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IDENTIFICATION AND SUBJECTIVATION

A Theory of Ideological Interpellation

»L'idéologie interpelle les individus en sujets.« (Althusser)

If this thesis means that ideology interpellates individuals *as* subjects, then the constitution of subject escapes historical materialism. Since we know from Lacan that subject is an effect of the signifier, and from Benveniste that the signifying practice, as undertaken by an individual, is a discourse — the question arises as to the nature of the »other« discourse, the one that »constitutes« the subject.

If this other discourse *is not* ideological, we are confronted by an uneasy question about a universal, yet non-ideological discourse underlying the whole field of inter-subjectivity: this at least demands that historical materialism should define its articulation with its specific exterior; at most, it undermines the historical-materialist thesis itself.

If this »other« discourse *is* ideological, then either we get trapped in a theoretical vicious circle, or we have to interpret Althusser's thesis as meaning that the ideology interpellates individuals *into* subjects. But should the consequence of this interpretation be that there are as many »subjects« as there are ideologies? This seems an unacceptable conclusion: for it either breaks down the ideological universe into as many communities as there are ideologies (and, from the position »to each ideology — a certain type of subject«, leads to the evidently false position »to each community — one and only one ideology«) or it postulates a transversal function linking together different ideological discourses. This transversal function (securing the effect of social totality) can easily be recognized as the dominant ideology — but then the question arises: how does the dominant ideology excercise its transversal function, how does it »catch« individuals, if not by interpellating them *into* subjects?

This essay will deal with this apparent short-circuit. We shall approach the question of ideological interpellation through a theory of interpretation, and will try to show that, while subjectivation is a symbolic mechanism that has always the same structure, interpellation depends upon a mechanism of imaginary identification in which the ideological conflict as an instance of

class struggle is being carried out. Althusser's dictum will prove to be a valid indication if it is refined by the Lacanian distinction between the imaginary and symbolic orders.

1. A Theory of Interpretation

Linguistic (Ducrot) and philosophical (Grice) approaches to interpretation usually proceed from a general principle of human communication which we can render in terms of the following syllogism:[1]

If an utterance is meaningful, then there must be a way to understand it: and this particular utterance is meaningful, since its speaker has offered it as such; so let's try and find the way to understand it.

In addition to revealing the fundamental, even though anticlimactic feature that the proof of meaning of an utterance is its having been uttered, this formula rests upon the vague notion of a way that leads to understanding. No less vaguely, but maybe more productively, we may say that the meaning of an utterance can be understood from a certain »point of view«. Interpreters spontaneously assume that this »point of view« is nothing extradiscursive.

(1) You have missed the boat for Eureka.

It seems that we could determine the meaning of (1) with the help of a disjunction: the speaker either believes that Eureka is a port, or he means »you are too late« by »you have missed the boat«. Unfortunately, by choosing one term one does not exclude the other. But the hearer can easily determine the meaning by deciding in what »capacity« he is being addressed by the speaker: either as a tourist travelling for Eureka — or as a Yugoslav worried about the course taken by his country in the block division of scientific research.

(2) Let a hundred flowers bloom.

To get the meaning of (2), it seems sufficient to know whether it was spoken by a horticultural advisor or by Mao Zedong; still, it may happen that (2) is uttered by a speaker who can pretend to horticultural as well as to political discourse, like the last Emperor of China. The decision is therefore made, not in reference to the mundane entity of the speaker, but in reference to the capacity in which (s)he in is uttering her/his words.

(3) I have climbed to the top of the greasy pole.

It may certainly help to know whether (3) was uttered at a village fair or in a Victorian drawing room, still the decision as to its meaning would depend on the type of *intersubjective structure non-univocally imposed by the utterance itself.* (For most utterances, the »capacity in which they are being uttered«, the »capacity in which the hearer is being addressed by the

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[1]   This principle is so general that it underlies otherwise different and even contrary epistemological procedures; compare e. g., Searle's treatment of »indirect speech acts« and Ducrot's theory of presuppositions and sous-entendus (which denies both phenomenal and theoretical status to »indirect speech acts«).

speaker« etc. are established by the utterance itself and are not pre-existent to it.) Knowing that Disraeli was the author of (3), we would most likely interpret it as an evaluation of a career, but a non-definite description »A British Prime minister said (3)« would equally — if not even better — do the job. The same would be the case if (3) were a third-person sentence, beginning with »He«, where »he« referred to a prime minister or to a similarly outstanding person: *but not* if an equivalent of (3) were said of Mrs. Thatcher: in this case, the »metaphor« would be considered inappropriate, on the epistemologically dubious grounds that the »proper meaning« (which is precisely the discounted meaning!) of the predicate describes an »unladylike« coup de force.

Not only a stylistic reserve, but a straightforward objection as to its truth might be produced by

(2') Comrade Ždanov said: »Let a hundred flowers bloom.«

The most modest, and most revealing objection to (2') would be: »But he did not mean it!« The reference to the speaker plays a paradoxical role here: first, it directs the interpreter to understand the quoted passage as a piece of political discourse and makes possible the decision as to its meaning; secondly, on the grounds of this very interpretation, combined with supplemental information we possess about the presumed speaker, it makes us deny the correctness of the attribution of these words to this speaker. Still, this rightly disclaimed attribution was the only key to the meaning of the quoted utterance.

— Examples (1), (2), and (3) suggest that our interpretation is guided by a principle we may roughly resume in this way: for an utterance p to have a definite meaning, q has to be true.

An utterance p proposes itself as meaningful by the mere fact that it has been uttered (proposed as a meaningful »piece of behaviour« by its speaker); the mere act of uttering p therefore indicates the presence of an intersubjective (communicational) structure, but does not determine the actual pattern of this structure; instead it proposes a practically limited set of possible patterns: we can represent this set of possible structure patterns (i. e. of possible interpretations) by a set of q-s; since different q-s determine different interpretations of p, the problem of interpretation can be represented as a disjunction of a limited set of conjunctions of p-s and q-s: $(p_1 \& q_1) \lor (p_2 \& q_2) \lor \ldots (p_n \& q_n)$. The decision as to q decides about the meaning of p.

A sentence becomes an utterance by being uttered by a speaker to a hearer in a conversational situation; the meaning of an utterance could well be deciphered by reference to the intersubjective situation — were not the utterance itself a constitutive element of this situation. The amphiboly of an utterance opens only on the ambiguity of the conversational situation: the interpreter gets two sets of terms about which to guess but the fact that both are closely interdependent (the decision as to one set resolves the indeterminacy of the other) does not help the making of the decision itself.

The ambiguity of (1) comes from the uncertainty of the reference of the name Eureka and from the double meaning of the phrase »to miss the boat«. Even if we could reduce the double meaning of the phrase, this would not fix the reference of the name which, in this case, defines the set of (two) possible interpretations. If the interpreter, searching for the conditions under which (1) may make sense in the given situation, formulates a set of propositions *re-*

ferring both to the utterance and to the intersubjective situation, this *mere expansion* of the problem, combined with the additional »contextual« information (s)he always possesses, gives her/him a fair chance to get (1) right.

The trouble we had in trying to introduce Mrs. Thatcher into (3) as its subject shows that the decision as to q is not made on the basis of the crude criterion of something being true or false; not even on the grounds of the possibility of some q being true. A slippery notion of appropriateness has imposed itself: Aristotle already demanded that a metaphor be »harmonious«, and prized above all the type of harmony he called »analogy«. We may then say that q expresses something that can »appropriately« *be believed* of p (or of some element of it) under one of the many interpretations of its meaning. Since, on the other hand, we can replace the vague notion of »the meaning of an utterance p« by »the possibility to believe that p«,[2] we have brought both components, p and q, under the same modality of (possible) belief — i. e. we have succeeded in bringing them into the realm of *ideology.*

Example (2') confirms our speculation: the name of Ždanov places (2) within a particular debate about cultural politics, and thus yields the principle of interpretation (the same would be achieved by »a Communist leader« or even by »a comrade«); the meaning, determined on the basis of the principle of interpretation (*suggested* by the name), then falsifies the attribution of (2) to the bearer of the name (if the interpreter knows about Ždanovism; but if he did not know, he would most likely be unable to produce the proper interpretation of (2) in the first place).

(4) Brûlé de plus de feux que je n'en allumai.

The Alexandrine verse, together with the first person singular, suffice to interpret these fires as meaning the pangs of disprized love, even abusively in the subordinate clause: for the cultural (ideological) prejudice linking the effects of fire with feelings of unreciprocated love is a common enough heritage, while particular information about the speaker of this line Pyrrhus, to the effect that he excelled at the burning down of Troy, is needed fully to appreciate this »syllepsis of metaphor« (as Fontanier calls it).

The »spontaneous« »mis«-interpretation of (4) shows an important feature of the pricinple of interpretation: that it tends to extend its power beyond the scope that may, under analysis, appear as its legitimate domain. In (4), the (»illegitimately«) trespassed limit was the one traditionally understood as the difference between the »metaphorical« and the »proper« meanings. The »metaphorical« meaning imposed itself abusively, because supported by an ideology still in power; to do justice to the »proper« meaning (of »fire« in the subordinate), it was necessary to introduce another »point of view«, based upon the »factual information« provided by Greek mythology, i. e. to introduce another principle of interpretation, brought in from another ideology. Fascinated by the ideological gratification of »getting the meaning«, the reader may easily yield to the interpellation by a cliché (which, in respect to Racine,

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[2]   This is an extension of Davidson's theory of meaning. For Davidson, the meaning of an utterance is the same as its truth-conditions. Meaning in general would then be »the capacity of being true«; since, on the other hand and according to Davidson, only utterances (as opposed to sentences) have meaning, we may force the next step and claim that the »meaning« is »what some speakers at certain times may hold to be true«.

quite contingently comes from romantic lyrics), and miss the other interpellation equally available in (4).

The possibility of an interpretational principle stretching its power beyond its legitimate domain is just a marginal case pointing to a more general, and more dramatic phenomenon: that a principle of interpretation may function in a way that appears *altogether illegitimate* from another »point of view«, i. e. from another ideological position. Such »interpretational imperialism« is possible only if complemented by the inverse operation of »switching off« the power of some other interpretational principle. This is obviously a phenomenon of *ideological struggle,* and we have still to determine what decides about failure or success in it. In (4), the »spontaneous« ideological reading is dictated by the romantic norm — a phenomenon quite inexplicable after more than a century of modernism, were it not blatant proof of the power of the school apparatus, in the field of literary studies still in the grips of (liberal, individualistic, »expressive«) bourgeois ideology.

(5) Waldheim and the Austrians are deeply hurt.
<div align="right">(Headline in the daily Delo, 4/30/87)</div>

We may ask (but the reader is not supposed to) whether (5) is one utterance or whether there are two utterances glued together in it: »Waldheim is hurt. The Austrians are hurt.« If there are two utterances, then we may be prone to ask if their glueing together does not derive from a homonymy of predicates rather than from their synonymy (»being hurt in one's feelings« — »being hurt in one's international interests«). The tendency of (5) is precisely to prevent the reader from posing this type of questions: its interpretational principle postulates the existence of a modality of being hurt that constitutes the imaginary community »Waldheim and the Austrians« — precisely the affective state that was the material basis of the last presidential election in Austria.

The dramaticity of phenomena like (5) holds to their *not being* a »picture« of some extra-discursive reality; on the contrary, they are *constructive* of social reality, i. e. they establish the basis of self-evidence upon which social relations are built. (The result of the last presidential election in Austria was produced by precisely utterances like (5).) Only as far as »it goes by itself« does an ideology have interpellative force.[3]

(6) Was allein hier herrscht, ist Freiheit, Gleichheit, Eigentum und Bentham.
<div align="right">(Marx, Das Kapital, MEW 23, 189)</div>

To the revolutionary bourgeois slogan »Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité«, Marx affixes a dyad that both imposes a new interpretational principle and demystifies the original one. The idea is to strip the bourgeois dictum of its false

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[3] The phrase »it goes without saying« strikes at the heart of the matter: an ideology suggests how what is said is to be taken. It is often enough to make it »speak out« to destroy its interpellative magic. — As to the possibility that an ideology »constructs« the »outer« social world, we may put it in traditional terms: traditionally speaking, the difference between the »inner« and the »outer« world being that, contrary to the latter, the former does not know the »essence/appearance« distinction, so that »inner« things are what they seem to be — ideology acts upon the »inner« world by inducing »appearances« that instantly turn into »essences«. In this methodologically solipsistic manner, we may minimalistically claim that the self-definition (or: self-perception) of a subject enters into his/her inter-subjective relations. As we have admitted that this self-definition of a subject is an ideological product, we have thus demonstrated that, even under those extremely unsuitable epistemological presuppositions, it follows that the ideology is constructive of social reality.

universality (of its interpellative force), and to exhibit its »proper« principle of believability as a stratagem in the class struggle; the elegance is to do it on stylistic level, not to »preach« it — i. e., to do it on the proper level of ideological conflict.

— The ideological interpellation is therefore a *formal* mechanism: the interpellated individual *identifies* himself with a position from which an interpellative utterance *might be meanigfully* pronounced: this is a position from which *it may be believed* that an utterance »makes sense« — and once the individual is situated in this position, the abstract meaningfulness magically transforms itself into a definite meaning. This description reveals the central feature that »yielding to an ideological interpellation« is something that the interpreter (the addressee) *actively achieves.* This is precisely what the young Marx calls the self-production of the human being. But the interpellation is *doubly* productive: it is not only a self-production of the conscious self, but also a causation of the unconscious subject. We are holding here a possibility for a theoretical articulation of the two contradictory effects of ideological interpellation: while identifying her/his conscious self with a presumingly *universal* »image« of the understanding speaker-hearer, the unconscious subject (effect of an always *idiosyncratic* mechanism) arises at a place that supports the identifying operation.

On the level of the signifying disposition (of the »material body« of an utterance), the most an interpreter can achieve is to formulate a *dilemma* as to the meaning: either q_1 or q_2, but not both (this dilemma dominates the dependent one: either p_1 or p_2, but not both).[4] The field of the signifier is by definition nonsaturated and can offer no support for a meaning-yielding decision. But it suffices to introduce a purely illusionary element, that of belief, and the meaning magically arises. By the same movement, the individual unconscious subject situates her-himself at the point of the non-saturation of the signifier: the ideology has interpellated the individual as-into subject.

2. *Identification*

It remains to define the identification point — the axis of interpellation proper. We have already said that what the *interpreter* contributes to the interpretation is her/his belief in the interpretability of an utterance. There have been attempts to define the *utterer's* meaning as a set of propositional attitudes. E. g., the speaker's meaning of an imperative can be defined as follows: S (the speaker) believes that p is good, $+$ S desires that p be made true, $+$ S believes that H (the hearer) can make p come true, $+$ S desires that H make p come true. — To this set PA_1 another element should be added — PA_2: S believes that H will make p come true if (s)he (S) communicates to H that PA_1 *and* PA_2. This last propositional attitude (PA_2) is sui-referential: it takes into account that an utterance not only says[1] some-

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[4]   This is the reason for the basic legitimacy of Quine's skepticism (the impossibility of radical translation) and of Davidson's refined version of it (the »impossibility« of radical interpretation: a native interpreter has no advantage over a complete foreigner). According to our theory, Davidson is basically right in seeking the solution by introducing the propositional attitudes, esp. belief. We differ from him in not looking for a »calculus of propositional attitudes«, inspired by the theory of games; instead, we will try to derive the basic attitude of belief from a theory of Freudian phantasy (see infra).

thing, but also says$_2$ something about the way it is saying$_1$ something (cf. Ducrot, *Le dire et le dit*). But at the very heart of this absolute proximity of an utterance to itself, of its suireferentiality, a third element intervenes: the very possibility of PA$_2$ depends upon the possibility that the hearer *understands* what is being communicated to her/him. So that an objective element of belief should be interpolated into PA$_2$: S believes *that it is possible to believe* that the hearer will make p come true if S communicates to H that PA$_1$ and PA$_2$.

This is the point of solidarity upon which the interpellative effect depends: just as the speaker believes that *it is possible to believe* that the hearer will understand her/his utterance, so the hearer believes that *it is possible to believe* that a certain utterance makes sense. The mutual identification of the two agents has a material support in its mediator, *the subject supposed to believe*, whose existence is guaranteed by the mere existence of a common language.

We can now see why, with a successful ideological interpellation, it seems enough to »understand« an utterance to yield to its interpellative force. It is a common experience that the presence of a third party gives a special additional force to orders, promises, insults and the like. We may refine this point and say that the mere *possibility* that a third party witnesses our linguistic transactions has the same effect. And we may generalize the point and say that this »third party« functions in this way only as an empirical incarnation of the general social responsibility, ethical awareness etc. common to human beings as human, i. e. social beings. The general condition for a third party to act as an ethical instance of our linguistic transactions is that they be carried out in an intelligible way. This same condition applies to their being linguistic, and even transactions at all. This adds up to the conclusion that the conditions of uttering and understanding are *the same* as the conditions of moral sanction. Therefore, by the mere act of understanding, I »create« the sufficient condition for the »third person's« moral, i. e. ideological sanction: I submit myself to the »Subject« of ideology in Althusser's terminology, i. e. I produce the subject-supposed-to believe, the material support of the ideological constraint.

So far, we have been describing mechanisms of successful interpellation. We have still to define the conditions an interpellation has to meet in order to be successful at all.

3. *The phantasy*

(6) I won't be the first President to lose a war.

There are two possible interpretations of this utterance of L. B. Johnson, depending on two different interpretational principles:

(a) (6) & Johnson has a specific interpretation of the U. S. history.

(b) (6) & the U. S. never lost a war.

According to our prima vista criterion (that the interpretational principle should be a proposition referring both to the utterance and to its situational context), (a) has much better chances of imposing itself than (b): still, we feel (and history has demonstrated) that (b) is the ideologically privileged inter-

pretation. To say that (b) is being imposed by the dominant ideology is not an answer, it only sharpens the question: what makes the force of the dominant ideology?

We are dealing with the tenacity of commonplaces, and may find a lead in what seems to be their most confusing feature: their utter irrationality. To take the extreme cases of racial prejudice, nationalistic hatred or sex chauvinism, we clearly see that those are stereotypes that cannot possibly be accepted except *in the modality of sheer belief*. To their interpreter, they pose a radical dilemma: is this pure nonsense or ... is it to be believed? (This dilemma, of course, does not explicitly occur in a successful interpellation: explicitly posed, it is destructive of interpellation; implicitly answered, it triggers it.) If the interpreter adopts a *spontaneous* (i. e. ideological) attitude, her/his desire is to save the meaningfulness of the utterance, which, *regardless of her/his choice as to the radical dilemma*, forces her/him into the position: *credo quia absurdum*.

The advantage of (6-b) over (6-a) resides exactly in its being universal and void, i. e. that it invites an intuitive agreement and precludes an analytical approach; on the other hand, (6-a) *already implictly refers to* (6-b) as to a »universally accepted truth« that can only be challenged by a specific justification: this is precisely the relation between a dominant and a non-hegemonic ideology, in which the dominant ideology defines the field of the argument in advance, while the burden of justification falls upon the subordinated ideology.

The criterion for a »successful« interpretational principle is thus its debility, that is, the *formal* necessity that it be an object of belief: this same feature makes it a point at which *desire* (that an utterance be meaningful, i. e. that it be possible to treat it as a string of signifiers) *and constraint* (the compulsion to believe) *coincide*. It has the structure of Freudian *phantasy*. It is now clear that there need not be a specific interpretational principle *for each* utterance: the same principle may guide the interpretation of a whole set — the shift from one principle to another being marked by a typical moment of bewilderment on the part of the interpreter: »How am I to take this?«

Having introduced the concept of Freudian phantasy, we can and must refine our notion of interpretational principle: as far as it is the justification that the interpreter can, in some way or other, provide for her/his interpretation of any particular utterance, it depends on the interpreter's identification with the subject-supposed-to believe, an instance of the solidarity between the speaker and the hearer, since the speaker, having produced what (s)he believes to be a meaningful string of signifiers, has already identified her-/himself with this same instance; on the other hand, as a formal matrix of the sense/nonsense alternative that both imposes the constraint of belief on the subject and »responds« to her/his desire,[5] it is the *material basis* of the identification process, because it is the subject-constitutive phantasy. To the formal criterion (of the sense/nonsense alternative), we must therefore add another one: if a phantasy is to be socially (i. e. ideologically) operative, it must be capable of catching the always idiosyncratic individual unconscious

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[5] The belief is the privileged (and maybe the only) selffulfilling modality of desire: any form of renouncement is supported by the belief that it gives someone else pleasure — and is *gratified* by this mere supposition. The libidinal economy of belief makes »the subject supposed to enjoy« a necessary complement to »the subject supposed to believe«. (Cf. R. Močnik, 1985, and Grosrichard 1987, Preface by M. Dolar.)

phantasies. It must be able to function as a *cloaca maxima* draining individual phantasies into a social dimension.

»You've been very kind to me,« said the young gentleman. »That's why I came.«

»I'm always kind to people who have good Louis Quatorze. It's very rare now, and there's no telling what one may get by it.« With which the left-hand corner of Madame Merle's mouth gave expression to the joke.

But he looked, in spite of it, literally apprehensive and consistently strenuous. »Ah, I thought you liked me for myself!«

»I like you very much: but, if you please, we won't analyse. Pardon me if I seem patronising, but I think you a perfect little gentleman ...«

(Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady*.)

This, of course, is a perfect example of Romanesque double talk, on the general tendentious background of the novelistic critique of social reification à la Goldmann. Still, it would have no artistic dimension, had not the mention of Louis Quatorze a specific function within the depicted dialogue itself. What the young gentleman fails to catch is a relatively well-intended advice he is being given, and which he could appropriately take had he read Sallust before having decided to propose in Rome. A phrase in *De bello Iugurthino* — — »*Romae omnia venalia esse*« — gives weight to the antique porcelain argument, and, if used as an interpretational principle, helps to convey the message »When in Rome, do as the Romans do«. The milleniary success of the Sallustian apperception that makes it as relevant to-day as it presumably was in 1876, can be easily understood if we consider what grain should be added to the heap of goods on sale to make them »*omnia*«, everything: namely, sexual favours. It is this feature, together with its universal and »unbelievable« pretension, that qualifies it as phantasy; hence its paradoxical character: unverifiable by definition, it can neither be falsified[6] — and imposes itself transhistorically and transideologically.

Much has been said about the relationship between ideology and reality, and symptomatically, no attempt to define it can avoid some contradiction.[7] This necessary contradiction derives from the contradictory nature of ideology itself — from its being a part of the very reality upon which it »operates«. In addition to Engels's model of *Wiederspiegeln* and Althusser's concept of *représentation imaginaire,* there is a much better way to think this paradoxical »relation« which not only embraces both these concepts but also has the advantage *not to presuppose a difference of nature between ideology and the material upon which it operates:* this concept is the Freudian concept of *sekundäre Bearbeitung* (traditionally translated as »secondary revision«; although this translation underlines an important dimension of the concept, we prefer the more literal one: »secondary elaboration«).

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⁶ »Nothing can be done about your nose, because there is nothing wrong about it.« — the analyst Ruth MacBrunswick to Wolfsmann.

⁷ Here is a recent example, importantly coming from a historian who takes ideology seriously. »Ideology, as we know, is not a reflexion of reality, but a way to act upon it. For this action to have at least some effect, there should not be too large a gap between the illusionary representation and the ‚reality‘ of life.« (Georges Duby, 1978.)
  Ideology is posed both outside the social reality (as an instrument to act upon it) and inside it (its importance for a historian comes from its being a social fact among others). The solution of situating ideology at an intermediate distance, not too close — not too far, from the reality, is symptomatic for its utopian indetermination.

4. *Ideology as Secondary Elaboration*

Secondary elaboration is a dream mechanism that *unifies* the dream material.[8] Freud describes it, almost in Marxist style, as a *tendentious revision*,[9] and has some trouble in situating it.[10] This difficulty derives from the nature of the secondary elaboration:

1. On the one hand, it is already *an interpretation:* it interprets the results of the dream-work, and is therefore no part of it.

2. On the other hand, it is a tendentious or a *deformed* interpretation; the character of distortion assimilates it to the dream-work.

Secondary elaboration thus presents a sense of the dream — but this is a false sense. Without it, the dream is a heap of disconnected fragments — with it, it has a sense, but not the true one. With the secondary elaboration, we get *a* sense, but as this is not *the* sense of the dream, it makes us lose the sense. The only motive to the secondary elaboration is the *claim of intelligibility* of the dream-material; and its only achievement is a *falsification* of what is there to be understood. The fascinating result of the secondary elaboration is that *the intelligibility blocks the understanding.*

Freud explains this paradox by an analogy:

»... Before we start upon the analysis of a dream we have to clear the ground of this attempt at an interpretation.

... It [the secondary elaboration] behaves towards the dream-content lying before it just as our normal psychical activity behaves in general towards any perceptual content that may be presented to it. It understands that content on the basis of certain anticipatory ideas, and arranges it, even in the moment of perceiving it, on the presupposition of its being intelligible; in so doing, it runs a risk of falsifying it, and in fact, if it cannot bring it into line with anything familiar, is prey to the strangest misunderstandings. As is well known, we are incapable of seeing a series of unfamiliar sings or of hearing a succes-

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[8] The thing that distinguishes and at the same time reveals this part of the dream-work is its *purpose.* This function behaves in the manner which the poet maliciously ascribes to philosophers: it fills up the gaps in the dream-structure with shreds and patches (Heine, »Die Heimkehr«). As a result of its efforts, the dream loses its appearance of absurdity and disconnectedness and approximates to the model of an intelligible experience. ... Dreams ... appear to have a meaning, but that meaning is as far removed as possible from their true significance. (*The Interpretation of Dreams,* Freud 1900.)

[9] Ibidem.

[10] In the *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) and in *On Dreams* (1901), secondary elaboration is supposed to be a part of the dream-work, even though its less important part, not even necessarily present in every dream. In *An Evidential Dream* (Ein Traum als Beweismittel, 1913), Freud already doubts if the secondary elaboration makes a part of the dream-work, and finds a Solomonic solution to get rid of the problem: »Secondary revision by the conscious agency is here reckoned as part of the dream-work. Even if one were to separate it, this would not involve any alteration in our conception. We should then have to say: dreams in the analytic sense comprise the dream-work proper together with the secondary revision of its products.« (Ibid., XII, 274—275.) In his article on »Psycho-Analysis«, contributed to Marcuse's *Handwörterbuch,* Freud states that »strictly speaking«, the secondary elaboration »does not form a part of the dream-work« (Ibid., 241) Freud's hesitation can be best shown if we confront the following two passages: »Are we to suppose that what happens is that in the first instance the dream constructing factors ... put together a provisional dream-content out of the material provided, and that this content is subsequently re-cast so as to conform so far as possible to the demands of a second agency? This is scarcely probable. We must assume rather that from the very first the demands of this second factor constitute one of the conditions which the dream must satisfy and that this condition ... operates simultaneously in a conductive and selective sense upon the mass of material present in the dream-thoughts.« (Ibid., V, 499.) — »I shall not deal exhaustively with this part of the dream-work, and will therefore merely remark that the easiest way of forming an idea of its nature is to suppose — though the supposition probably does not meet the facts — that it only comes into operation AFTER the dream-content has already been constructed.« (Ibid., V, 666.)

sion of unknown words, without at once falsifying the perception from consi-
derations of intelligibility, on the basis of something already known to us.«

This is Freud — the materialist at work: *the whole is the untrue*. The
analogy with the Marxist problem of the illusion of totality as the result of
the ideological totalisation, is more than an analogy. The illusion of totality
is a »lie«, but this »lie« is a part of the non-totalisable material itself. Dreams,
dictated by sexual desire, are as non-totalisable as society, torn and constituted
by class struggle. »Structure« is not a whole precisely because the illusion
of its wholeness is a part of it.

This, of course, is only the leftist element in Freud; to stop here would
be to yield to the infant malady of materialism. Freud's genius was to submit
this malady to analysis, and here its name is *Phantasie,* wishful phantasy.

The interpretation presented by the secondary elaboration is a false inter-
pretation; as far as it is false, it is no interpretation, it is a part of the dream-
work; and as far as it is a part of the dream-work, it is a part of the truth
of the dream: therefore, the result of the secondary elaboration is *»true«*
precisely inasmuch as it is »false«.

Although this may be an excessively logicist deduction, it nevertheless
exactly reproduces Freud's point: what is false in the distorting operation, is
not the distortion itself, but its interpretational character: it is the »conside-
ration of intelligibility«, the claim of a »sense« that is »false«.

According to Freud, the secondary elaboration builds up a façade of
coherence for the dream: this façade has to be broken in order to get to
the latent dream-content. Still, this does not mean it should be discounted:
for its framework is not accidental, it is made of pre-fabricated dream ma-
terial:

»It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that these dream-façades are
nothing other than mistaken and somewhat arbitrary revisions of the dream-
content by the conscious agency of our mental life. In the erection of a dream-
façade, use is not infrequently made of wishful phantasies which are present
in the dream-thoughts in a pre-constructed form, and are of the same character
as the appropriately named »day dreams« familiar to us in waking life. The
wishful phantasies revealed by analysis in night-dreams often turn out to be
repetitions or modified versions of scenes from infancy; thus, in some cases,
the façade of the dream directly reveals the dream's actual nucleus, distorted
by an admixture of other material.« (The paragraph added to *On Dreams* in
1911; ibid., V, 667.)

»Now there is one case in which it is to a great extent spared the labour
of, as it were, building up a façade of the dream — the case, namely, in which
a formation of that kind already exists, available for use in the material of
the dream-thoughts. I am in the habit of describing the element in the dream-
thoughts which I have in mind as a ‚phantasy' [‚Phantasie'].«[11] (*The Inter-
pretation of Dreams,* ibid., V, 491.)

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[11] Later in this text, we come across this important statement: »Hysterical simptoms are not
attached to actual memories, but to phantasies erected on the basis of memories.« — In
an addendum to his letter to Fließ of May 2. 1897, Freud specified that idea: »Phantasies
are psychical façades constructed in order to bar the way to these memories [of primal
scenes].«

The phantasy is thus what Lacan calls the *point de capiton,* the quilting point, an element common both to the façade and to what it conceals.

— The positive response to an ideological interpellation is also made in the name of a *claim of sense:* it is this claim that pushes the interpellated individual towards an *identification* with the subject-supposed-to believe. The active part played by the interpellated individual consists precisely in her/his helping to establish »a façade« — an ideological effect of coherence. The identification process is impossible, and the façade is likely to break down if they are not supported by a particular element — the element of *phantasy* satisfying the two conditions of being non-sensical (and thus necessarily an object of pure belief) and of offering a catch upon which the particular individual's idiosyncratic wishful phantasies may be attached. This element is typically void of any explicit class-content or tendency[12] and presents the same confusing mixture of universal pretension and singular idiocy as the Freudian *Phantasie.* (In (6), we referred to the phantasy of Western imperialism; later, we added the phantasy of the decline of the West; we could put on the same list the phantasy of Oriental despotism, and any number of racist stereotypes.) In addition, being a quilting point, it is what punctually connects the ideological façade with its specific exterior: the so-called »social reality«; it is typically an inert string of signifiers, capable of being inserted into different façade »interpretations« (cf. the classical Freudian example »Ein Kind wird geschlagen« — »A child is being beaten.«). It is an inert set of signifiers, »behind« which there is »nothing« — nothing but the hiatus that makes the social structure unwhole, the hiatus of the class-struggle.

Being a cover that covers a hole in the whole, it is what is »the most real« in an ideology. The »test of reality« for an ideology, is performed by testing its capacity to incorporate this obturator into a convincing (coherent, unifying) ideological façade: therefore, many conflictual ideologies may compete around the same phantasy — offering diverse class-interested interpretations of this non-sensical marker of the class struggle. It is their incorporation of the phantasy that guarantees them the »appropriate« intermediary distance from the »reality«: ideologies do not situate themselves en face to the social reality, they construe it around *the absence* of the social »real« (in the Lacanian sense), the class struggle, marked in their discourse by a stereotype, the phantasy.

That is why ideological conflict is possible at all: it is a struggle for the interpretation of something that finally resists any interpretation, and thus opens the field of ideological warfare. That is why the theory may be of some assistance to the ideological class struggle: in its enlightened moment, it can »demystify« mystifications, and isolate the kernel of nonsense they contain; in its materialist moment, it analyses the logic of mystification, and opens the breach of intervention — an intervention carried out through the alleys of signifier, resisting the temptation to reduce the phantasy, but confronting it and, with some chance, getting over it — getting over with it.

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[12] Analysing the Belgrade trial against the six dissident intellectuals (1984—1985), we discovered this element in the popular phantasy of a football match »à la Yougoslave«. (Močnik, 1985a.)

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