

## Freedom, History and the Subject of the Unconscious. Theoretical Contributions to the Ideological Study

*Libertad, historia y el sujeto del inconsciente.  
Contribuciones teóricas al estudio de la ideología*

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### Abstract

In this article we address the notions of freedom, history and subjectivity, in order to make an original contribution to the studies of ideology. Our methodology will consist in crossing Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis and the theory of interpellation of Louis Althusser. In the introduction, we start by exposing two major critiques of Freudian psychoanalysis, one formulated by Jean-Paul Sartre, and the other by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, thus shedding the light on how the psychoanalysis could represent (despite those critical arguments), a field of freedom rather than determinism, and a domain which is inherently historical, rather than the opposite. In the first section, we will look closer at the notions of freedom, memory and history, advancing a preliminary hypothesis according to which within the symbolic space, the past remains open to changes – which will make both ideology and freedom possible. Moreover, we will see what aspects of freedom could be found within the Althusserian theory of interpellation, and how Lacanian psychoanalysis is compatible with it or can lead us beyond its limitations. In the second section, we will see how there can be a subject that precedes subjectivation, and how Lacan's theory of subject which arises from the traumatic remainder, surpasses the scope of the theory of interpellation. The third section will address the pulse-traumatic core of the subject, such as it is conceived by Freud, not only as a determining dimension of the individual psyche, but as a structural condition of culture. Via these considerations, we will show how psychoanalysis can provide an explanation of the foundations of ideology, by conceiving the pulse-traumatic core of law that resides in the Name-of-Father. In the conclusion, we will see, through a series of examples, how ideology appears in the guise of truth, and why the psychoanalytic understanding of the unconscious is necessary for debunking the illusions it produces.

**Keywords:** unconscious, ideology, freedom, history, trauma.

### Resumen

En este artículo abordamos las nociones de libertad, historia y subjetividad, con el fin de aportar una contribución original a los estudios sobre la ideología. Nuestra metodología consistirá en cruzar el psicoanálisis freudiano-laciano y la teoría de la interpelación de Louis Althusser. En la introducción, comenzaremos exponiendo dos grandes críticas al psicoanálisis freudiano, una formulada por Jean-Paul Sartre, y la otra por Gilles Deleuze y Félix Guattari, arrojando así la luz sobre cómo el psicoanálisis podría representar (a pesar de esos argumentos críticos), un campo de libertad en lugar de determinismo, y un dominio que es inherentemente histórico, en lugar de lo contrario. En la primera sección, examinaremos más de cerca las nociones de libertad, memoria e historia, avanzando una hipótesis preliminar según la cual, dentro del espacio simbólico, el pasado permanece abierto a los cambios, lo que hará posible tanto la ideología como la libertad. Además, veremos qué aspectos de la libertad podrían encontrarse dentro de la teoría althusseriana de la interpelación, y cómo el psicoanálisis laciano es compatible con ella o puede llevarnos más allá de sus limitaciones. En la segunda



sección, veremos cómo puede haber un sujeto que precede a la subjetivación, y cómo la teoría del sujeto de Lacan que surge del resto traumático, sobrepasa el alcance de la teoría de la interpelación. La tercera sección abordará el núcleo pulsional-traumático del sujeto, tal como lo concibe Freud, no sólo como dimensión determinante del psiquismo individual, sino como condición estructural de la cultura. A través de estas consideraciones, mostraremos cómo el psicoanálisis puede proporcionar una explicación de los fundamentos de la ideología, al concebir el núcleo pulsional-traumático de la ley que reside en el Nombre-del-Padre. En la conclusión, veremos, a través de una serie de ejemplos, cómo la ideología aparece disfrazada de verdad, y por qué la comprensión psicoanalítica del inconsciente es necesaria para desmascarar las ilusiones que produce.

**Palabras clave:** inconsciente, ideología, libertad, historia, trauma.

## 1. Introduction

It is not a secret that psychoanalysis was often accused of being a theoretically restrained and auto-centered discipline; that the unconscious – such as Freud, and moreover Lacan, saw it – was an obstacle for considering wider social and/or philosophical phenomena. Yet all too often, in order to formulate their stances toward psychoanalysis, its critics were isolating the most well-known concepts (i.e. unconscious, Oedipus complex, sexuality), thus omitting to a certain extent, more or less intentionally, the complexity of the web of notions that constitute the psychoanalytic theory. This was the case even with some of the greatest thinkers of the 20th century. In the following lines, we will reflect on two very different critiques of psychoanalysis, one formulated by Jean-Paul Sartre, and the other by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. These reconsiderations will allow us to conceive an entry point for the examination of notions of freedom and history in their relation to the subject of the unconscious.

Let's start with Sartre and his famous reproaches to Freud. Namely, in *Being and Nothingness*, in the chapter on *bad faith*, Sartre boldly contests Freud's idea of the unconscious (Sartre, 1943, p. 87). Firstly, as Philippe Cabestan explains, Sartre accuses the Freudian theory of being mechanistic<sup>1</sup>: “The latter consists, it occurs, in reducing phenomena such as emotions, desires, wishes or decisions, to phenomena which are by essence analogous to those studied by natural sciences.” (Cabestan, 2005, pp. 99-100, our translation). Differently put, for Sartre “The unconscious could be brought down to a reification of the psyche, to making a *thing* out of it, and introducing in it the principle of determinism, which certainly applies to natural facts, but which isn't suitable for psychic facts.” (Tomès, 2013, p. 55, our translation). These, of course, aren't the only objections that Sartre makes concerning the

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<sup>1</sup> Almost thirty years after the publication of *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre will finish by somewhat relativizing his negative stance concerning the unconscious, yet still, he will never go back on his argument that the object of psychoanalysis suffers from determinism, from what he named the ‘mechanistic cramp’ (*crampe mécaniste*) (Sartre, 1972, p. 105).

idea of the unconscious. According to Arnaud Tomès, Sartre considers the unconscious as a contradictory and absurd concept, which proposes a ‘consciousness that fails to know itself’. Furthermore, he will stress that Sartre labels the unconscious also as an unnecessary concept, because “we could perfectly account the phenomena studied by Freud (complexes, neurosis, etc.) via an existential psychoanalysis (for-itself, project, situation, etc.)” (Tomès, 2013) And so, when conceptualizing consciousness, Sartre (as a self-admitted good cartesian thinker) excludes the possibility of the unconscious, by proposing that “consciousness exists by itself” (Sartre, 1943, p. 22). In the given passage, he continues by questioning himself, in an almost cynical fashion: “And, from where would the consciousness “come from”, if it could “come from” something? From the limbo of the unconscious and the psychological. But if we ask how this limbo could exist in its own respect, we are brought down to the concept of passive existence, that is to say, we absolutely cannot understand how those non-conscious data, that do not extract their existence from themselves, could still perpetuate and find force to produce consciousness” (Sartre, 1943). It is by beginning with these preliminary remarks that, after a long argumentation, the Freudian complex will be substituted by the *original choice*. And, as it is well known, the original choice is the source of radical freedom for Sartre. In sum, Sartre is claiming that, if there is the unconscious, there cannot be freedom. Instead trying to play the role of Freud’s advocate and reply here to Sartre’s critique (which has been done many times), we shall recall an author who cherished Sartre, at least as much as he has cherished Freud. In 1955, the famous French Hegelian philosopher Jean Hyppolite writes: “Psychoanalysis doesn’t make freedom impossible, it teaches us to conceive it concretely as a creative reconsideration (*reprise créative*) of ourselves after the event (*après coup*), remaining always faithful to ourselves” (1971, p. 382). This consideration implies that freedom, such as conceived by psychoanalysis, is linked inherently to the past, to a certain transformation of the past events, that takes place in what is to come (*à venir*). It is likewise that psychoanalysis offers the freedom to change one’s past, by recreating its sense in the future. But also, we must add, a freedom to change one’s future by searching for its sense in the past.

This leads us to the inevitably to the question of the relation between psychoanalysis and history, and this is where we should turn to Deleuze and Guattari, whose critique of Freud was entirely different from Sartre’s one, because it somehow transformed the premises of psychoanalysis from the inside, rather than to renounce all its central notions. *Anti-Oedipus* is most often seen, and rightfully so, as one of the major texts that replunges psychoanalysis in the social and the political domains; with *Anti-Oedipus*, the factory comes to replace the ancient theatre, the unities of the productions of the unconscious stand in place of representations, and the productive unconscious branched on social machines substitutes the myth, the tragedy and the dream (Deleuze & Guattari, 1973, p. 31). Yet, the often-forgotten fact is that *Anti-Oedipus* also aims to reconnect the subject of the unconscious (called the desiring machine in their case) to History. It is precisely History that comes to substitute the familyism of the Oedipal scene: “A materialist psychiatry is one that brings production into desire on the one hand, and desire into production on the other. *Délire* turns not on

the father, nor even “the name of the father”, but on names in History. It’s as if it was the immanence of desiring machines in great social machines” (Deleuze, 1995, pp. 17-18). On the place of the Name-of-the-Father, come the names-of-history. But is it completely just to say that the father, or the name-of-the-father is decisively ahistorical? Is it true that for the Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, the “names of history’ are the derivatives of the name of the father, and races, cultures and continents, substitutes of dad-mom, dependencies of the oedipal genealogy” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1973, p. 106)? Isn’t Deleuze’s and Guattari’s claim here slightly exaggerated (even if it is for a good cause)? Why couldn’t we claim the opposite and say that precisely the Name-of-the-Father is a derivative of History? Aren’t the familial figures that we encounter in *Totem and Taboo* products of a certain History too? Couldn’t we defend the idea of the cultural, social and historical relativity of the Oedipus complex, that appears in response to a particular ideological situation? Already in 1938, Lacan proposes this option for the first time, drawing on the work of Bronislaw Malinowski, and repeats it when he writes: “I think that the Oedipus complex did not appear with the origin of man (insofar as it is not meaningless to attempt to write the history of this origin), but alongside history, ‘historical’ history, at the limit of ‘ethnographic’ cultures. It can clearly only appear in the patriarchal form of the family institution ...?” (Lacan, 1966a, p. 184). And thus finally, isn’t the pulse-traumatic core that is both determining the subject and representing the condition of cultures and laws, always already historical?

## 2. History, memory and freedom

One can sustain the space of freedom by way of directly limiting the domain of universal natural laws: either there is an exception in the order of nature itself when its laws are suspended (singularity, Big Bang), or there is a sphere radically different from the domain of nature (spirit, human soul). This is one of the ways Catholics make a compromise with the theory of evolution: it can explain the development of life on earth, but it cannot account for the emergence of human soul when God directly conferred spirit on humans. At the opposite end of this account of freedom in the terms of an exception to the universal laws of nature, there is the idea that, although there is no exception, nothing outside nature, nature is in itself “non-all,” inconsistent, composed of multiple causal networks, and this multiplicity of imperfect causal chains opens up to the subject the space not to operate in pure freedom but to determine/chose the causal link that determines it. Our acts are not simply outside the chain of reasons, they happen because of gaps in chain of reasons, and in this sense, we can change the past – to quote T. S. Eliot:

What happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order

must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, and values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new./.../ the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past. (Eliot, 1922, p. 15)

Let's take the example of Shakespeare: a great staging of Hamlet today is not just a new interpretation of the play, it in a way fills the lacks of Shakespeare's original itself –when writing it, Shakespeare didn't know fully what he is saying, the play is full of inconsistencies, open towards the future. Recall also the ridiculously ingenious Christian reply to the Darwinist challenge: one of Darwin's contemporaries proposed a ridiculously perspicuous reconciliation between the Bible and evolutionary theory: the Bible is literally true; the world was created ca. 4000 BC—so how can we explain the fossils? They were directly created by God as fossils, to give humanity a false sense of opening, of living in an older universe—in short, when God created the universe, he created traces of its imagined past. The post-Kantian transcendentalism answers the challenge of objective science in a similar way: if for the theological literalists, God directly created fossils in order to expose men to the temptation of denying the divine creation, i.e., to test their faith, the post-Kantian transcendentalists conceive the spontaneous everyday “naive” notion of objective reality existing independently of us as a similar trap, exposing humans to the test, challenging them to see through this “evidence” and grasp how reality is constituted by the transcendental subject. We should nonetheless insist that the Christian solution –meaningless as a scientific theory, of course– contains a grain of truth: it provides an implicit adequate theory of ideology. Does every ideology not also directly create fossils, i.e., does it not create an imagined past which fits the present?

And the same holds for politics. When, in 1953, Chou En Lai, the Chinese Prime Minister, was in Geneva for the peace negotiations to end the Korean war, a French journalist asked him what does he think about the French Revolution; Chou replied: “It is still too early to tell”. In a way, he was right: with the disintegration of the East European “people's democracies” in the late 1990s, the struggle for the historical place of the French Revolution flared up again. The liberal revisionists tried to impose the notion that the demise of Communism in 1989 occurred at exactly the right moment: it marked the end of the era which began in 1789, the final failure of the revolutionary model which first entered the scene with the Jacobins. The battle for the past goes on today: if a new space of radical emancipatory politics will emerge, then French Revolution was not just a deadlock of history.

At every historical juncture, the present is not only present, it also encompasses a perspective on the past immanent to it –say, after the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, the October Revolution is no longer the same historical event, i.e., it is (for the triumphant liberal-capitalist view) no longer the beginning of a new progressive epoch in the history of humanity, but the beginning of a catastrophic mis-direction of history which reached its end in 1991. Or let's take the passage from Lenin to Stalin: once Stalinism emerged, Lenin's epoch changes its meaning, it becomes retroactively determined by what comes after –either Stalinism appears as a necessary consequence of Lenin's rule, or we emphasize how Stalinism



involved a radical break with Lenin. However, if we really want to “liberate” Lenin from Stalin’s shadow, we should avoid both this extremes (Stalin as the truth of Lenin; Stalin as a break, no continuity with Lenin) and try to abstract from Stalin’s towering presence altogether, focusing of Lenin’s period as it was in itself, with all the ambiguities that it involved, inclusive of its dark potentials (intuited exemplarily by Platonov’s two great novels, *Chevengur* and *Foundation Pit*).

The counter-argument is here that such a retroactive determination of causes which (I choose to) determine me is limited to symbolic networks: only within the symbolic space can I “change the past” –the past is factually what it was, but I can re-inscribe it into a different context, or simply act as if a part of the past didn’t happen. In the first season of (the otherwise revolting) *Sex and the City*, there is a nice detail. Samantha spends the night with a young lover in the apartment of Charlotte where she is temporarily staying, without telling this to Charlotte. In the middle of the night, Charlotte stumbles upon the half-dressed boy in the corridor and tells him: “I am going to a bathroom, and when I come out, you will not be here, and we will never talk about this!” An example of how *Ungeschehenmachen* (undoing something) can work in everyday life: you just make a deal with another or others to act as if something didn’t happen. Unexpectedly, Louis Althusser itself engaged in this path, linking overdetermination with underdetermination:

Of course there are... ‘possibilities’ within social determination, if only because there are several different orders of social determination and because this creates a play—of gaps, blank spaces, or margins (*des lacunes, des blancs, des marges*) in which the subject may find his path determined or not determined by social constraints; but this non-determination is an effect, a sub-effect (*sous-effet*), of determination, of determinations; what I called not only overdetermination (*surdétermination*), but underdetermination (*sous-détermination*)... (Althusser & Navarro, 1994, p. 121)

However, a couple of pages later, Althusser wisely limits this “freedom of choice” to interpellation, i.e., to the assuming of (recognizing oneself in) symbolic identity:

The interpellation of the individual as subject, which makes him an ideological subject, is realized not on the basis of a single ideology, but of several ideologies at once, under which the individual lives and acts [*agit*] his practice. These ideologies may be very ‘local,’ such as a subject in his family and at work, in his immediate relations with his family and friends or his peers (*ses proches ou semblables*); or they may be broader, ‘local’ in the broad sense, either ‘regional’ or ‘national.’ Such ideologies are, for the most part, always initially inherited from the past, the tradition. What results is a play and a space (*un jeu et un espace*) of multiple interpellations in which the subject is caught up (*est pris*), but which (as contradictory play and as space) constitutes the ‘freedom’ (*la «liberté»*) of the individual subject, who is simultaneously interpellated by several ideologies that are neither of the same kind nor at the same level; this multiplicity explains the ‘free’ development of the positions adopted by the subject-individual (*l’évo-*

lution «libre» des prises de position de l'individu-sujet). Thus, the individual has at his disposal a 'play of manoeuvre' [jeu de manoeuvre] between several positions, between which he can 'develop' («évoluer»), or even, if you insist, 'choose' («choisir»), determine his course [se déterminer], although this determination is itself determined, but in the play of the plurality of interpellations... The theory of the ISAs is therefore quite the contrary (tout le contraire) of a determinist theory in the superficial sense (au sens plat du terme)." (Althusser & Navarro, 1994, p. 121)

However, this grounding of subject's freedom in multiple (and conflicting, even) interpellations is not enough – there has to be a zero-level subject beneath the subject guaranteed its symbolic identity through interpellation. Althusser's own example of interpellation contains more than his theorization gets out of it. Althusser evokes an individual who, while carelessly walking down the street, is suddenly addressed by a policeman: »Hey, you there! «By answering the call – that is, by stopping and turning round towards the policeman – the individual recognizes-constitutes himself as the subject of Power, of the big Other-Subject: ideology

transforms' the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called interpellation or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace every day police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there!'

»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 transmission of hailings is such that they hardly ever miss their man: verbal call or whistle, the one hailed always recognizes that it is really him who is being hailed. And yet it is a strange phenomenon, and one which cannot be explained solely by 'guilt feelings,' despite the large numbers who 'have something on their consciences.'

»Naturally for the convenience and clarity of my little theoretical theatre I have had to present things in the form of a sequence, with a before and an after, and thus in the form of a temporal succession. There are individuals walking along. Somewhere (usually behind them) the hail rings out: 'Hey, you there!' One individual (nine times out of ten it is the right one) turns round, believing/suspecting/knowing that it is for him, i.e., recognizing that 'it really is he' who is meant by the hailing. But in reality, these things happen without any succession. The existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing. (Althusser, 1984, p. 163)

The first thing that strikes the eye in this passage is Althusser's implicit reference to Lacan's thesis on a letter that "always arrives at its destination": the interpellative letter cannot miss its addressee since, on account of its "timeless" character, it is only the addressee's recognition/acceptance that constitutes it as a letter. The crucial feature of the quoted passage, however,



is the double denial at work in it: the denial of the explanation of interpellative recognition by means of a “guilt feeling”, as well as the denial of the temporality of the process of interpellation (strictly speaking, individuals do not “become” subjects, they “always-already” are subjects).<sup>2</sup> This double denial is to be read as a Freudian denial: what the “timeless” character of interpellation renders invisible is a kind of atemporal sequentiality that is far more complex than the “theoretical theatre” staged by Althusser on behalf of the suspicious alibi of “convenience and clarity”. This “repressed” sequence concerns a “guilt feeling” of a purely formal, “non-pathological” (in the Kantian sense) nature, a guilt which, for that very reason, weighs most heavily upon those individuals who “have nothing on their consciences”. That is to say, in what, precisely, consists of the individual’s first reaction to the policeman’s “Hey, you there!”? In an inconsistent mixture of two elements: 1) why me, what does the policeman want from me? I’m innocent, I was just minding my own business and strolling around...; however, this perplexed protestation of innocence is always accompanied by 2) an indeterminate Kafkaesque feeling of “abstract” guilt, a feeling that, in the eyes of Power, I am a priori terribly guilty of something, although it is not possible for me to know what precisely I am guilty of, and for that reason –since I don’t know what I am guilty of– I am even more guilty; or, more pointedly, it is in this very ignorance of mine that my true guilt consists.<sup>3</sup>

What we have here is thus the entire Lacanian structure of the subject split between innocence and abstract, indeterminate guilt, confronted with a non-transparent call emanating from the Other (“Hey, you there!”), a call where it is not clear to the subject what the Other actually wants from him («Che vuoi?»). In short, what we encounter here is interpellation prior to identification. Prior to the recognition in the call of the Other by means of which the individual constitutes himself as “always-already”-subject, we are obliged to acknowledge this »timeless« instant of the impasse in which innocence coincides with indeterminate guilt: the ideological identification by means of which I assume a symbolic mandate and recognize myself as the subject of Power takes place only as an answer to this impasse. So, what remains “unthought” in Althusser’s theory of interpellation is the fact that prior to ideological recognition we have an intermediate moment of obscene, impenetrable interpellation without identification, a kind of vanishing mediator that has to become invisible if the subject is to achieve symbolic identity, i.e., to accomplish the gesture of subjectivization. In short, the “unthought” of Althusser is that there is already an uncanny subject that precedes the gesture of subjectivization. This gap is addressed by the hysterical question which undermines the identity conferred by interpellation: “Why am I what you are saying that I am?”

But can we simply oppose symbolic retroactivity and external reality which stupidly is at it –or, as Lacan condenses “c’est comme ça,” sekomsa. Even if we accept retroactivity to the

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<sup>2</sup> I resume here a more detailed critical reading of Althusser’s notion of ideology from Chapter 3 of Slavoj Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment*, London: Verso Books 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Here I follow the perspicacious observations of Henry Krips - see his excellent unpublished manuscript “The Subject of Althusser and Lacan”.

symbolic universe, we should bear in mind that reality is never given to us directly but always within a certain symbolic frame, and this holds also for scientific approach to reality. What this means is that our self-perception as free and responsible agents is not just a necessary illusion, but the a priori of every scientific knowledge, however determinist the content of this knowledge is. So, when Sabine Hossenfelder dismisses free will (and the claim that the denial of free will destroys science itself) as non-scientific nonsense, she misses the point of her critics, the point nicely formulated in Michael Egnor's (2021) (theologically inclined) critique:

Hossenfelder is wrong to deny the reality of free will. I think her critique of physicists who deny superdeterminism because it denies free will has salience, but the denial of free will is self-refuting regardless of the issues in theoretical physics. Free will is a precondition for all science, all reasoning, and all claims to know the truth. As noted above, if free will is not real and all of our actions, including our investigations of reality, are determined by the laws of nature which in themselves are not propositions and have no truth value. Thus, if free will is not real, human thought has no access to truth. To deny free will is to assert it, and any denial of free will on any basis whatsoever is nonsensical. If we lack free will, we have no justification whatsoever to believe that we lack free will. (Egnor, 2021, p. 1)

We are dealing here with a case of what is usually referred to as pragmatic contradiction: the very practice of a scientific community (which relies on rational argumentation) addresses us as free-thinking beings who could be convinced by arguments. Even the most positivist and reductionist science is in itself a normative activity, it tries to make us accept facts as truths, and when we convince someone that he has no free will, what he is saying is: "Ok, you convinced me, I freely admit I have no free will..." Our approach to reality always has to rely on some transcendental horizon; "transcendental" is the philosopher's technical term for a frame which defines the coordinates of reality; for example, the transcendental approach makes us aware that, for a scientific naturalist, only Spatio-temporal material phenomena regulated by natural laws really exist, while for a premodern traditionalist, spirits and meanings are also part of reality, not only our human projections.

However, the fact that a hermeneutic horizon through which we approach reality cannot be reduced to or explained by this reality does not imply that we are free to choose this horizon: on the most basic level, we are thrown into this horizon, this horizon always-already here determining how we perceive reality. So, again, our highest freedom (independence with regard to factual reality) coincides with destiny: the passage from traditional view of reality and modern scientific view of reality just happened as what Heidegger calls "event," it did not arise as a "free choice" of an agent but is here as our fate. Is then this horizon the unsurpassable fact of our lives? Psychoanalysis shows the way beyond. In his *Zollikoner Seminare* Heidegger dismisses Freud as a causal determinist:

He postulates for the conscious human phenomena that they can be explained without gaps, i.e., the continuity of causal connections. Since there are no such connections ‘in the consciousness,’ he has to invent ‘the unconscious,’ in which there have to be the causal links without gaps. (Heidegger, 2017, p. 260)

This interpretation may appear correct: is it not that Freud tries to discover a causal order in what appears to our consciousness as a confused and contingent array of mental facts (slips of tongue, dreams, clinical symptoms) and, in this way, to close the chain of causal links that run our psyche? However, Heidegger completely misses the way the Freudian “unconscious” is grounded in the traumatic encounter of an Otherness whose intrusion precisely breaks, and interrupts, the continuity of the causal link: what we get in the “unconscious” is not a complete, uninterrupted, causal link, but the repercussions, the after-shocks, of a traumatic interruption. What Freud calls “symptoms” are ways to deal with a traumatic cut, while “fantasy” is a formation destined to cover up this cut. Human freedom is ultimately not a user’s illusion only if it is grounded in this catastrophe.

### 3. A traumatic remainder: the subject before subjectivation

Althusser (2014) stresses that the subject is the effect of interpellation and not a precondition for the interpellating call to be set in motion. In laying out the way in which interpellation operates, his argument accounts for it as if it were a particular event, in which individuals are “recruited” by the call of ideology, which is most explicitly stated when he says: “I will suggest that ideology ‘acts’ or ‘functions’ as such that it ‘recruits’ subjects among individuals (recruits them all), or ‘transforms’ individuals into subjects (transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called interpellation or call” (p. 264).

The above statement is extremely clear; ideology acts by means of a call that transforms individuals into subjects. The verb *transform* is key to placing the meaning of the statement, insofar as it indicates a contingent modification, that is to say, temporally situated and within a concrete framework of occurrence. This would imply, following a simple linear logic, that the subject is not present before the event of the interpellation itself, its prior condition being that of a concrete individual. However, as is widely known, Althusser affirms the eternity of ideology, which leads him to suppress the temporal form in which he has presented the moment of interpellation. This leads him to hold a position that is directly contradictory to the idea of the interpellating call as a moment of transformation of the individual into a subject, inasmuch as there would be no such transformation since individuals would always already be subjects.

But how can we understand this apparent contradiction between a moment of production-transformation of the individual into an ideological subject and the affirmation that individuals are always-already subjects? How does Althusser manage to get out of the impasse of proposing a scene of interpellation in which the subject is created through subjection to the

ideological call and, on the other hand, sustain a pre-existence of the subject, an always-already subject prior to the interpellation? As Eagleton (1994) has noted, Althusser's proposal suffers from a logical problem since the individual's response to the interpellant call presupposes that he pre-exists the call so that he can recognize that it is addressed to him.

To settle this logical quagmire, Althusser turns to Freud to demonstrate how his argument that the individual presupposes the always-already-subject is not a paradox, but obvious evidence. Without indicating on which text or moment of Freudian theorizing he relies, Althusser asserts that "Freud shows that individuals are always 'abstract' with respect to the always-already-subjects". (Althusser, 2014, p. 265)

Althusser, using as an example the family ritual prior to the birth of a child, affirms that every individual is already a subject by the fact of bearing the name of his father, in what seems to be an allusion to the function of the Name-of-the-Father of Lacanian theory. This allusion is to be understood as the possibility that the individual comes into the field of symbolic recognition before his material existence, which seems to be a method of resolving the apparent paradox that individuals are always-already subjects: before the individual has material existence, even before he is conceived, he is preceded in the symbolic universe by a signifier that operates as the precondition both of his anchoring to the symbolic field and of his recognition/nomination. However, it is worth remembering that, for Althusser, interpellation takes place in the dimension of the imaginary and not the symbolic, stating in this regard that ideology "represents the imaginary relation of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (2014, p. 181), which implies, as Strathausen (1994) argues, that ideology maintains its imaginary status through the process of interpellation. Interpellation for Althusser would be maintained on the imaginary plane insofar as it operates as a process of specular recognition between the always-already subject individual and an Absolute Subject that functions as the core of all ideology. When the individual recognizes his subject position, he simultaneously recognizes the superiority of the Ideological Subject that interpellates him. This operation would be strictly dual, from subject to Subject, constituting a process of mutual recognition according to what Althusser calls the redoubled specular structure of ideology. The absence of a third position in the scheme of ideological interpellation is indicative that Althusser does not conceive of it as a process of a symbolic character, at least in the sense that Lacan attributes to the term symbolic, since the symbolic necessarily implies alterity that frames and mediates in every imaginary/specular/dyadic relation.

In Lacan's (2006) view, as is made clear in Seminar 11, the conditions of production of the subject escape a purely specular logic, since it implies the introduction of a third element, an element that articulates being with meaning or, in other words, the production of the subject takes place within the framework of a link between the subject and the symbolic field, the latter represented by the figure of the big Other. This is what Lacan seeks to sustain through his conceptualization of alienation and separation as logical moments of production of the subject. The phenomenon of alienation is conceived by Lacan as particular conjunction between the sets of being and meaning, which occurs through the mediation of the *vel* of

alienation, a choice that entails that in opting for one of the elements placed in relation, the other is irretrievably lost. In the production of the subject in alienation, the elements brought together are, on the one hand, being (the subject) and, on the other, meaning (the Other). This implies that, if we opt for being, the subject disappears in meaninglessness, given the absence of the Other, whereas, if we opt for meaning, we lose that dimension of the subject that is characterized by its meaninglessness, that is, the subject of the unconscious. On the other hand, separation can be understood as the intersection of two faults, the lack of the subject and the lack of the Other. The introduction of the absence implies the introduction of desire which, far from referring to the longing for some object, takes the form of a question that interrogates the discourse of the Other: *“you tell me that, but what do you want?”* (Lacan, 2010). In what the Other says, in what he demands, in his interpellation we could add, his desire is also outlined, which implies that his discourse is a failed discourse, a discourse in which, as Lacan points out, something does not quite fit. For Lacan, the eagerness that drives infantile questions does not seek to know the reason for things, but to question what in the discourse of the Other appears as a failure and enigma: why are you telling me this?

Separation, as a point of convergence of the faults of the subject and the Other, exposes the intensely negative nature of the whole process, a negativity that does not even find a possibility of becoming positive in a query of the subject that could acquire the propositional character of the question: what does the Other want from me? since it is formulated as a proposition towards the Other with respect to one's own disappearance: can you lose me? As exemplified by Lacan, the primary fantasy with which children respond to the enigma of the desire of the Other, embodied in the parental figures, is by offering their lack by means of a question and a phantasm that concerns their own disappearance: can you lose me?

Where Althusser thinks that the ideological family ritual provides an irreplaceable identity, Lacan proposes a scheme of production of the subject centered on lack and on the productivity of the negative. The Lacanian subject calls identity into question insofar as its constitution depends much more on that which is absent - the desire of the Other as enigma - than on that which provides a point of focalization and identity fixation. What becomes evident then is that the ways of conceiving the subject proposed by Althusser and Lacan respectively are different.

We could affirm that Althusser's proposal is rather a way of conceiving subjectivation and not the moment of production of the subject, which implies that interpellation in Althusser is a process that is on the imaginary side of identification. It is upon such an imaginary identity that the interpellant call of ideology comes to operate. Instead, the Lacanian subject is the recognition of a founding negativity, constituting itself as that which remains of the processes of alienation and separation, and whose presence testifies to an original trauma.

In a way, the Lacanian subject is more interrogative than interrogated, since rather than being placed on the scene by the call of the Other, he acquires his form from the call that he addresses to the Other in the form of a question, but given both the negative structure



of his question “Can you lose me? as well as the enigmatic answer he receives - the Other responds from his lack, that is, from the enigma of his desire - far from constituting himself as an irreplaceable identity, he presents himself as the positivized presence of a nucleus that resists imaginary totalization and symbolic integration, in synthesis, as a response in the real to the lack of the Other. The Lacanian subject is not-all with respect to an interpellation that is played out entirely within the imaginary and symbolic margins that shape ideology in Althusser’s version.

The process of interpellation-subjectivation is an attempt to avoid the encounter with the traumatic core that gives rise to the subject (Žižek, 2016). By means of the identification granted by assuming the interpellating call we assume a subjective position that allows us to avoid recognizing ourselves as subjects in the real or, in other words, to recognize that, as subjects, we are the effect of that traumatic imbalance that Freud called the death drive.

Early on, in his 1954-1955 seminar, we can see that Lacan refers to the death drive as a psychic dimension that is not to be identified with any biological principle or natural order: “There is already a fissure in it, a profound disturbance of vital regulation. Herein lies the importance of the notion of death instinct contributed by Freud” (Lacan, 20008, p. 62). In this same seminar Lacan will directly link the death drive -identified with the pleasure principle beyond- with the functioning of the symbolic order. In this regard he points out:

It is here that we come to the symbolic order, which is not the libidinal order in which both the ego and the totality of drives are inscribed. It tends beyond the pleasure principle, outside the limits of life, and that is why Freud identifies it with the death instinct. You will reread the text and see if it seems to you worthy of approval. The symbolic order is rejected from the libidinal order which includes the whole domain of the imaginary, including the structure of the ego. The death instinct is nothing but the mask of the symbolic order, insofar as - Freud writes - it is mute, that is to say, insofar as it has not been realized. As long as symbolic recognition has not been established, by definition, the symbolic order is mute. (2008, p. 481)

The silence of the death drive, to which Freud refers to, is understood by Lacan as the expression of the silence of the symbolic insofar as it does not unfold in the field of recognition, which can be interpreted as the impotence of the symbolic to offer an absolute response, a definitive meaning: its response is given only from the contingent relation between signifiers that refer to each other indefinitely, finding it impossible to offer a full response. This dumbness of the symbolic is expressed as a compulsion to repetition, the incessant return of the signifying chaining through which the symbolic order insists, unsuccessfully, on being realized.

Unlike the self-transparent subject of the Althusserian interpellation, the Lacanian subject is characterized by both processes of production -alienation, and separation- that establish it on the basis of an insurmountable loss, as well as by its subjection to the death drive, conditions that institute it as a negative power, open to the opaque alterity of the symbolic, which implies the impossibility of its coincidence with the autonomous subject derived from the



process of interpellation. As Dolar points out: “the psychoanalytic subject is the failure to become an Althusserian subject” (1993, pp. 77-78). Subject, in the Lacanian sense, is the name of an impossibility, of a void made positive, in short, a response to the impossibility of complete symbolization and imaginary totalization. But this does not imply that the subject is only a void since at its core we can find a remnant, a fragment of external materiality that pretends to fill the void: the object of the drive. The interpellation pretends to evade the encounter with this Thing within the subject, the subjectivation it offers is an alternative to the ominous experience that would mean identifying with that traumatic core.

#### 4. Before ideology: the pulse-traumatic core of the law

The pulse-traumatic core of the subject is conceived by Freud not only as a determining dimension of the individual psyche, but as a structural condition of culture, a condition that is paradoxically expressed in the very human attempt to regulate its collective life through the creation of norms:

we cannot understand why the rules that we ourselves have created should not rather protect and benefit us all. In fact, if we consider how poorly we manage to prevent the penalties of this origin, the suspicion that behind this there could also be hidden an invincible block of nature, this time, of our own psychic complexion. (Freud, 1992, p. 85)

The norm, the law itself, cannot get rid of something that infiltrates it from our “own psychic complexion”. Of course, Freud alludes to the death drive, which in “Civilization and Its Discontents” will be placed as a central factor in understanding the form that human bonds assume, as well as the impossibility of definitively purifying the social bond of violence and conflict.

Questioning cultural attempts to regulate violence, Freud concludes that the human *psychic complexion* cannot be dissociated from aggression. The law consistently fails to regulate violence because it is itself founded on an inaugural violence. In *Totem and Taboo* Freud had formulated the essentially violent and negative character on which cultural organization is founded. The negativity, to which we refer to, hints at an unrepresentability of the law, which supposes that it cannot be directly enunciated as that which it is, but only as that which it prohibits. For Roberto Esposito (1998) the arguments of *Totem and Taboo*, on the level of a political anthropology, have the capacity to “undermine all affirmative semantics of the political vocabulary” (p. 144). The inaugural act of the social aspect imagined by Freud has the character of a double loss: the death of the father and the prohibition to occupy the empty place left by the father. But such negativity also concerns the very bond and agreement established between the siblings after the father’s murder.

What is reunified under the name of the father, that is, in the form of a signifier of the law, is the impossibility of political representation of fraternity-plurality. In this impossibil-

ity of positive representation, in its self-dissolving tendency as it embodies the vengeance of the dejected father, we can appreciate how the law and the death drive are intertwined. The collusion of the law with the revenge of the father allows us to understand why the subject is always-already guilty. For Freud, in the super-egoic psychic instance we can see this intertwining of drive and law in operation, given that the command of the superego –the voice in which the paternal vengeance survives– is eroticized by the death drive that takes pleasure in its sadistic satisfaction on the ego. This *extimacy* of the drive and the law –the implantation of an exteriority in the core of the subject– means that something within the subject operates simultaneously as an object of attraction and repulsion, generating a structural split.

It is this division that sustains an immanent guilt of the subject, a guilt that passes from potency to act as soon as the subject becomes the addressee of a question. The question exposes the intimacy that shames the subject, that obscene driving core to which we have alluded to, especially when it is an indeterminate question in which any answer ends up exhibiting more than what we wanted to show, as it also exposes an impossibility of an answer, fundamental impotence. In the face of the question, we are always already guilty insofar as it exposes, on the one hand, that object in us whose joyful attraction shames us and, on the other hand, resonates the accusations of guilt that the superego never ceases to pronounce. The call of ideology has the structure of an obscene question, to which the subject responds from its structural guilt, a guilt prior to the interpellation and which is the foundation of the subject's uncompromising response to ideological subjectivation (Žižek, 2009).

## 5. Conclusions: ideology in the guise of truth

The necessity to study ideology have been more demanding at present because of the arising perspective that it seems there is no longer an alternative to capitalism and that the only possible changes to capitalist ideology are some minor adjustments. From hierarchical authority to dialogue and cooperation; centralized bureaucracy to dynamic and nomadic; old industrial production to culture and knowledge; fixed hierarchy to spontaneous interaction and autopoiesis (Žižek, 2008). One of the probable reasons is the expansion of mass media, which enables ideology to effectively penetrate the pore of the social body, bringing events from the farthest and most isolated portion of the earth in a split second. Despite the recognition that capitalism worsens the human condition and allows the destruction of the environment, billions of individuals seek nothing more than to become successful capitalists (Skott-Myhre, 2015). Even the most desolate members of society seek to obtain microloans so that they might employ their relatives and neighbors and engage in the most oppressive of capitalist relations. In addition, curriculum and programs in the educational system are designed, particularly in the global south, to cater to the needs of global capitalism by producing graduates that are globally competitive. For example, in the fields of fisheries, animal science, and agriculture, instead of addressing food security at the local level, they are not able to provide an alternative to the locals since their training and education are programs to mass

produce and respond to the needs of global capitalism. They are educated to enhance the profit of genetically engineered fish, chickens, vegetables, etc. for mass production to meet the demands of the global market.

Moreover, the anti-capitalist movement had thrown capitalism into crisis, but it always goes back with an updated version and its aim, which is to exploit, alienate, and make a profit, remains the same. However, capitalist control continues to appropriate and turn struggle into market opportunities under the guise of democratic aspiration and political reform. As a result, emerge what refers to “themselves as the liberal communists,” uniting capitalism and social movements as an alternative to capitalism. It professes the principle that everyone can have the global capitalist cake, thrive as profitable entrepreneurs, and endorse the anti-capitalist cause, social responsibility, and environmental concern (Žižek, 2009).

Furthermore, liberal communists take hold of a new version of Adam Smith’s invisible hand of the market, emphasizing that the key to success in business entails collaboration with and participation of the employees, dialogues with customers, transparency of deals, and respect for the environment. With such a principle, working-class exploitation is no longer possible, and protest is no longer considered a viable option. For them, the most glaring problems that need to be solved are starvation in Africa, religious fundamentalist violence, overpopulation, the treatment of women in the global south, and the continued emergence of people diagnosed with HIV. As a response, charity is their form of morality, but underneath their act of charity is nothing but a sort of new strategy in making profit taken by the old capitalists creating deception; their hand stretches to help while the other hand is reaching the pocket. Charity is the humanitarian mask hiding in the face of economic exploitation. Foreign aid, credits, and so on are blackmailed by the undeveloped countries as a way of avoiding responsibility for their connivance in the miserable situation of the undeveloped. For example, the factories and other inimical business ventures in Southeast Asia in particular benefit from cheap labor and not the highly skilled workers (Žižek, 1998).

As a whole, capitalism displaces the realities of the suffering of an ever-increasing segment of the population onto a field of political discourse and empty sloganeering. The universality of capitalism resides in the fact that capitalism is not a name for civilizations, for a specific cultural-symbolic world, but the name for a truly neutral economic symbolic machine that operates with Asian values as well as with others, and not that capitalism is Eurocentric (Žižek, 2008). In addition, Skott-Myhre (2015) claimed that the work of Guatarri and Deleuze’s *A Thousand Plateaus* both pointed out that language reifies the existing power relations. Language is a system that inherently orders the world; in a certain sense, all beliefs are ideological because they are derived from the system of language and definition common to the system of rule and dominance of that historical period. Thus, because of this, language renders a problem even though it is perceived to work as a medium of reconciliation, making it a divider that puts individuals and their neighbors into disarray as one expresses itself through language (Žižek, 2009).

Jacques Lacan builds his idea of the unconscious on Freud's assertion that thoughts and emotions outside of our cognizance continue to wield an influence on behavior, choices, and judgment even though we are unaware of these underlying influences. The value in understanding the role of unconsciousness, for example in Hegel's Absolute, baffled psychology and philosophy at the same time, thus resulting in the emergence of psychoanalysis. A discipline that is governed by rules for which that analyst is responsible and the effects of which the analyst is responsible and the effects of which on the analysand are not independent of how the experience is formulated (Soler, 2014). The aim of psychoanalysis is not to become "guarantors of the bourgeois dream." It is never simply about the individual and its problems but of "the Other". Thus it cannot be helped to extend its musings to various fields or disciplines such as philosophy, religion, art, as well as various branches of science (Zupancic, 2008).

Moreover, Freud provided a way in which the unconscious can be explored and perhaps deciphered, since, as Lacan puts it, unconsciousness is like a language in the sense that it is a signifying process that involves coding and decoding. Errors of everyday life, symptoms, dreams, and jokes are the linguistic products of the unconscious. Because of the elusiveness of the unconscious, it is by way of ideology that we can have temporary access to unconsciousness since it is located in politics, economics, religion, etc. Ideology is a series of discourses that impose ideas on people. When people capitulate to those ideas, they develop a consciousness about, for example, the world, how it operates, and the individual's place in it. Ideologies are created to help sustain a particular social structure and ultimately fall out when new ideas come into force. It is where power relations, control, and dominance are maintained and preserved within society through the process of political socialization. How a society transmits political orientations, knowledge, attitudes, or norms and values—from generation to generation. It is the process of learning, embracing, and maintaining the flow of political values. Therefore, ideology is not something that is assembled but something that one is born into (Sicat, 1976). It promises social inclusion for anyone who is a successful capitalist, a hard worker, a competent functionary, and so on.

Furthermore, to claim that ideology is a coping mechanism for the unconsciousness caused by trauma, failure, and deprivation due to the inconsistent operation of the world is a rational and viable reason. The emergence of a new ideology is an attempt to change the condition brought about by the irrationality of the world. Thus, ideology is not a simple error, a false consciousness; it is created for society to function, a support for communal life. It is a system of representations that designates itself as anything from a contemplative attitude that misrecognizes its dependence on social reality to an action-oriented set of beliefs, from the indispensable medium in which individuals live out their relations to a social structure to false ideas that legitimize a dominant political power. Therefore, ideology is not necessarily false since what matters is not the asserted content but the way this content is related to the subjective position implied by its process of enunciation. However, ideology may not be categorically identified as true or false, but it can easily lie under the guise of truth. For example, the 2003 United States-led invasion of the Republic of Iraq aimed to disarm Iraq with

weapons of mass destruction, end Saddam Hussein's support for terrorism, and free the Iraqi people. The intervention of the US and other countries will indeed halt various forms of violence, yet such legitimization nonetheless remains ideological in so far as it fails to mention the true motives of the invasion (economics, vengeance, politics, etc.) (Žižek, 1994).

At present, the world is enmeshed in a capitalist ideology, which as a social form casts a certain spell of capture over its subjects. It creates objective violence, a form of violence that is invisible and sustains the very low standard against which people perceive themselves as subjectively violent. Anonymous and systemic, unable to determine who is guilty, they experience it as a pseudo-catastrophe. For example, during an economic crisis, thousands of workers become unemployed, small shareholders lose everything they have, and the quality of living plummets. This happens and is considered normal without knowing who is responsible (Žižek, 2008, pp. 2-12).

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