

THE SUBJECT BEFORE SUBJECTIVATION

The theme of this colloquium is Habermas. As an avowed dogmatic Lacanian, I will of course start with the question of the relation between Habermas and Lacan as it is developed in the Habermas' book which specifically addresses the issue of the so-called »post-structuralism«: *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne* (cf. Habermas 1985). There is a curious detail concerning Lacan's name: it is mentioned five times — I will quote all five places: p. 70 — »von Hegel und Marx bis Nietzsche und Heidegger, von Bataille und Lacan bis Foucault und Derrida«; p. 120 — »Bataille, Lacan und Foucault«; p. 311 — »mit Lévi-Strauss und Lacan«; p. 313 — »den zeitgenössischen Strukturalismus, die Ethnologie von Lévi-Strauss und die Lacansche Psychoanalyse«; p. 359 — »von Freud oder C. G. Jung, von Lacan oder Lévi-Strauss« (!). Lacanian theory isn't then perceived as a specific entity, it is — to use a term of Laclau and Mouffe (L/M) — always articulated in a series of equivalences. Why this refusal to confront Lacan directly, in a book which includes lengthy discussions of Bataille, Derrida and above all, Foucault, the real partner of Habermas? The answer to this enigma is to be found in another curiosity of the Habermas' book, in a curious accident with Althusser. Of course, I'm using here the term »curious accident« in Sherlock-Holmsian sense: Althusser's name isn't even mentioned in Habermas' book, and that's the curious accident. So, my first thesis would be that the great debate occupying the foreground of today's intellectual scene, the Habermas-Foucault debate, is masking another opposition, another debate which is theoretically more far-reaching: the Althusser-Lacan debate. There is something enigmatic in a sudden eclipse of the Althusserian school: it cannot be explained away in terms of a theoretical defeat or even insinuations concerning his private life (the serious mistakes of Althusser, to use the good old Stalinist euphemism) — it is more as if there was in Althusser's theory a traumatic kernel which had to be quickly forgotten, repressed; it's an effective case of theoretical amnesia.

Why is it then that the opposition Althusser-Lacan was replaced, in a kind of metaphorical substitution, by the opposition Habermas-Foucault? I will try to approach this issue from the perspective of the different ethical positions and at the same time, different notions of the subject that these four theories are implying.

With Habermas, we have the ethics of the unbroken communication, the Ideal of the universal, transparent intersubjective community; the notion of the subject behind it is, of course, the philosophy-of-language-version of the old subject of the transcendental reflection. With Foucault, we have a turn against that universalist ethics which results in a kind of esthetization of ethics: each subject must, without any support from universal rules, build his own mode of self-mastering, he must harmonize the antagonism of the powers within himself, so to speak invent himself, produce himself as subject, find his own particular art of living — that's why Foucault was so fascinated by marginal life-styles constructing their particular mode of subjectivity (the sado-masochistic homosexual universe, for example). (Cf. Foucault 1984.) It is not so difficult to detect how this Foucaultian notion of subject enters the humanist-elitist tradition: its closest realisation would be the Renaissance ideal of the »all-round personality« mastering the passions within himself and making out of his own life a work of art. Foucault's notion of the subject is rather a classical one: subject as the power of self-mediation and harmonizing the antagonistic forces, as a way of mastering the »use of pleasures« through a restoration of the image of self. Habermas and Foucault are here the two sides of the same coin — the real break is represented by Althusser, by his insistence on the fact that a certain cleft, a certain fissure, misrecognition, characterizes the human condition as such, i. e. by his thesis that the idea of the possible end of ideology is an ideological idea *par excellence*. (Cf. Althusser 1965.)

Although Althusser hasn't written a lot about ethical problematics, it is clear that the whole of his work embodies a certain radical ethical attitude which we might call the heroism of alienation or of subjective destitution: the point is not just that we must unmask the structural mechanism which is producing the effect of subject as ideological misrecognition, but that we must at the same time fully acknowledge this misrecognitions as unavoidable, i. e. that we must accept a certain delusion as a condition of our historical activity, of assuming a role as agent of historical process. In this perspective, the subject as such is constituted through a certain misrecognition: the process of ideological interpellation through which the subject »recognizes« itself in the calling up as the addressee of the ideological Cause implies necessarily a certain short-circuit, an illusion of the type of »I already was there« which, as was pointed out by Michel Pêcheux (cf. Pêcheux 1975), who has given us the most elaborated version of the theory of interpellation, isn't without its comical effects — the short-circuit of »no wonder you were interpellated as proletarian, when you are a proletarian«. Here, Pêcheux is supplementing Marxism with Marx-brothers whose well-known joke is »You remind me of Emanuel Ravelli. — But I am Emanuel Ravelli. — Then no wonder that you look like him!« I myself once experienced this kind of stupidity when I was obliged to phone somebody in the name of my father and presented myself: »It's me speaking, I'm the son of my father!« This was the point of my subjectivation.

In contrast to the Althusserian ethics of *alienation*, we may determine the ethics implied by Lacanian psychoanalysis as that of *separation*. The famous Lacanian *motto* not to give way to our desire (*ne pas céder sur son désir*), is aimed at the fact that we must not obliterate the distance separating the real from its symbolisation. (Cf. Lacan 1973.) The best way to explain this would be to articulate its opposition the traditional Marxist notion of social antagonism. This traditional notion implies two interconnected features: 1. there



exists a certain fundamental antagonism possessing an ontological priority to »mediate« all other antagonisms, determining their place and their specific weight (class antagonism, economic exploitation); 2. historical development is bringing about, if not a necessity, at least an »objective possibility« of solving this fundamental antagonism and, in this way, mediating all other antagonisms — to recall the well-known Marxist formulation, the same logic which drove mankind into alienation and class division, is also creating the condition for its abolition — »die Wunde schliesst der Speer nur, der sie schlug /the wound can be healed only by the spear which made it/«, as Wagner, Marx's contemporary, was already saying, through the mouth of Parsifal. It is upon the unity of these two features that the Marxist notion of the revolution, of the revolutionary situation is founded: a situation of metaphorical condensation in which it finally becomes clear to the everyday consciousness that it is not possible to solve any particular question without solving them all, i. e. without solving the fundamental question which is embodying the antagonistic character of the social totality. In a »normal«, pre-revolutionary state of things, everybody is fighting his own particular battles (the workers are striking for better wages, feminists are fighting for the rights of women, democrats for political and social freedoms, the ecologists against the exploitation of nature, participants in the peace-movements against the war-danger, etc.). Marxists are using all the skill and cleverness of their argumentation to convince the participants of these particular struggles that the only real solution to their problem is to be found in the global revolution: as long as social relations are dominated by Capital, there will always be sexism in relations between the sexes, there will always be a threat of global war, there will always be a danger that political and social freedoms will be suspended, nature itself will always remain an object of ruthless exploitation... (the last heroic and rather desperate attempt of such a totalisation is to be found in Perry Anderson's *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism* — cf. Anderson 1985). The global revolution will than abolish the fundamental social antagonism, enabling the formation of a transparent, rationally governed society.

The basic feature of so-called »post-Marxism« is, of course, the break with this logic which, by the way, has not necessarily a Marxist connotation: almost any of the antagonisms which, in the light of Marxism, appear to be secondary, can take over this essential role of being the mediator of all the others. We have, for example, feminist fundamentalism (no global liberation without the emancipation of women, without the abolition of sexism), democratic fundamentalism (democracy as the fundamental value of western civilisation — all other struggles (economic, feminist, minorities, etc.) are just further applications of the basic democratic-egalitarian principle), ecological fundamentalism (ecological deadlock as the fundamental problem of mankind), and — why not? — also psychoanalytical fundamentalism as was articulated in Marcuse's *Eros and Civilisation* (the key to liberation lies in changing the repressive libidinal structure: cf. Marcuse 1955).

In contrast to this essentialist perspective, »post-Marxism« affirms the irreducible plurality of the particular struggles — their articulation into a series of equivalences depends always on radical contingency of the social-historical process. But this is not enough — I think that the real counterpoint to Marxism is developed only in the Lacanian reading of psychoanalysis. Let's take the Freudian notion of the »death drive«. Of course, we have to abstract Freud's



biologism: »death drive« is not a biological fact but a notion indicating that the human psychic apparatus is subordinated to a blind automatism of repetition beyond pleasure-seeking, self-preservation of life, accordance between man and his milieu. Man is — Hegel *dixit* — »an animal sick to death«, an animal extorted by an insatiable parasite (reason, *logos*, language). In this perspective, the »death drive«, this dimension of radical negativity, cannot be reduced to an expression of alienated social conditions, it defines *la condition humaine* as such: there is no solution, no escape from it, the thing to do is not to »overcome«, to »abolish«, it, but to come to terms with it, to learn to recognize it in its terrifying dimension, and then, on the basis of this fundamental recognition, to try to articulate a *modus vivendi* with it. All »culture« is in a way a reaction-formation, an attempt to limit, canalize, precisely to cultivate this imbalance, this traumatic kernel, this radical antagonism through which man cuts his umbilical cord with nature, with the animal homeostasis. It's not only that the aim is no longer to abolish this drive-antagonism, but the aspiration to abolish it is precisely the source of totalitarian temptation: the greatest mass murders and holocausts were always done in the name of Man as harmonious being, of a New Man without antagonistic tension.

We have the same logic with ecology: man as such is »the wound of nature«, there is no return to the natural balance, to accordance with his milieu, the only thing to do is to accept fully this cleft, fissure, this structural rooting out of man, and to try as far as possible to patch things afterwards; all other solutions — the illusion of a possible return to Nature, the idea of a total socialisation of nature — are a direct path to totalitarianism. — We have the same logic with feminism: »there isn't any sexual relationship«, i. e. the relation between sexes is *per definitionem* »impossible«, an antagonistic one, there is no final solution, and the only foundation for the somewhat bearable relation between the sexes in an acknowledgement of this basic antagonism, of this basic impossibility. — We have the same logic with democracy: it is — to use the worn out phrase of Churchill — the worst of all possible systems, the only problem is that there isn't any other which would be better, i. e. democracy as such always entails the possibility of corruption, of the rule of the dull mediocrity, the only problem is that every attempt to elude this risk inherent in democracy and to restore »real« democracy, necessarily brings about its opposite, i. e. it ends in the abolition of democracy itself. By the way, here it would be possible to defend a thesis that the first post-Marxist was none other than Hegel himself: his thesis is precisely that the antagonism of civil society cannot be suppressed without a fall into totalitarian terrorism — the state can only afterwards limit its disastrous effects.

It is the merit of L/M (cf. Laclau/Mouffe 1985) that they have, with their *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, developed a theory of the social field founded on such a notion of antagonism, i. e. on an acknowledgement of an original »traumatism«, an impossible kernel which resists symbolisation, totalisation, symbolic integration. Every attempt at symbolisation/totalisation comes afterwards: it is an attempt to suture an original cleft, an attempt which is, in the last resort, *per definitionem* doomed to fail. Their accent is precisely that we must not be »radical« in the sense of aiming at a radical solution: we always live in an interspace and in borrowed time, every solution is provisional and temporary, a kind of postponing of a fundamental impossibility. So it seems to me that their title »radical democracy« is to be taken somehow para-



doxically: it is precisely NOT »radical« in a sense of pure, true democracy, its radical character implies, on the contrary, that we can save democracy only by taking into account its own radical impossibility. Here we can see how we have reached the other end of the traditional Marxist standpoint: in traditional Marxism, the global solution-revolution is the condition of the effective solution of all particular problems, while here every provisional, temporarily successful solution of a particular problem entails an acknowledgement of the global radical deadlock, impossibility, an acknowledgement of a fundamental antagonism.

Now, my question here is, as with Althusser: which is the notion of the subject corresponding to this ethical position implying an acknowledgement of a radical deadlock, »antagonism«, proper to the human condition as such? The answer is that, in contrast to all above-mentioned positions, Lacan introduces a discontinuity, a fissure between the subject and the subjectivation: the subject is prior to subjectivation (in contrast to identity, which is a result of identification). Far from being the result of the process of subjectivation = interpellation = identification, the subject is precisely what is being masked by the process: the stake, the function of this process is to conceal the basic dimension of the subject.

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Precisely concerning this Lacanian notion of the subject, I would like to make a remark on L/M which is more a supplement than a criticism. My main idea is that the notion of the subject used in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* is not on the level of the crucial notion of antagonism proposed by L/M, and the reason for this is a certain lack of clarity in the notion of antagonism itself.

In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, we even have a certain regression from Laclau's previous book *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* (cf. Laclau 1977): in this book we find a finely elaborated Althusserian theory of interpellation, while *Hegemony* offers us just a kind of vague reference to the post-structuralist notion of the »subject-positions«. Why this regression? My optimistic reading of it is that it is — to use again the good old Stalinist expression — »a dizziness from too much success«, an effect of the fact that L/M had progressed to quickly, i. e. that, with the elaboration of their concept of antagonism, they have accomplished such a radical breakthrough that it wasn't possible for them to follow it immediately with a corresponding concept of subject — hence the uncertainty regarding the subject in *Hegemony*.

L/M are basically still conceiving the subject in a way that characterises »post-structuralism«, as an effect of the ideological interpellation, from the perspective of assuming different »subject-positions«. The main thrust of their argumentation is directed against the classical notion of the Subject as a substantial, essential entity, given in advance, dominating the social process and not being produced by the contingency of the discursive process itself: against this notion, they affirm that what we have is a series of particular subject-positions (feminist, ecologist, democratic...) the signification of which is not fixed in advance: it changes according to the way they are articulated in a series of equivalences through the metaphoric surplus which defines the identity of everyone of them. Let us take, for example, the series feminism-democracy-peace movement-ecologism: insofar as the participant in the struggle for democracy »finds out by experience« that there is no real democracy with-



out the emancipation of women, insofar as the participant in the ecological struggle »finds out by experience« that there is no real reconciliation with nature without abandoning the aggressive-masculine attitude towards nature, insofar as the participant in the peace-movement »finds out by experience« that there is no real peace without radical democratisation, etc., that is to say, insofar as the identity of each of the four above-mentioned positions is marked with the metaphorical surplus of the other three positions, we can say that something like an unified subject-position is being constructed: to be a democrat means at the same time to be a feminist, etc. What we must not overlook is, of course, that such an unity is always radically contingent, the result of a symbolic condensation, and not an expression of some kind of internal necessity according to which the interests of all the above-mentioned positions would in the long run »objectively convene«. It is quite possible, for example, to imagine an ecological position which sees the only solution in a strong anti-democratic, authoritarian state resuming control over the exploitation of natural resources, etc.

Now, it is clear that such a notion of the subject-positions still enters the frame of the Althusserian ideological interpellation as constitutive of the subject: the subject-position is a mode of how we recognize our position of an (interested) agent of the social process, how we experience our commitment to a certain ideological Cause. My idea is that we have to supplement this notion with two thesis: (1) as soon as we constitute ourselves as ideological subjects, as soon as we respond to the interpellation and assume a certain subject-position, we are *a priori, per definitionem* deluded, we are overlooking the radical dimension of the social antagonism, that is to say the traumatic kernel the symbolisation of which always fails; (2) it is precisely the Lacanian notion of the subject as »the answer of the real« which describes the subject in its confrontation with the antagonism, the subject which isn't avoiding the traumatic dimension of social antagonism.

To explain these two points, let's take the case of class antagonism. The relationship between the classes is antagonistic in the L/M sense of the term, i. e. it is neither contradiction nor opposition but the »impossible« relationship between two terms: each of them is preventing the other from achieving its identity with itself, to become what it really is. As soon as I recognize myself, in an ideological interpellation, as a »proletarian«, I'm engaged in the social reality, fighting against the capitalist who is preventing me from realizing fully my human potential, blocking my full development. Where is here the ideological illusion proper to the subject-position? It lies precisely in the fact that it is the capitalist, this external enemy, who is preventing me from achieving an identity with myself: the illusion is that after the eventual annihilation of the antagonistic enemy, I will finally abolish the antagonism and arrive at an identity with myself. And it's the same with sexual antagonism: the feminist struggle against patriarchal, male chauvinist oppression is necessarily filled out by the illusion that afterwards, when patriarchal oppression is abolished, women will finally achieve their full identity with themselves, realize their human potentials, etc. Now, my thesis is that to grasp the notion of antagonism in its most radical dimension, we should *invert* the relation between the two terms: it is not the external enemy who is preventing me from achieving identity with myself, but every identity is already in itself blocked, marked by an impossibility, and the external enemy is simply the small piece, the rest of



reality upon which we »project« or »externalize« this intrinsic, immanent impossibility. That would be the last lesson of the famous Hegelian dialectics of the Master and the Servant, the lesson usually overlooked by Marxist reading: the Master is in the last resort an invention of the Servant, it is a way for the Servant to »give way as to his desire«, to evade the blockade of his own desire by projecting its reason into the external repression of the Master. (Cf. Hegel 1952.) This is also the real ground for Freud's insistence that the *Verdrängung* cannot be reduced to an internalization of external repression (*Unterdrückung*): there is a certain fundamental, radical, constitutive, self-inflicted blockage, impediment, hindrance of the drive, and the stake of the fascinating figure of external Authority, of its repressive force, is precisely to make us blind to this self-impediment of the drive. That's why we could say that it's precisely in the moment when we achieve victory over the enemy in the antagonistic struggle in the social reality that we experience the antagonism in its most radical dimension, as a self-hindrance: far from enabling us finally to achieve full identity with ourselves, the moment of victory is the moment of greatest loss. The Servant frees himself from the Master only when he experiences how the Master was only embodying the auto-blockage of his own desire: what the Master through his external repression was supposed to deprive him of, to prevent him from realizing, he — the Servant — never possessed. This is the moment called by Hegel »the loss of a loss«: the experience that we never had what we were supposed to have lost.

We can also determine this experience of a »loss of a loss« as the experience of the »negation of the negation«, i. e. of pure antagonism where the negation is brought to the point of self-reference. What is here at stake is no longer the fact that — as in an antagonistic fight with the external adversary — all the positivity, all the consistency of our position lies in the negation of the adversary's position and *vice versa*; what is at stake is the fact that the negativity of the other which is preventing me from achieving my full identity with myself is just an externalisation of my own auto-negativity, of my self-hindering. The point is here how exactly to read, which accent to give to the crucial thesis of L/M that *in the antagonism, the negativity as such assumes a positive existence*. We can read this thesis as asserting that in an antagonistic relationship, the positivity of »our« position consists only in the positivation of our negative relation to the other, to the antagonist adversary: the whole consistency of our position is in the fact that we are negating the other, we are precisely this drive to abolish, to annihilate our adversary. In this case, the antagonistic relation is in a way symmetrical: each position is only its negative relation to the other (the Master prevents the Servant from achieving full identity with himself and *vice versa*). But if we radicalise the antagonistic fight in reality to the point of pure antagonism, the thesis that, in the antagonism, the negativity as such assumes a positive existence, must be read in another way: the other itself (the Master, let's say) is, in his positivity, in his fascinating presence, just the positivation of our own — Servants — negative relationship towards ourselves, the positive embodiment of our own self-blockage. The point is that here, the relationship is no longer symmetrical: we cannot say that the Servant is also in the same way just the positivation of the negative self-relationship of the Master. What we can perhaps say is that he is the Master's symptom. When we radicalize the antagonistic fight to a point of pure antagonism, it is always one of the two moments which, through



the positivity of the other, maintains a negative self-relationship: to use a Hegelian term, this other element functions as a »reflexive determination« (*Reflexionsbestimmung*) of the first (cf. Hegel 1966) — the Master, for example, is just a reflexive determination of the Servant. Or, to take the sexual difference/antagonism: Man is a reflexive determination of Woman's impossibility of achieving an identity with itself (which is why the Woman is a symptom of the Man).

We must then distinguish the experience of antagonism in its radical form, as a limit of the social, as the impossibility around which the social field is structured, from antagonism as the relation between two antagonistic subject-positions: in Lacanian terms, we must distinguish antagonism as real from the social reality of the antagonistic fight. And the Lacanian notion of the subject aims precisely at the experience of »pure« antagonism as self-hindering, self blockage, this internal limit preventing the symbolic field from realising its full identity: the stake of the entire process of subjectivation, of assuming different subject-positions is, in the last resort, precisely to enable us to avoid this traumatic experience. The limit of the social as it is defined by L/M, this paradoxical limit which causes that »the Society doesn't exist« — the L/M paraphrase of the Lacanian »Woman doesn't exist« — this limit isn't just something that subverts each subject-position, each defined identity of the subject; on the contrary, this limit is at the same time what sustains the subject in its most radical dimension: »the subject« in the Lacanian sense is the name for this internal limit, this internal impossibility of the Other, of the »substance«. The subject is a paradoxical entity which persists only insofar as its full realisation is blocked, a paradoxical entity of which what at first sight appears as a limitation is a positive condition. In short: there is an object, a remnant which resists subjectivation, and the subject is precisely correlative to this object.

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What is the status of this subject before subjectivation? Roughly speaking, the Lacanian answer would be that before subjectivation as identification, before ideological interpellation, before assuming a certain subject-position, the subject is a subject of a question. At first sight, it may seem that we are here again in the middle of traditional philosophical problematics: subject as a force of negativity which can question every given, objective status of things, introducing into the positivity the openness of the questioning... in a word, the subject is a question. But the Lacanian position is its exact opposite: the subject is not a question, it is an *answer*, the answer of the real to the question asked by the great Other, the symbolic order. (Cf. Miller 1984—85.) It isn't the subject which is asking the question — the subject is the void of the impossibility of answering the question of the Other.

To explain this, let us refer to the interesting book by Aron Bodenheimer *Why? On the obscenity of questioning* (cf. Bodenheimer 1984). Its fundamental thesis is that there is something obscene in the act of asking a question as such, without regard to its content. It's the form of the question as such which is obscene: the question lays open, exposes, denudes its addressee, it invades his sphere of intimacy; which is why the basic, elementary reaction to a question is shame, on the bodily level, blushing and lowering our eyes — as a child whom we are asking »What were you doing?«. Already in our everyday expe-



rience, it is clear that such a questioning of children is *a priori* culpabilizing, provoking in the other an effect of guilt: »What were you doing? Where were you? What does this white spot mean?« — even if I can offer an answer which is objectively true and at the same time delivering me of the guilt (»I was learning with my friend«, for example), the guilt is already admitted on the level of desire, every answer is an excuse: with a quick answer »I was learning with a friend« I'm precisely confirming that I didn't really want to do that, that my desire was to stroll about or something like that...

Questioning is the basic procedure of the totalitarian intersubjective relationship: one needs not to refer to such exemplary cases as police interrogation or religious confession, it is quite sufficient to recall the usual abusing of the enemy in the real-socialist press: how more threatening is the question »Who is really hiding behind... (the demands for the freedom of press, for democracy)? Who is really pulling the strings of the so-called new social movements? Who is really speaking through them?« than the vulgar, direct positive affirmation »Those who demand the freedom of the press really want to open the space for the activity of the counter-socialist powers and in this way diminish the hegemony of the working class...«. Totalitarian power is not a dogmatism which has all the answers, it is on the contrary the instance which has all the questions.

The basic indecency of the question consists in its drive to put into words what should be left unspoken — as in a wellknown dialogue: »What were you doing? — You know what! — Yes, but I want *you* to tell me!« Which is then the instance in the other, in its addressee, that the question is aiming at? It aims at a point at which the answer isn't possible, where the word is lacking, where the subject is exposed in his impotence. We can illustrate this by the inverse type of the question, not by the question of the authority to its subjects but by the question of the subject-child to his father: the stake of such a question is always to catch the other who embodies the authority in his impotence, in his inability, in his lack. Bodenheimer articulates this dimension *à propos* the child's question to the father: »Father, why is the sky blue?« — the child isn't really interested in the sky as such, the real stake of the question is to expose father's impotence, his helplessness in front of the *factum brutum* that the sky is blue, his incapacity to substantiate this fact, to present the whole chain of reasons leading to it. The blue of the sky becomes thus not only father's problem, but in a way even his fault: »The sky is blue, and you're just staring at it like an idiot, incapable of doing anything about it!« A question, even if it refers only to a given state of things, makes the subject always formally responsible for it, although only in a negative way, i. e. responsible for his impotence regarding this fact. This dimension becomes manifest in the negative form of a question, when we add to a question the so-called *ne explétif*. If I say »Is it warm?«, we might still be tempted to conceive the question as simply aiming at an objective state of things; but if I say »Isn't it warm?«, the addressee himself is aimed at as responsible for this state of things: »Why is it warm? Why didn't you do anything about it?« — another confirmation of the Lacanian thesis that the *ne explétif* is a point of the inscription of the subject in a signifying chain.

What is then this point in the other where the word fails, this point of impotence at which the question as such is aiming? The question as such creates shame because it aims at my innermost, intimate kernel called by



Freud *Kern unseres Wesens* and by Lacan *das Ding*, at that strange body in my interior which is »in me more than me«, which is radically interior and the same time already exterior and for which Lacan coined a new word *extime*. The real object of the question is what Plato in *Symposion* called — through the mouth of Alcibiades — *agalma*, the hidden treasure, the object in me which precisely cannot be objectivated, dominated. The Lacanian form of this object is of course *l'objet petit a*, this point of real in the very heart of subject which cannot be symbolised, which is produced as a rest, a remnant, a left-over of every signifying operation, a hard core embodying horrifying *jouissance*, enjoyment and as such an object which at the same time attracts and repels us, i. e. which divides our desire and thus provokes shame.

Our thesis is that it is precisely the question in its obscene dimension, insofar as it aims at the ex-timate kernel, at what is in subject more than subject, at the *object in subject*, which is constitutive for the subject. In other words, there is no subject without guilt, the subject exists only insofar as it is ashamed because of the object in himself, in its interior. This is the meaning of Lacan's thesis that the subject is originally split, divided: it is divided as to the object in himself, as to the Thing, which at the same time attracts and repels him:  $\$ \langle \rangle a$ .

Let us resume: the subject is an answer of the real (of the object, of the traumatic kernel) to the question of the Other. The question as such produces in its addressee an effect of shame and guilt, it divides, it hysterizes him, and this hysterization is the constitution of the subject: the status of the subject as such is hysterical. The subject is constituted through its own division, splitting, as to the object in him; this object, this traumatic kernel is precisely the dimension that we've already indicated as that of a »death drive«, of a traumatic imbalance, rooting out. Man as such is »nature sick to death«, derailed, run off the rails through a fascination with a lethal Thing. And the process of interpellation-subjectivation is precisely an essay to elude, to avoid this traumatic kernel through the identification: in assuming a symbolic mandate, in recognizing himself in the interpellation, the subject evades the dimension of the Thing. (There are, of course, other possibilities of avoiding this hysterical deadlock: the perverse position, for example, in which the subject identifies himself immediately with the object and thus relieves himself of the burden of the question. Psychoanalysis itself also de-hysterizes the subject, but in another way: at the end of the psychoanalysis, the question is so to speak returned to the Other, the impotence of the subject displaces itself into the impossibility proper to the Other itself: the subject experiences the Other itself as blocked, failed, marked with a central impossibility, in brief, as »antagonistic«.)

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The subject, then, as an impossible answer, consubstantive with a certain guilt — the first literary association which comes to our mind is of course the work of Franz Kafka. And indeed, we might say that the achievement of Kafka is to articulate this paradoxical status of the subject before subjectivation — we were speaking of shame and the last words of *The Trial* are precisely »... it was as if he meant the shame of it to outlive him.« (Kafka 1985, 251.)

Where lies the subversive force of Kafka? We might approach it from the Althusserian problematic of the ideological state-apparatuses and ideological



interpelation (cf. Althusser 1976); the weak point of Althusser is that he or his school never succeeded in thinking out the link between these two mechanisms: how does the ideological state-apparatus (i. e. the »machine« in the Pascalian meaning, the signifying automatism) »internalize« itself, how does it produce the effect of ideological belief in a Cause and the interconnected effect of subjectivation, of recognition of one's ideological position? Kafka develops a kind of criticism of Althusser *avant la lettre*, in letting us see the gap between the two: Kafka's famous »irrational« bureaucracy, this blind gigantic, non-sensical apparatus, isn't it precisely the ideological state-apparatus with which a subject is confronted before any identification, any recognition takes place? What can we then learn from Kafka?

In a first approach, the starting point in Kafka's novels is precisely that of an interpelation: Kafkian subject is interpellated by a mysterious bureaucratic entity (Law, Castle). But this interpelation has a somewhat strange look: it is so to say an interpelation without identification, it is not offering us a Cause to identify with — the Kafkian subject is the subject desperately seeking a trait with which to identify, he doesn't understand the meaning of the call of the Other.

This situation is in itself culpabilizing. Which is why we find in Kafka's work the reverse, disquieting side of the comical aspect of interpelation: the illusion proper to interpelation, the illusion of »already-there«, shows its negative face. The procedure of culpabilization is precisely to put the subject into the position of somebody who is *already supposed to know* (to use this Lacanian term in another context). For example, in *The Trial*, Josef K. is summoned to appear before the Court on Sunday morning; the exact time of interrogation is not specified. When he finally finds the court-room, the judge reproaches him: »You should have been here an hour and five minutes ago.« (Ibid., 47.) Some of us probably remember the same situation from army service: the corporal culpabilizes us from the very beginning with a cry: »What are you staring at like idiots? Don't you know what to do? One really has to explain again and again things to you!« — and then he proceeds to give us instructions as if they were superfluous, as if we should already know them. This is then the reverse side of the ideological »already-there« illusion: the subject is culpabilized by suddenly being thrown into a situation in which he is supposed to know what is expected of him.

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We have described four different ethical positions and the four correspondent notions of the subject; at least concerning the first three of them, it is not difficult to find a global political standpoint which they imply: if Habermas' ethics of the communicative action remains attached to the social-democratic mainstream, to a faith in the progressive realisation of the political potentials of Modernity; if Althusser, trying to save the Marxist orthodoxy of the Class Struggle, Party and the Proletarian Dictatorship as a nostalgic lost Object of desire, has served as a theoretical framework for some of the Third World radical revolutionaries (from Latin America to Maoism and Pol Pot whose supporter is still the ex-althusserian Alain Badiou); if Foucault actively participated in the political struggles of the so-called marginalist movements (sexual and racial minorities, prisoners, the mentally insane...), the political potential of the Lacanian theory has yet to be fully articulated. Is this



a contingent fact or an effect of a structural impossibility? What is clear is that the first three versions (the progressivism of the social-democratic mainstream, the Third-World radical orthodoxy, the marginalist movements) are more and more attesting their unfitness to serve as a model for the Left today. Will the Lacanian theory succeed in offering a theoretical framework enabling us to articulate the new demands of the Left, escaping the first three above-mentioned versions: *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* perhaps indicates that a positive answer to this question cannot be totally excluded, however improbable it may appear in view of the fate of the Lacanian theory to date.

What does this mean, »politically«? Let us just remember the deadlock of the old Maoist class-struggle radicalism: »class struggle is eternal« etc. — but where does the class enemy draw the force for his eternal regeneration? From the negative self-relationship of the »proletarian« side itself. As soon as we admit that, we reach the level of what Hegel calls »reconciliation« or »absolute spirit« (cf. Hegel 1959); we can still fight our political battles, but we became aware of the fact that they include a necessary delusion, we became aware of the limit of political as such. To conclude with a Lacanian paradox: there is nothing that couldn't be »politicised«, that couldn't become an object of political struggle, but still the field of political is not »all«, there is a certain limit to it, although there is nothing beyond this limit.

This limitation of the field of politics doesn't entail any kind of resignation — or, if there is a resignation, it is a paradox of the enthusiastic resignation: I'm using here the term »enthusiasm« in its strict Kantian meaning, as indicating an experience of the (noumenal) object through the failure itself of its adequate representation. Enthusiasm and resignation are not then two opposed moments: it is the »resignation« itself, i. e. the experience of a certain impossibility, which incites enthusiasm.

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