparatus, is the educational ideological apparatus.’ This thesis is advanced against the apparent obviousness of the political state apparatus—parliamentary democracy—being the dominant ideological state apparatus. For Althusser, the political apparatus takes the foreground and masks the actually dominant apparatus. The motivation for this pronouncement is, on the one hand, the way in which capitalism is able to accommodate other political formations and, on the other, the fact that to a

77 Althusser later modifies his opinion on this point, at least in a speculative way which is tied up with his own biographical reflections: ‘What I also discovered during my captivity [was] how much I enjoyed living with people other than my father and mother and away from the world (without any outside) of books, the classroom, and the family flat. In short, I was free from that most frightful, appalling, and horrifying of all ideological State apparatuses, in a nation where the State exists, namely the family. Do you hear what I am saying, Robert Fossaert, and you too Gramsci from the depths of your dreadful tomb? May I say that even in Lyon, for three whole years—from the age of eighteen till I was twenty-one! I knew absolutely no one apart from my friends in khâgne and my teachers. And the sole reason or that was an awful combination of fear, upbringing, respect, timidity, and guilt which was instilled into me by none other than my own parents, who were themselves trapped in the same ideological structure which was dreadful for my mother and for my father, however it might have appeared. They did it in order to instil in me as a small child the supreme values prevailing in the society in which I was growing up: absolute respect for absolute authority and above all the State, which since Marx and Lenin we have come to recognise, thank God, as a terrible “machine” in the service not of the dominant class which never holds power alone (yes Fossaert, yes Gramsci), but of several classes constituting a “power bloc”, as Sorel so aptly termed it at a time when there was such widespread theoretical and political indifference in France. But how long will even the most informed and intelligent people allow themselves to be deluded by something even more blind and blinding than that dreadful deaf fish of the unconscious, which Freud trawled up from the very depths of the seas in his long net? How much longer will they fail to recognise the blinding evidence of the true nature of the Family as an ideological State apparatus? Does one now have to point out that, in addition to the three great narcissistic wounds inflicted on Humanity (that of Galileo, that of Darwin, and that of the unconscious), there is a fourth and even graver one which no one wishes to have revealed (since from time immemorial the family has been the very site of the sacred and therefore of power and of religion)? It is an irrefutable fact that the Family is the most powerful ideological State apparatus.’ (The Future Lasts Forever: A Memoir, trans. Richard Veasey [New York: The New York Press, 1993], pp. 104–5)

One should be careful to differentiate the sense of these statements from the sense of similar statements made about the educational system in the context of the theoretical analysis of ideology pertaining to structural organisation. Note too that the modification might be simply understood as a change of emphasis: Althusser, in the ISA text, at significant points, in a cursory manner refers to the dominant ideological state apparatus as the couple school-family, and not simply the school.

78 Althusser 1971, p. 152.
large extent the educational ideological apparatus ‘has in fact replaced in its functions the previously dominant ideological State apparatus, the Church.’

Along with this, Althusser notes in a cursory fashion: ‘One might even add: the School-Family couple has replaced the Church-Family couple.’ And later: ‘the Church has been replaced today in its role as the dominant Ideological State Apparatus by the School. It is coupled with the Family just as the Church was once coupled with the Family.’ Now, we cannot explore the significance of this coupling with the family here, but we might say that this may be understood in a manner which directs us to the main thesis we have been formulating throughout in as much as the site of the family is inextricably bound to psychic ontogeny of the subject and the establishment of the subject’s relation to the Other.

Coming back to the exposition of the dominant ideological state apparatus, that the educational apparatus should be considered so is given further justification through the description of its institutional function. This is done in such a way as to not efface the particularity and importance of other social institutions and the manner in which they function as ideological apparatuses, nor in such a way that the effaces the contradictions which arise both between them and their relation to both the repressive state apparatuses and the actual mode of production (such contradictions are more or less possible according to the particular situation). I quote Althusser at length on this point due to its importance.

1. All ideological State apparatuses, whatever they are, contribute to the same result: the reproduction of the relations of production, i.e. of capitalist relations of exploitation.
2. Each of them contributes towards this single result in the way proper to it. The political apparatus by subjecting individuals to the political State ideology, the ‘indirect’ (parliamentary) or ‘direct’

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80 Althusser 1971, p. 154. Cf. Michel Foucault, ‘The Subject and Power,’ pp. 777–95 in Critical Inquiry, Vol. 8, No. 4 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) [url: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343197>]: ‘[…] the modern Western state has integrated in a new political shape an old power technique which originated in Christian institutions. We can call this power technique the pastoral power. […] this form of power cannot be exercised without knowing the inside of people’s minds, without exploring their souls, without making them reveal their innermost secrets. It implies a knowledge of the conscience and an ability to direct it. […]’

‘An important phenomenon took place around the eighteenth century—it was a new distribution, a new organization of this kind of individualizing power.

‘I don’t think that we should consider the “modern state” as an entity which was developed above individuals, ignoring what they are and even their very existence, but, on the contrary, as a very sophisticated structure, in which individuals can be integrated, under one condition: that this individuality would be shaped in a new form and submitted to a set of very specific patterns.

In a way, we can see the state as a modern matrix of individualization or a new form of pastoral power.’ (pp. 782–83)
(plebiscitary or fascist) ‘democratic’ ideology. The communications apparatus by cramming every ‘citizen’ with daily doses of nationalism, chauvinism, liberalism, moralism, etc, by means of the press the radio and television. The same goes for the cultural apparatus (the role of sport in chauvinism is of the first importance), etc. The religious apparatus by recalling in sermons and the other great ceremonies of Birth, Marriage and Death, that man is only ashes, unless he loves his neighbour to the extent of turning the other cheek to whoever strikes first. The family apparatus … but there is no need to go on.

3. This concert is dominated by a single score occasionally disturbed by contradictions (those of the remnants of former ruling classes, those of the proletarians and their organizations): the score of ideology of the current ruling class which integrates into its music the great themes of Humanism of the Great Forefathers, who produced the Greek Miracle even before Christianity, and afterwards the Glory of Rome, the Eternal City, and the themes of Interest, particular and general, etc. nationalism, moralism and economism.

4. Nevertheless, in this concert, one ideological State apparatus certainly has the dominant role, although hardly anyone lends an ear to its music: it is so silent! This is the School.

It takes children from every class at infant-school age, and then for years, the years in which the child is most ‘vulnerable’, squeezed between the family State apparatus and the educational State apparatus, it drums into them, whether it uses new or old methods, a certain amount of ‘know-how’ wrapped in the ruling ideology (French, arithmetic, natural history, the sciences, literature) or simply the ruling ideology in its pure state (ethics, civic instruction, philosophy). Somewhere around the age of sixteen, a huge mass of children are ejected ‘into production’: these are the workers or small peasants. Another portion of scholastically adapted youth carries on: and, for better or worse, it goes somewhat further, until it falls by the wayside and fills the posts of small and middle technicians, white-collar workers, small and middle executives, petty bourgeois of all kinds. A last portion reaches the summit, either to fall into intellectual semi-employment, or to provide, as well as the ‘intellectuals of the collective labourer’, the agents of exploitation (capitalists, managers), the agents of repression (soldiers, policemen, politicians, administrators, etc.) and the professional ideologists (priests of all sorts, most of whom are convinced ‘laymen’).

Each mass ejected en route is practically provided with the ideology which suits the role it has to fulfil in class society: the role of the exploited (with a ‘highly-developed’ ‘professional’, ‘ethical’, ‘civic’, ‘national’ and a-political consciousness); the role of the agent of exploitation (ability to give the workers orders and speak to them: ‘human relations’), of the agent of repression (ability to give orders and enforce obedience ‘without discussion’, or ability to manipulate the demagogy of a political leader’s rhetoric), or of the professional ideologist (ability to treat consciousnesses with the respect, i.e. with the contempt, blackmail, and demagogy they deserve, adapted to the accents of Morality, of Virtue, of ‘Transcendence’, of Nation, of France’s World Role, etc.).
Of course, many of these contrasting Virtues (modesty, resignation, submissiveness on the one hand, cynicism, contempt, arrogance, confidence, self-importance, even smooth talk and cunning on the other) are also taught in the Family, in the Church, in the Army, in Good books, in films and even in the football stadium. But no other ideological State apparatus has the obligatory (and not least, free) audience of the totality of the children in the capitalist social formation, eight hours a day for five or six days out of seven.

But it is by an apprenticeship in a variety of know-how wrapped up in the massive inculcation of the ideology of the ruling class that the relations of production in a capitalist social formation, i.e. the relations of exploited to exploiters and exploiters to exploited, are largely reproduced. The mechanisms which produce this vital result for the capitalist regime are naturally covered up and concealed by a universally reigning ideology of the School, universally reigning because it is one of the essential forms of the ruling bourgeois ideology: an ideology which represents the School as a neutral environment purged of ideology (because it is … lay), where teachers respectful of the ‘conscience’ and ‘freedom’ of the children who are entrusted to them (in complete confidence) by their ‘parents’ (who are free, too, i.e. the owners of their children) open up for them the path to the freedom, morality and responsibility of adults by their own example, by knowledge, literature and their ‘liberating’ virtues.83

One might add, it isn’t so surprising then that, as many have pointed out, actual learning seems suspiciously absent from the educational institution, despite the surprise some might profess when they discover this fact—and yet, an entire field within the educational institution devotes itself to the pedagogical theory and training in order to perfect and render more ‘efficient’ this function in service to the ‘value,’ the ‘virtue,’ and the ‘liberation’ of education. . . .

The enlightened views of educators aside, with this astute description we can now come to the individual interpellated within this institution and the significance of our revised formulation in regards to this.

Let us imagine a teacher engaged in the functions of this institution, ensnared in the ‘reigning ideology of the School,’ simply but aptly described by Krips: ‘a teacher performs paid labor, churning out her students as workers, managers, investors, and so on, who despite her best intentions help to lubricate the cogs of capitalist production. These are the brutal, unflattering, “real” conditions of her existence as a paid functionary of the State.”84 And of course, she is ‘loyal

to the institution, dedicated to the cause of learning, and so on, all of which enable her activities
to be integrated more productively into the system of production, contributing to its overall
stability.\textsuperscript{85} The \textit{dispositif} in terms of the ideational material that the subject applies to their material
conditions to ideological reflect their conditions and practices which correspond to their
conditions or to explain (causally) their practices in relation to their material conditions, which
‘distorts’ the actuality of their practice, is in this context freely chosen—for the free choice of this
\textit{dispositif} is determined by material conditions. And in this determination lies the interpellative
function, which is the precondition of the \textit{dispositif}; though it ‘distorts’; it is nonetheless in
correspondence to what Wolff describes as ‘meaning systems (including definitions of [one’s] own
and others’ identities)\textsuperscript{86} which have their structural significatory value in ‘the domain of
symbolizable material realities rather than mental images.’\textsuperscript{87}

If this schematic or topological relationality effecting the individual is understood, it allows
us to properly, with theoretical explanation, comprehend the following, seemingly paradoxical
(though only seemingly) conclusion: ideological interpellation thus enables one to freely choose their subjection.
(We can see why the liberal and liberal humanist notion of the ‘subject,’ enshrined in law, is so
‘obvious’ to us all and why it is difficult for some to comprehend the ‘subject’ in any other sense.)
This is the Althusserian notion, as expounded by Wolff, supported our formulation:

This ideology of the subject that ISAs impose on individuals affirms, in an ironic twist, that their
subjectivity consists of a quite radical independence and autonomy. That is, individuals are
interpellated as free subjects who cause or originate their belief systems, their actions, and their social
institutions. The definitional ambiguity of “subject” – as both something/someone “subjected” and
something/someone that causes – serves Althusser to highlight the ideological reversal performed by
ISAs in capitalist societies today. Individuals are shaped by ISAs to believe that their conformity to
the needs of capitalist class structures is something quite different, a life path freely chosen by an
independent and autonomous subject. In Althusser’s words, the individual within modern capitalist
societies is interpellated by ISAs as “free” so that he/she “freely accepts … subjection”[.]\textsuperscript{88}

So let us then move, finally, to the condition of the \textit{dispositif}, the site of interpellation, and outline its
structure. In order to do so, let us come full circle and again give reference illustratively to the

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\item Krips 1999, p. 148.
\item Wolff 2004, p. 5.
\item Krips, p. 149.
\item Wolff 2004, p. 5.
\end{thebibliography}
‘theoretical theatre’ of Althusser’s ISA text, keeping in mind the ‘allegorical,’ for lack of a better term, nature of this petite histoire.

An individual is strolling along a path perhaps, say, in a sense more or less absent from our contemporary culture, that is, they are going for their ‘nightly stroll.’ They hear a shout (and it turns out to be a policeman’s shout): ‘Hey, you there!’ And the individual responds: in a one-hundred-and-eighty-degree-turn, something happens. The individual ‘turns around, believing/suspecting/knowing that it is for him, i.e. recognizing that “it really is he [or her]” who is meant by the hailing.’ With this turn, this response, we have (or we have the possibility of) an interpellated subject, an ideological subject.

I must emphasise again this is a logical structure and it should not be understood according to temporal succession. With that said, it is in this moment of response, the one-hundred-and-eighty-degree turn, wherein the operation of interpellation and its structure should be designated. And it is in this moment, or point, where the symbolic coordinates of meaning are addressed—interrupted, antagonised—and effected. To cite Krips again, he allows us to grasp what is at play in this moment. I refer to this passage in Krips at length for its explanatory value.

What strikes the passerby as she pursues her nightly stroll and hears the shout, ‘Hey you there!’ What moves her to reconstitute herself through what Althusser refers to as her ‘one-hundred-and-eighty-degree turn’? It is, I suggest, not the policeman’s personal authority or even the power he embodies as a representative of the law, but rather a tension arising between the implicit accusation of criminality and the palpable appearance of innocence of the passerby’s behavior (‘I was just walking down the street, minding my own business,’ she might protest). Such tension arises not merely from a personal sense of innocence. […] Rather, the tension results from a conflict between, on the one hand, a meaning of innocence which attaches to the action of strolling one’s neighbourhood streets and, on the other, a meaning which turns a policeman’s shout, whatever its intent, into an accusation of guilt.

The stroll’s innocence is not merely a matter of the stroller’s state of mind. Instead, it is determined by a meaning framework, a widely accepted, publicly sanctioned set of associations between home, hearth, mealtime, relaxation, and so on, in terms of which a nightly, predinner walk in the neighbourhood more or less unavoidably takes on a certain quality of innocence, although not in a strictly legal sense. Such meaning is neither indefeasible nor unequivocal. […] This effective loss of innocence is reinforced by the obscurity of the law, which raises the possibility than an ‘innocent’

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90 Althusser 1971, p. 175.
stroll may pose all sort of legal problems: unwitting trespass, violation of a traffic ordinance, and so on.

Despite such destabilizing cross-current, the meaning of innocence enjoys a certain fixity, the result in part of work by interests who stand to benefit from the general acceptance of a bourgeois ideology that presents the ‘home’ as a site of certain rights and privileges. […] In Lacanian terms, this ideological meaning acts as a point of suture\textsuperscript{91} at which the passerby’s identity along with a corresponding account of her activities as ‘an honest citizen minding her own business’ are sewn up for the time being. On this point, Marxist arguments for the existence of hegemonic structures converge with Lacan’s claim that relatively stable meanings are necessary as temporary resting places from the otherwise continuing diffusion of meaning along chains of signifiers.

Similarly, the accusation of guilt implicit in the policeman’s shout is determined not by some intentions on his part (he may have merely wanted to draw attention to an approaching car) or even by the passerby’s startled response, but rather by a meaning framework that assigns the role of arbiter of guilty to the institution of the law embodied in the figure of the policeman on the beat. This meaning too may be destabilized by various cross-currents.\textsuperscript{92}

And Krips goes on to then illustrate, from this, the site of interpellation as I have been formulating it:

These apparently opposing evaluations by intersecting meaning frameworks create a tension at the site of the policeman’s call. […] the policeman’s call functions as a site at which certain aspects of the meanings or ‘identities’ that the passerby is offered, as middle-class burgher, citizen under the law, and so on, are not only brought into conflict but also internally destabilized, each meaning in turn becoming the site of rival interpretations struggling to assert themselves.\textsuperscript{93}

If we follow this description, we can say that the antagonism which is generated in this site is the condition of possibility for and the driving force of the operation of interpellation. This antagonism effects the symbolic coordinates of meaning and the individual’s relation to the Other and thus drives the individual to respond; whatever the response may be, its determination and its

\textsuperscript{91} It might be better to replace this use of the term ‘suture’ with ‘point de capiton’ so as not to confuse this with the notion of ‘suture’ introduced by Jacques-Alain Miller. See: \textlt{http://www.lacan.com/symptom8_articles/miller8.html}.
\textsuperscript{92} Krips 1999, pp. 153–54.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid, p. 154.
correspondence is necessarily material. We must also add that this—in distinction to other readings of the ISA text—necessarily grants responsibility to the side of the individual who is interpellated.

If the above is adequately expressed, we can now develop our formulation regarding the site of interpellation in this way: the place of antagonism in the Other generated for the individual opens up a space of response, and the function of interpellation on the side of the subject of interpellation’s response serves to meet this antagonism with an assimilation into the symbolic coordinates of meaning for the subject. This antagonism is an interruption, a disruption, to the subject’s (individual’s) relation to the symbolic.

Perhaps we can go further—I write this as a cursory note—and describe this position of the subject in relation to the interruption as the opening up of the question ‘who (or what) am I for the Other?’ which can be mediated by an a-a’ relation.

94 With a little over-precipitance we might say that this resonates with Lacan’s ‘Chè vuoi?’ and indeed with this resonance we find ourselves being directed towards something more fundamental. See ‘The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire,’ pp. 671–702 [793–827] in Écrits, trans. Bruce Fink (New York & London: W. W. Norton & Co., 2006), in particular: ‘[…] man’s desire is the Other’s desire [le désir de l’homme est le désir de l’Autre] in which the de provides what grammarians call a “subjective determination”—namely, that it is qua Other that man desires (this is what provides the true scope of human passion).

‘This is why the Other’s question [la question de l’Autre]—that comes back to the subject from the place from which he expects an oracular reply—which takes some form as “Chè vuoi?,” “What do you want?,” is the question that best leads the subject to the path of his own desire, assuming that, thanks to the know-how of a partner known as a psychoanalyst, he takes up that question, even without knowing it, in the following form: “What does he want from me?”

Graph 3

‘It is this superimposed level of structure that will nudge my graph (see graph 3) toward its completed form, inserting itself there first like the outline of a question mark planted in the circle of the capital A, for Other, symbolizing the question it signifies with a desconcerting collineation.

‘Of what bottle is this opener? Of what answer is it the signifier, the master key?

‘It should be noted that a clue may be found in the clear alienation that leaves it up to the subject to butt up against the question of his essence, in that he may not misrecognize that what he desires presents itself to him as what he does not want—a form assumed by negation in which misrecognition is inserted in a very odd way, the misrecognition of which he himself is unaware, by which he transfers the permanence of his desire to an ego that is nevertheless attributing to it these very intermittences.’ (pp. 690–691 [815–16])
Let us now schematise *ideological interpellation* in a manner which accords with the interpretation we have been pursuing throughout. With the above formulations we can thus stipulate the following:

First level of ideological interpellation: the interruption *qua* precipitatatory determination in the field of the Other to the individual’s coordinates of meaning.

Second level of ideological interpellation: solution to the antagonism at the first level; the formation of that which stabilises one’s relation to their symbolic coordinates—the precondition of ‘identification’—and with it the (ideological) material practices in relation to this solution; i.e., the precondition of the ‘identity’ formation *qua* the *dispositif*.

Third level of ideological interpellation: the level of the ideology of ideology and thus the level of subjection to ‘identification’ and the *dispositif* proper.

In addition to what has been set forth, there is another element in this operation, thus far unaddressed, which remains to be formulated. This relates to the nature of the response to the interruption or antagonism. I am limited to merely naming this aspect and deferring any exploration of its function in the operation of interpellation to another time. The aspect I am referring is termed: *Wiederholung*.

To conclude, in the above I have attempted to provide a reading and interpretation of Althusser’s ISA text which serves to provide a revised formulation of *ideological interpellation* which situates the interpellative operation and function of ideological interpretation within the Symbolic, at the site of an antagonism in the field of the Other. In the course of the analysis I have argued against the *mirror thesis* and the *disciplinary thesis* interpretation of the text and I have affirmed the basic theoretical motivations of Althusser, most significantly, the requirements of materialism. The aim has been to better conceptualise the meaning of ideology and clarify the materialist theory of ideology.

*August 2016*


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