

# Figures of interpellation in Althusser and Fanon

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The text that Althusser published in 1970 under the title 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', where he puts forward the thesis of the individual's interpellation as subject, is no doubt one of his most innovative, but it is also particularly disconcerting: its exposition, in exploiting a rhetoric that combines ellipses and brute force, winds up constructing an enigma, which the reader herself is left to decrypt. It is in an effort to help with that decryption that we will try to confront that text with *Black Skin, White Masks*, published some twenty years earlier.<sup>1</sup> Althusser and Fanon target their respective analyses on two formulas of interpellation – 'Look, a nigger!' (Fanon), 'Hey, you there!' (Althusser) – and it is interesting to compare them with one another as a way of bringing out the contrast between these two ways of taking up the problem of subjectivation [subjectivation].<sup>2</sup>

## Ideology

Let us first see how, in Althusser's text, the cry 'Hey, you there!' is introduced and interpreted. Taken in its entire trajectory, the reasoning followed in the text – which, we should never forget, is lacunary, even systematically lacunary, if we may say so<sup>3</sup> – moves from a thesis concerning social reproduction ('Every social formation must, at the same time as it produces, and in order to be able to produce, reproduce the conditions of its production'<sup>4</sup>) to a thesis concerning ideology ('It is in and under the forms of ideological subjection [l'assujettissement] that the reproduction of the qualification of labour power is assured'<sup>5</sup>), and from there we move on to a thesis concerning the subject ('Ideology interpellates the individual as a subject'<sup>6</sup>). It is thus the concept of ideological subjection that constitutes the pivot of this argumentative sequence: ideology subjects, its function is to subject, to unfold the process of subjectivation.

In putting all of this forward in the form of theses proposed for discussion, Althusser knew that this

amounted to renovating the concept of ideology from the ground up, and shedding a light on ideology that cannot be found by reading Marx's classical writings or their traditional commentaries: so far as the question of ideology is concerned, the tradition, as Althusser sees it, is indeed locked in an impasse. Why is the traditional conception of ideology unsatisfying? Because it ends up conceiving of it in a defective, ultimately negative sense; from its point of view, ideology is defined by what it is not, by what it fails to be, or, to put it another way, by the distance that it keeps from the real and its materiality, making it a tissue of illusions, a curtain of smoke: from this perspective, ideology, as mere 'reflection', does not actually participate in the process of social production whose inverted, mystified, imaginary version it is compelled to offer, so as to mask the real problems, but only after the fact. What Althusser ultimately seeks to do is to rematerialize ideology,<sup>7</sup> which is the condition under which we may develop a positive conception of it as an effective agent of the process of social reproduction in which it is directly implicated. Now, to achieve this goal, we must rid ourselves of two presuppositions on which the defective conception of ideology rests: the first consists in privileging a purely representational conception of ideology that identifies it with a world-view; the second confines ideology's interventions within a purely reactive and repressive role, which keeps it trailing behind the real and reinforces its characterization as unproductive.

In the first place, Althusser proposes to show that, contrary to what is suggested by the word that serves to designate it, ideology is not to be reduced to a system of ideas, whether dominant or dominated, which change nothing on the ground. This is what is meant – in a manner which, we must say, is obscure at first sight – by the decision that, rather than focus on ideologies as concatenations [agencements] of representations, we should pursue the question upstream, to a primordial level where what we are dealing with is no longer this

or that particular ideological formation, but ideology as such, 'ideology in general', on the subject of which Althusser submits that it 'has no history' and that it displays an 'omni-historical' dimension.<sup>8</sup> In an effort to rematerialize ideology, and reinsert it into the process of production and social reproduction, this manner of proceeding is strange at first sight, to the extent that it refers to an entity, 'ideology in general', that is situated at such a level of abstraction that it seems to outdo even the traditional conception in distancing ideology from the real. What is Althusser getting at when he speaks of ideology in general? He is seeking to bring about a displacement of the question of ideology, to change the playing field outright. Two hypotheses may be put forward to characterize this change.

To begin with, with reference to the category of 'continent' that plays a central role in Althusser's epistemology, we may suppose that his intention is to extract the question of ideology from the continent of 'history' – in which it has been inscribed by its reduction to a mere set of conceptions of the world, condemned to follow the vicissitudes of historical evolution and betrothed to day-to-day conflicts – so as to transport it to another continent, the continent of 'the unconscious':

Our proposition, 'ideology has no history', can and should (and in a fashion that has nothing arbitrary about it, but which is theoretically necessary, because there is an organic link between the two propositions) be placed in a direct relation with Freud's proposition that the unconscious is eternal, which is to say, it has no history.<sup>9</sup>

By establishing this relation between ideology in general and the unconscious, and by forcefully underscoring, as he does here, the 'necessary' character of this relation, Althusser prepares the 'subjectivating' conception of ideology that he will introduce a little later, according to which ideology's intervention in the process of social reproduction is reduced to the constitution of individuals as subjects, a constitution for which the interpellation scene constitutes the metaphor.

A second hypothesis, which is in no way an alternative to the preceding one: by substituting a consideration of ideology in general, which has no history, for that of historical ideologies, Althusser moves from a gnoseological, purely representational conception of ideology, to a conception that can be called existential. Ideology is not a certain historically conditioned manner of representing what exists, but a certain manner of being or being-made-to-be that constitutes a historical unconditioned (Althusser nevertheless specifies: within the horizon belonging to the

history of class societies<sup>10</sup>). Here, again, with a sense of groping towards the unknown, he makes a rather sibylline remark that demands decryption:

It is not their conditions of real existence, their real world, that 'men' 'represent to themselves' in ideology; it is rather, above all, their relation to their conditions of existence that is represented to them [*leur y est représenté*]. It is that relation which is at the centre of every ideological, and therefore imaginary, representation of the real world.<sup>11</sup>

There are indeed, therefore, ideological representations, but the bearers of those representations are not, in any case, their responsible authors, their authentic creators; 'something is represented to them', which is their relation to their conditions of existence. That relation is the cause of the deformations that accompany those representations, and in this sense it is imaginary or at least productive of effects situated on the imaginary plane; but, as imaginary as it might be, it is no less real, to the extent that it is the necessary form according to which the conditions of men's life represent themselves – or, perhaps it would be better to say, present themselves – to consciousness, which is to say, to the consciousness of subjects whose admittance they compel. In other words, behind all of these representations, at their source, runs a process of presentation that, to return to the formula we employed earlier, is a certain manner of being in the world of which ideology is, in the last instance, the cause or principal motor: this manner of being in the world is subject-being. Ideology in general is nothing other than that process which, according to the first hypothesis, entertains an original relation with the unconscious, and which is consequently omni-historical. If there are ideological representations, and if those representations are imaginary, this is so, we might say, at the end of the process: they are the results that the ideologization process yields at the end of its operation [*fonctionnement*]; these results are affected by a historical conditioning upon arrival, but the process that has given birth to them is staged elsewhere, outside the terrain of history. From this point of view, it must be admitted that ideology, before taking on the guise of a notional system, is a practical behaviour, a *habitus* one might say, to speak like Bourdieu. This is why, even if it produces effects that are imaginary, and as such bear historical connotation, it is something altogether real, as a process that unfolds on a plane which is that of neither history nor consciousness; it unfolds on the plane of the unconscious, which, for its part, has no history. Ideology, ideology as such, is therefore not of the order of representation, even if, at the end of

the process, it manifests itself to consciousness in the form of representations. Ideology, ideology as such, must not be reduced to these manifestations, which entertain a distorted, and therefore negatively marked, relation with the real; it must rather be conceived, from a positive point of view, as the altogether real process that is at the source of those manifestations' genesis in consciousness – namely, the process of subjectivation.

Given this first point, let us move on to the second presupposition, which concerns the conception of ideology as reactive and repressive. In the article that was published in *La Pensée* in 1970, and later reprinted without modifications in the *Positions* collection, the theme is taken up only in passing; in the original manuscript from which the text was drawn, however, it is the object of a lengthy discussion under the heading 'Répression et idéologie', which immediately follows the passage that explains how ideology has no history. The discussion begins as follows:

The advantage of this theory of ideology ... is that it shows us, concretely, how ideology 'operates' on its most concrete level, on the level of individual 'subjects', which is to say, men such as they exist, in their concrete individuality, in their work, their daily life, their acts, their commitments [*engagements*], their hesitations, their doubts and their most immediate intuitions [*évidences*].<sup>12</sup>

The reference to the concrete emphasizes, by contrast, the abstract character of the repressive conception of ideology, which reduces it to obstacles [*blocages*] that are supposed to divert historical agents from thinking and possibly acting in a certain way. But ideology, under the condition of its being rematerialized, presents itself not in a restrictive or reactive and consequently defective manner, but, quite to the contrary, as that which makes us act and think 'concretely'. Its action is fundamentally constitutive, and for this reason, as we have shown, existentially determinant: on the plane of both ideas and behaviours, in so far as both are assumed and borne by 'subjects', it yields products of its operation which it configures in a real fashion. Its status is not constative but performative.

Let us remark in passing that, in so far as he develops this productive conception of ideology, which restores to it its positive role in the social process, Althusser brings about, on the plane of Marxist theory, a turn that is not without resemblance to the one that, on an altogether different plane, Foucault was engaging in at the same time. No doubt, Foucault accords no interest to the question of ideology, which he considers to be fundamentally ill-posed, and incapable of being set back on its feet. However, if we agree to look

beyond mere words, we can see that what Althusser aims at under the rubric of 'ideology in general' presents a certain number of points in common with what Foucault, for his part, seeks to think under the concept of norm, which, like Althusser's concept of ideology, serves to designate a process of subjectivation.<sup>13</sup> What does it mean to be subjected to norms? It represents the operation by which one is constituted as a subject for the norms, subject to the call that one answers by bending to the slope of a rationality that quietly goes to work, without being remarked upon, because it has come to penetrate minds and bodies completely, so as to govern them: we can interpret the notion of 'bio-power' along these lines, a notion that Foucault introduces precisely in order to understand how what he calls the 'society of the norm'<sup>14</sup> institutes modes of rationalization of social life that fundamentally transform the conditions of the exercise of authority, in such a way that it no longer takes the guise of a repressive, formal constraint. We may conclude that what Althusser is trying to do for the concept of ideology, Foucault is, for his part, trying to do for the concept of norm – namely, to show that what is implicated in the term in question are practical logics of behaviour, manners of acting, and not formal systems of representations constituting an order apart from social reality, with which, on the basis of transcendence and prohibition, it maintains a merely external relation. To the question of knowing 'what happens' to an individual who lives 'in ideology', Althusser, from this point of view, answers that 'he conducts himself in such and such a manner, adopts such and such a practical behaviour'.<sup>15</sup> What is decisive in 'ideology' is that it makes one act: it incarnates itself in acts, and, as Althusser further specifies, in acts 'inserted in practices',<sup>16</sup> which is to say collective, socially ordered practices. These practices are accompanied by ideas that claim to direct them when, in reality, it is the practices themselves that determine the orientation of those ideas. From this it follows that:

Ideas have disappeared as such (as endowed with an ideal, spiritual existence), to the very extent that it is apparent that their existence is inscribed in acts and practices that are regulated by definite rituals and, in the last instance, by an ideological apparatus.<sup>17</sup>

Under these conditions, one might well ask whether the term 'ideology', formed from the noun 'idea', is still pertinent: if Althusser has retained it, while struggling to twist its meaning, it is no doubt out of a concern to continue to inscribe himself within, even while proposing a strongly heterodox version of, the wake of 'Marxist theory', a concern foreign to Foucault.

## Interpellation

We now come to the ‘scene’ of interpellation that Althusser employs in what he calls ‘our little theoretical theatre’,<sup>18</sup> in order to furnish a concrete presentation of the theory of subjection [*l’assujettissement*] that would allow him to conceive of ideology as positive, constitutive and productive, and therefore not exclusively representational and repressive:

We therefore suggest that ideology ‘acts’ or ‘functions’ in such a way that it ‘recruits’ subjects amongst individuals (it recruits them all), or ‘transforms’ individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by this very precise operation that we call *interpellation*, which can be represented in the same way as the most banal everyday policing (or other) operation: ‘hey, you there!’ If we suppose that the imagined theoretical scene takes place in the street, the interpellated individual turns around. By this simple 180-degree physical conversion, he becomes a *subject*. Why? Because he has recognized that the interpellation is ‘indeed’ addressed to him, and that ‘it is *indeed he*’ who has been interpellated (and not another).<sup>19</sup>

With these few lines, as can happen on the stage at the moment of crisis, when the action comes to a head, it all makes sense.

To begin with, attention is drawn to the fact that the ideological operation of interpellation is common, banal, ordinary, or, in other words, that it exhibits no exceptional character, which is what is illustrated by having it take place ‘in the street’. A consequence of this, as Althusser goes on to explain, is that it ‘practically always gets its man’,<sup>20</sup> and so displays a universal character: this is why, having said that ideology ‘recruits’ individuals as subjects, he immediately corrects the formulation by specifying that it recruits all – which, from the outset, strips this recruitment of the allure of a selective procedure sorting people into those who are worthy of becoming subjects and those who are not. In ideology, everyone is ‘called’, and evasion is not permitted. This is why, in so far as it is a procedure of identification that is at stake, which results in the admission that ‘it is indeed he’, it would be inappropriate to reduce it to the strict model of a police-like control of identity, which

presents, on the basis of guilt, a primarily repressive character, in the context of a pursuit that may well lead to sanction and relegation. If ideology interpellates, it is by putting out a call that is addressed to all and to which all, without exception, not only *must answer*, but *answer in fact*, by acknowledging – by ‘recognizing’ – that they have positioned themselves according to the forms that the call destines for them, in such a manner that they are not at liberty to ignore it, adhering to it completely by default: in the specific case, the answer is in some sense contained in the question, with no possibility of dodging it, and so the behaviour triggered by the sending of the message seems to be followed automatically.<sup>21</sup>

Second, we should note that the interpellation procedure, directly associated with the sending of a message, presents itself at the outset as an act of language, whence its universal character, which is to say its tendency to saturate the field in which it intervenes. If individuals are ideologically subjected, this is so in and through the language that gives their subject-being its common structure and universal reception: subjects ‘take place’ in language in the double sense that they come to be, and in particular come to be subjects, in the field of language, and that this field opens the



space where they are called to take their place. In contending that there are subjects only in and through language, Althusser inscribes himself in the lineage of Lacan, reread in the light of Deligny, from whom he again takes up the idea that it is the symbolism of language that accounts for the constitution of individuals as subjects, which is to say their recruitment, establishment, identification as subjects having their place already traced inside its order, an order which, rather than being imposed on them from without in the name of a negative and repressive constraint, makes them what they are, produces them as subjects of the language, or subjects of language, existing as subjects in so far as they occupy the place they return to or which is assigned to them in the field of language.<sup>22</sup> Note that when Foucault puts forward the idea of an 'order of discourse', which prepares his own theory of subjectivation, he does so from a more or less similar perspective.<sup>23</sup>

Third remark: the call to enter and take a place in the field of language assumes, in the allegorical framework of the interpellation scene, the form of a message whose every word has been carefully weighed. 'Hey', the interjection that casts the message, exhibits the allure of an urgent summons, the dispatching of which triggers a movement in the opposite direction as a reaction, a 180-degree turn, which is to say, a gesture that, tacitly, signifies that the call has been well understood and understood well [*que l'appel a bien été entendu et qu'il a été bien entendu*], which is to say that the urgent necessity of responding has been respected. 'You' is the proper word of identification: it designates the fact that the message, far from being cast into the void, is programmed, like the drone of military operations, so as to attain the precise objective at which it aims, namely, if we may say so, a 'you', someone endowed with the capacity to authenticate the pertinence of the call with the formula 'yes, it's me', and therefore a subject, a true subject. Finally, 'there' signals the distance opened up in a space that contains the places to be occupied, places which, as their very name indicates, 'take place' in a larger field within which they are laid out in relation to one another, so that one is always subject to distance, and in particular to a certain distance that allows one to localize the subject-position that one is called upon to occupy: to be a subject, in this sense, is to take a position in a field.

Finally, one last remark: the message thus formulated takes the form of an utterance – a truly strange utterance! Addressed to someone from offstage, it does not itself seem to have been addressed by anyone,

which gives to the distance in question a quasi-fantastic allure. Where is the call projected [*lancé*] from? Who projects it? None of this is known, and the call draws its insistent force precisely from this ignorance. The voice that utters the message is not the voice of someone; it is not a subject's voice; or, at least, if this voice has a subject, the latter is not directly identifiable. Further on in the text, where Althusser takes Christian religious ideology as an example<sup>24</sup> in order to illustrate his theory of interpellation, he writes:

It therefore appears that the interpellation of individuals as subjects supposes the 'existence' of an Other Subject, Unique and central, in whose Name religious ideology interpellates all individuals as subjects. All of this is clearly written in what is justly called Scripture: 'At that moment, the Lord God (*Yahweh*) spoke to Moses in the cloud. And the Lord called Moses: "Moses!" "It is (indeed) I!" answered Moses, "I am Moses, your servant. Speak and I will listen!" And the Lord spoke to Moses, and he said unto him: "I am That I am".'<sup>25</sup>

The entire question is whether this 'Other Subject', whom Althusser later calls 'the Subject par excellence', is still a subject. We may well doubt this: when God 'speaks' to Moses, He does so while dissimulating himself in a cloud; and, in order to identify Himself, He performs a pirouette and is satisfied to say 'I am That I am', which, taken literally, means nothing, but in virtue of an excess rather than a deficiency. In any case, any way we look at it, this Other Subject, from whom the message is sent, is a hidden subject, a *Deus absconditus*; one never knows where to find Him, or who He is, in the sense of ordinary existence, and this is the key to His radical alterity. In the street scene that constitutes the profane version of interpellation, the transcendent and strictly anonymous character of the voice that casts the call is translated by the fact that it addresses someone whom it constitutes as subject from behind, speaking to his or her back, which is precisely what makes it a provocation to turn around. Hence this observation, which is truly enigmatic: every subject is turned around [*retournés*]; subjects are people who have turned around in response to the call to become what has been projected at them; the constitution of the subject is a matter of turning around.

The theory of interpellation does not stop there, as Althusser goes on to explain that the subjects of interpellation have not, properly speaking, become subjects as a result of interpellation, at the end of a temporal process that proceeds from its cause in the direction of its effects, because 'in every case, they are already subjects',<sup>26</sup> which literally contradicts the

way the interpellation scene was presented: it in fact amounts to saying that the call is not really responsible for the operation of turning around that constitutes the subject, this operation having already been accomplished before the message has even been addressed, so that the response is not only triggered automatically by the question, but anticipates it; it is as if the question was posed after the fact, the fact that it had been posed at all has the status of a mere confirmation (in this case, the call [*appel*] simply has the status of a reminder [*rappel*]). But never mind this difficult point, which is of capital importance. We will come back to it in the end. With the interpellation scene such as we have recounted it in hand, let us, in order better to specify its characteristics, compare it with a quite different scene recounted and commented upon by Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*, the meaning of which is concentrated in the reaction: ‘Look, a nigger!’

### Face-to-face

*Peau noir, masques blancs*, published in 1952 in Éditions du Seuil’s ‘Esprit’ collection, with a preface by Francis Jeanson, a close friend of Sartre’s, is a work of neither philosophy nor political theory: its author, Frantz Fanon (1925–1961), said that he had planned to make it his thesis in medicine. It was partly composed in the exceptional environment of the Saint-Alban hospital where, after studying medicine at Lyon, Fanon spent two years visiting: it is there that he did his placement as *chef de clinique*; later, after he had obtained his degree, he was assigned to the Blida psychiatric hospital, the beginning of his Algerian career, which would lead to his involvement with the National Liberation Front (the Front de Libération National, or FLN).<sup>27</sup> A work written by a doctor, *Black Skin, White Masks* studies, in a style uncommon among academics, a ‘case’ with which Fanon, a black of Caribbean descent, was directly acquainted: that of being not a subject in general, but a subject of an altogether peculiar sort, a subject ‘of colour’, exposed, at every moment, to having the interjection ‘Look, a nigger!’ hurled in his face, triggering in him the phenomenon of ‘double consciousness’, as described by the American theoretician William E. Du Bois – himself a black of Haitian descent – in his 1903 book *The Souls of Black Folk*. Du Bois’s book begins as follows: ‘Herein lie buried many things which if read with patience may show the strange meaning of being black here at the dawning of the Twentieth Century.’<sup>28</sup> Fifty years later, Fanon considers Du Bois’s analyses to be still valid, and that ‘being black’, a phenomenon marked more than ever by its ‘strangeness’, continues to constitute

a problem, and, more precisely, a mental problem that psychiatric medicine might be called upon to take an interest in.

The interjection ‘Look, a nigger!’, as Fanon remarks in his book, is not staged in what Althusser calls a ‘little theoretical theatre’. Fanon fixes his attention on it because he has actually heard it, because it has been addressed to him personally. Look at how he relates this traumatizing experience in Chapter V of his book, entitled ‘The Lived Experience of the Black Man’:<sup>29</sup>

‘Look, a nigger!’ It was an external stimulus that flicked over me as I passed by. I made a tight smile.

‘Look, a nigger!’ It was true. It amused me.

‘Look, a nigger!’ The circle tightened, little by little. I made no secret of my amusement.

‘Mama, look at the nigger! I’m scared!’ Scared! Scared! Now they were beginning to be afraid of me. I made up my mind to laugh myself to tears, but that had become impossible.<sup>30</sup>

What first strikes us in this exposition is how it underscores the cumulative nature of the process by which is installed – in the mind of someone who, here, says ‘I’ – the feeling of not being a subject like the others, but a subject with something added, or perhaps we should say something missing, since the addition in question is colour, a characteristic with negative connotations, the absence of colourlessness: we begin with an observation, tied to the intervention of an external stimulus, an onlooker’s gaze on his body and his skin, an observation that exhibits an objective status from the outset; there then develops, in the mind of the one undergoing this test, a growing psychic tension leading from amusement, which is a form of acceptance, to the feeling that something unacceptable is happening, something strictly unbearable, at least under normal conditions. It is as if the meaning of the phrase had penetrated, little by little, the one it smacks in the face, until it ends up taking full possession of him, chilling him to the bone. The subject who emerges once this process has run its course is not, like the one of whom Althusser speaks, a turned subject [*un sujet retourné*], but a doubled subject, divided between the necessity of saying yes (‘it was true’) and the desire to say no (‘that had become impossible’), a sort of *double bind*<sup>31</sup> that should be made the object of a specific analysis, as a potential bearer of pathological effects.

‘Look, a nigger!’ is, like ‘Hey, you there!’, a linguistic sequence. But, looking at it more closely, its status is completely different. The Althusserian formula of subjection draws its efficacy from its purely verbal character: it is projected from behind, from a source systematically concealed from sight (when God speaks



to Moses, while hiding himself in a cloud, his voice alone bears the sum of his presence). ‘Look, a nigger!’: this reaction is spoken to his face, and is sustained in the line of a gaze whose verdict it only goes on to clarify, a verdict that is without appeal [*appel*] to the extent that it presents itself from the outset as a pure observation, whose neutrality is beyond question; at the limit, the words do nothing but translate the impression felt, and may even go unuttered – this is, after all, what usually happens; the surprise that the interjection ‘Look!’ reproduces is, before anything else, an effect of posture, a recoiling movement, for example, that speaks for itself. For Althusser, the subject is defined by the place that it occupies in the space of language, its status depends on the order of the sayable; for Fanon, however, the subject, or at least this subject unlike others who is a subject of colour, is constituted as such in the order of the visible, in plain sight, so to speak, and this changes everything.

What essentially differentiates the two scenes of interpellation is therefore staring us in the face. The one that Fanon analyses presents itself face to face: very concretely, it is an encounter between a man of colour and a white child, who, moreover, addresses his reaction, ‘Look, a nigger!’, not to the one who gave him pretext, but to his mother, in whose arms he seeks refuge, to protect himself against an unexpected event that he seems to interpret spontaneously as a potential menace (in reality, that interpretation has nothing spontaneous about it). Althusser constructs the set of the interpellation scene in such a way as to leave no place for this type of exchange, the primordial form of which, moreover, is not a verbal dialogue, but a simple exchange of intersecting gazes: the gaze of a child

falling upon the black skin of the man facing him, on the one hand, and the gaze borne by the latter, not so much on the child himself as the child’s gaze, a gaze that he sees and through which he sees himself as ‘a nigger’, which is to say the representative of an essence of which he bears the mark, the stigma, the strangeness – an absolute, incurable alterity. We can therefore better understand the objective Althusser pursues in constructing his theory of subjectivation: he takes it up in such a way as to evacuate it of everything that might belong to an intersubjective relationship, such as the one represented, for Fanon, by the encounter between two intersecting gazes.

The consequences of this choice are of capital importance: what follows, if we can put it this way, is that one becomes a subject alone, and not even through the sort of face-to-face encounter with oneself that, with Lacan, constitutes the mirror stage;<sup>32</sup> while, for Fanon, one does not become this subject unlike others, this subject who is the man of colour, except by entering into a relation [*rapport*] with others – for example, this child frightened by the presence of someone who, in turn, under the weight of the gaze that fixes him, in the double sense of taking him for a target and assigning him a place,<sup>33</sup> produces the – by all regards strange – experience of what it is ‘to be black’.<sup>34</sup> The Althusserian theory of subjectivation enlists the support of psychoanalysis as an antidote to the teachings of phenomenology, which inscribe themselves in the perspective of intersubjectivity and develop, on this basis, a conception of the ‘self as an other’, the self such as it recognizes itself in the gaze of another. The psychiatry practised by Fanon entertains a rapport with psychoanalysis from a distance:<sup>35</sup> what is certain is

that, from his point of view, the traumatizing situation summed up in the reaction ‘Look, a nigger!’, which brings about the intervention of a relation with an other, a situation which, as has been remarked, unfolds in plain sight, brings consciousness to the foreground and presupposes no reference to an unconscious,<sup>36</sup> or at least not to anything we could call a subjective unconscious, or the unconscious of a subject.<sup>37</sup>

From this point of view, it seems as if the two theoretical positions could not be more clearly separate. On one side, with Althusser, we find a conception of the subjectivation process that aims to be ‘scientific’, which is to say objective, and therefore not subjective, which is to say not bogged down with the unconscious presuppositions that pollute the consciousness of the subject and dissimulate its position in a combination of recognition and misrecognition [*méconnaissance*]. Such presuppositions divert attention from the place where the positioning of the subject is actually accomplished – the linguistic or symbolic order, to wit, where, in all rigour, there is a place enough only for a relation to the Other with a capital ‘O’ (vertical relation), and certainly not for a relation to the other with a small ‘o’ (horizontal relation): the very first effect of the call projected from offstage is to isolate the one who receives it, suspending the relations that he or she might entertain with other people.<sup>38</sup> On the other side, with Fanon, we find a conception of the subjectivation process developed in the light of the particular experience – a subjective experience in the strongest sense of the term – that a man of colour may come to have of his ‘being black’ (or ‘yellow’, or ‘red’, it matters little, except for the fact that he is not ‘white’, which, for its part, is supposed not to be a colour, and, therefore, to be the mark of colourlessness); this conception, which seeks to stick as close as possible to the data of lived experience, to the ‘feeling’ of that dramatic experience, grants a central place to the relation which, in the determinate context of colonialism, is established between subjects who recognize one another, and which it seems legitimate to interpret in terms of intersubjectivity – such as we find in Hegel, reread through the prism of phenomenology. To sum up this opposition schematically, Althusser is the anti-Ricoeur, something that cannot be said of Fanon.<sup>39</sup>

But we cannot stop there. Fanon, who was not a philosopher by training, but a medical doctor who took (great) interest in philosophy, was a free spirit, careful to avoid inscribing himself in any determinate tradition: he made use of theoretical references wherever they came from, be they from Hegel,<sup>40</sup> Freud, Sartre or other (white) theoreticians, without holding himself

to the letter of their systems of thought. A more thorough examination shows that his presentation of the thematic of intersubjectivity as a form of recognition has a number of twists: when he refers to it, it is not as a model, packaged with its own set of instructions and ready for use, but as a working hypothesis whose application to the ‘nigger situation’ allows us to criticize, and, at the limit, invalidate it.<sup>41</sup> At the beginning of the chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks* devoted to ‘the lived experience of the black man’, Fanon remarks:

As long as the black man is among his own, he will have no occasion, except in minor internal conflicts, to experience his being through others. There is of course the moment of ‘being for others’, of which Hegel speaks, but every ontology is made unattainable in a colonized and civilized society. It would seem that this fact has not been given sufficient attention by those who have discussed the question. In the *Weltanschauung* of a colonized people there is an impurity, a flaw that outlaws any ontological explanation. Someone may object that this is the case with every individual, but such an objection merely conceals a basic problem. Ontology – once it is finally admitted as leaving existence by the wayside – does not permit us to understand the being of the black man. For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in the presence of [*en face du*] the white man.<sup>42</sup>

What Fanon means is that the word ‘being’, which designates the proper object of ontology, changes its meaning when it is directed at someone who is not just a subject pure and simple [*tout court*] – it is tempting to say a subject in the normal sense – but a subject who, to boot, satisfies the conditions that allow him be labelled as black, within the framework of a relation to the other that is characteristic of the colonial context, a type of relation which cannot be reduced to the ordinary criteria of ontological analysis: indeed, in the singular figure that the designation ‘being black’ connotes, it is not simply being, but also a certain manner of not-being, of being defective, that is at stake. But what is it that is lacking? What is lacking that irrefutable, indelible mark of colourlessness that whiteness would be. What the lived experience of the black man reveals is therefore the limit that speculation on the subject of being qua being encounters, speculation that is incapable of accounting for what ‘being’ is in the specific case in which being is also being qua not-being [*être en tant qu’on n’est pas*], which is not the same thing at all.

This is why Fanon – and, in an altogether different manner, Althusser – distances himself from the theme of intersubjectivity in the Hegelian sense of ‘being for



the other': if he exploits the category of recognition, it is in order to contest its most basic stakes. Indeed, the interpellation projected by a pale-skinned child to a dark-skinned man, 'Look, a nigger!', even if it formally takes places in the context of a face-to-face encounter where two gazes intersect in plain sight, presupposes a background that teems with the unthought and unsaid. This is what explains the fact that, as we have remarked, the interpellation does not even need to be explicitly verbalized in order to produce its effects. But we must go further: in the case where the utterance 'Look, a nigger!' is in fact pronounced by the child, is it indeed he, himself, who is speaking? Is he not just the spokesperson or the echo of a remark of which he is not, himself, the author, and which does not come out of his mouth in a spontaneous fashion, but which has been dictated by another voice, a voice that remains silent? And this other voice, which speaks through him, manipulating him as in a ventriloquist act, is it really the voice of someone, the voice of an identifiable and localizable subject? It seems rather that this voice, the source of which is hidden, displays an impersonal character, and that its function is not that of communicating a message by transferring it from a sender to a receiver. It is an anonymous voice, which uses the body it possesses as a resonator, rendering vain the attempt to assign responsibility to anyone in particular: one may be tempted to say, in a language that differs from Fanon's, that it is the voice of ideology itself that conveys the thoughts and words to be expressed, submitting them to prefabricated stereotypes that are destined to be rehashed in an automatic fashion. Under this hypothesis, it no longer makes sense to speak of intersubjectivity: the encounter between two people facing one another is just an occasion for the reproduction of a relational mode whose forms are already fixed, under conditions that traditional ontology is incapable of accounting for. It is this relational mode that must be examined first of all, a task that Fanon carries out with the means philosophy provides him with.

### The situation

Fanon studied philosophy on his own. The only regular instruction he had in this discipline consisted in the course in child psychology that Merleau-Ponty taught in the Faculté des Lettres at Lyon, which Fanon audited while studying medicine. Beyond that, he read a great deal, searching his philosophical readings for something that he could use to elucidate a question that, among others, preoccupied him: what is it, exactly,

to be black? How does the fact of being the bearer of the qualifier 'black' fundamentally modify the fact of 'being', to the point of turning the project of ontology on its head? Amidst all of those readings, there was one that took on a decisive importance for him: it was *Réflexions sur la question juive*, which Sartre had published in 1946,<sup>43</sup> and which is cited and commented on at length in *Black Skin, White Masks*.<sup>44</sup> To Fanon, it seemed that the analyses Sartre dedicated to the question of knowing just what it is 'to be Jewish', which is to say to be perceived and 'recognized' as Jewish, could be transposed to that of knowing what it is 'to be black', which is to say, in Fanon's language, to be 'fixed' as black.<sup>45</sup>

Fanon was manifestly impressed, above all, by Sartre's exceptional capacity to restore, as if from within, the lived concreteness of an experience, whether it be one tied to the fact of being Jewish, or one tied to the fact of being queer like Genet, or that of being a bourgeois taking refuge in art like Flaubert, and so on: and when Fanon evokes the game of intersecting gazes whose lesson is concentrated in the reaction 'Look, a nigger!', he does so in a style that could be called Sartrean, with the nuance, however, that it is his own case that he is studying, that of 'the nigger', while, when Sartre speaks of the Jew, it is in so far as he himself is not a Jew, which is what allows him to develop thethetic consciousness of the Jewish condition to which the Jew himself is not spontaneously inclined (and the same goes for the queer, the bourgeois who takes refuge in art, etc.). But the influence Sartre exerts on Fanon is not just a stylistic influence, nourished by the fascination with 'the lived' that is the stamp of phenomenological speculation. Sartre also offers him a certain number of concepts, which allow him to reopen, on new grounds, the problem that preoccupies him.

The most important of these concepts, which performs a central function in Sartre and gives his 'existentialism' its specific dimension, a dimension for which one cannot find any equivalent in any of the other philosophers catalogued as existentialist – Kierkegaard or Gabriel Marcel, for example – is that of 'situation'. One is not Jewish, or black, or, at the limit, anything at all (homosexual, woman, artist, thief, etc.) in an absolute sense, on the plane of being in itself, but always in a situation, which is to say on the plane that is at once that of being for itself and that of being for the other, in a certain historical context. 'Being black' or 'being Jewish' is not a primary, objective determination, that can be identified in isolation as if it had any sort of status by itself, but the product of

a certain situation – in the case analysed by Fanon, a situation in which the gaze of the man of colour is at risk of crossing that of the terrified white child, who, taking refuge in his mother's arms, signifies the man's irreducible difference, transformed by a mark of infamy. A situation is a complex ensemble of relations that confront people with one another in a context in which their manner of relating to one another is predetermined, or called upon to take place according to a certain order or responding to certain norms. It is therefore a paradoxical combination of freedom and necessity which, seen from the angle of freedom, is unstable, and, seen from the angle of necessity, is regulated by a historical conditioning that unfolds on a plane that is not that of individual intentions, because it depends on the global organization of society. One cannot be black on one's own, facing only oneself, for example, but only in the framework proper to colonial society, where a certain form of domination is exercised, one which installs the white man in a position of superiority: outside of this very particular type of situation – which is the result of an evolution, and which Fanon thinks only a revolution, even a violent revolution, can put an end to<sup>46</sup> – the presupposition according to which 'white' is not a colour, the only colours being 'black', 'yellow', 'red', and so on, to say nothing of little green men from Mars, this presupposition collapses, loses all its credibility, and ceases to impose itself with the insignia of the obvious.

Before going any further, let us go back to the question of subjectivation with which we began. Revisited in light of the concept of situation, it displays another aspect, which compels us to affirm that one is never a subject pure and simple, or a subject in an absolute sense, but only ever a subject in a situation, in a colonial or imperial situation, for example, as in the case studied by Fanon. It follows, as Sartre will write with regard to the Jewish condition, that the position of a subject is 'overdetermined':

The root of Jewish restlessness is that necessity whereby the Jew ceaselessly interrogates himself and finally takes the side of a ghostly character, unknown and familiar, impalpable and intimate, who haunts him and who is none other than he himself, himself as he is for the other. One could say that this is the case with everyone, that we all have a familiar character who is intimate to us and who escapes us. Of course: this is, at bottom, nothing but our relation with the Other. But the Jew, like us, has a character, and, to boot, he is a Jew. What is at stake, for him, is something like a redoubling of the fundamental relation with the other. He is overdetermined.<sup>47</sup>

In cases like that of 'being Jewish' or 'being black', it is impossible to be simply a subject in the sense generally implied by the fact of being in relation to the other and being exposed to his gaze: to be a subject implies a reference to something additional, a supplement of being, signalled in this passage from *Anti-Semite and Jew* by the formula 'to boot'. This aspect of the question of subjectivation seems to have escaped Althusser, who had flushed it out with the same gesture by which he distanced himself from considerations of intersubjectivity, without understanding that, revisited in light of a concept like that of situation, it takes on an altogether different signification than the one implied by the ordinary relation to the other theorized by phenomenology. And this is no doubt what led Althusser, in order to account for subject-being as he does with his theory of interpellation, to privilege the vertical, transcendent, and, as Butler rightly diagnoses, religious dimension of the operation by which one becomes a subject,<sup>48</sup> not in general or in an absolute sense, but in a situation. Now, what does it change to say that one becomes a subject in a situation? It implies that, as we have come to see, one never becomes a subject pure and simple, but an 'overdetermined' subject, which is to say a subject specified according to the norms of the situation, and therefore a subject of a certain type, fashioned by the logic proper to that type – a subject who bears 'being black', for example, in the case examined by Fanon, but it could just as well be a masculine or feminine subject, an old or young, fat or thin, blonde or brunette, large or small, intelligent or stupid, rich or poor, heterosexual or homosexual, Aryan or non-Aryan, or even – why not? – a raw or cooked subject. Each type, whatever its physical or cultural connotations, is determined by means of the relation that it entertains with another type: the types and their differences are constituted in situations. This is why one is never a subject in the general, ontological sense, but is always a certain type of subject, someone who, besides answering 'it's me' to the interpellation projected at him or her from behind and/or from above, must, for example, recognize that, 'yes, I am a nigger', as he is compelled to do by the gaze that falls on his dark body, and that comes from a child belonging to the pale race of colonizers. To be black is not simply to be a subject, but to be a subject with something more (or less), who cannot be connoted as such – who cannot be 'recognized' or 'fixed' – except for in the context proper to the situation that, in the case of colonialism, is a relation of domination. The question that must be asked, and which Althusser does not ask, is whether or not this analysis is applicable to all cases;

that is, whether to be a subject is not always to be a specified subject, a normed subject, a subject for and under norms, identified from the outset according to criteria imposed by the situation (criteria according to which one is white or non-white, or more generally within the norm or outside the norm), criteria that simultaneously draw both their (apparent) legitimacy and their (real) efficacy from the situation. According to Althusser, the ideological operation recruits every subject without exception: but he fails to say that if it inscribes everyone in its registers, it does so within the framework of an operation which is nevertheless an operation of selection, and which is capable of taking the form of a relegation; no doubt, all are called to 'be' subjects, but not subjects of the same sort, not specified [*qualifié*] according to criteria that would make them all the same or of equal quality, only certain of them being recognized as worthy of the label 'like others'; the others, on the contrary, are identified as not being like others, but different, and therefore vulnerable to either tolerance or rejection. If we take this difficulty seriously, we must recognize that Sartre, through Fanon, has gone further than Althusser, and projects [*relance*] the question of subjectivation in another direction.

Translated by Zachary Luke Fraser

## Notes

1. Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, Seuil, Paris, 1952.
2. We propose this encounter without any regard to the question of influence or confrontation. Althusser never refers to Fanon. But nothing prevents us from bringing the two positions into dialogue, so as to understand better what specifies them.
3. Like a throbbing litany, he repeats the formula: 'But never mind that [*Mais laissons cela*].'
4. Althusser, *Positions*, Éditions Sociales, Paris, 1976, p. 68. [All citations have been translated from the French. They are followed below by references to the English translation in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, NLB, London, 1977. Here, p. 124].
5. *Ibid.*, p. 73; p. 128.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 110; p. 160.
7. This is what is aimed at by the thesis according to which 'ideology has a material existence' (*ibid.*, p. 105; p. 155), which seeks to bring it back down from the heaven of ideas to which it has been arbitrarily confined.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 100; p. 151.
9. *Ibid.*; p. 152.
10. This restriction is formulated on p. 101; p. 152: 'in all of history (= the history of social formations involving social classes)'.  
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 103–4; p. 154.
12. *Sur la reproduction*, PUF/Actuel Marx, Paris, 1995, p. 211.
13. Let us nevertheless remark that, between Althusser's perspective and Foucault's, a fundamental difference

remains. Foucault is far from, and even altogether opposed to, thinking that the intervention of norms exhibits an omni-historical character, transversal to every historical epoch.

14. This society of the norm is put in place during the second half of the eighteenth century: it instituted an altogether new type of 'power relation', which no longer depended on the violent intervention of an authority that would be external to the field it controls and that would be concentrated upon itself in virtue of its transcendent position.
15. Althusser, *Positions*, p. 106; p. 157.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 107; p. 158.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 109; p. 159.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 114; p. 163.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 113–14; pp. 162–3.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 114; p. 163.
21. In the reading she proposes of the interpellation scene in *The Psychic Life of Power* (Stanford University Press, Stanford CA, 1997, Chapter IV, 'Conscience Doth Make Subjects of Us All: Althusser's Subjection', pp. 106–31), Judith Butler concentrates her attention precisely on the automatic character of this relation between call and response, from which she concludes that the Althusserian concept of subjection remains a tributary of the model of religious conscience. The spirit of her analysis is summed up in this passage: 'The concern here has a more specific textual aim, namely, to show how figures – examples and analogies – inform and extend conceptualizations, implicating the text in an ideological sanctification of religious authority which it can expose only by reenacting that authority' (p. 114). In other words, Althusser would have fallen recklessly (or piously) into the trap that religious ideology, and in particular Christian religious ideology, have set for him, as if in prayer.
22. This idea can be found at the centre of Althusser's article on 'Freud and Lacan', published in *La Nouvelle Critique* in 1964–65, also reprinted in the *Positions* collection, for which it constitutes the introduction; *Lenin and Philosophy*, pp. 177–202.
23. When Foucault refers to this 'order of discourse', he is not returning the representational to the foreground: what this order consists of, for him, in fact, is a concatenation [*agencement*] of elements, of words, for example, which are not substitutes for things, but things in their own right; it does not therefore subsist at a distance from the real, opposing it [*en face de lui*] for example, but is a component of it in its own right; it is real, and even, at the limit, the real of the real.
24. According to Butler, this example was not chosen by chance, but represents the case par excellence in which the individual is constituted as subject by the procedure of interpellation.
25. Althusser, *Positions*, p. 118; p. 167.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 115; p. 164.
27. It was at Saint-Alban that Dr François Tosquelles, a Spanish political émigré, invented what would after him be referred to as 'institutional psychotherapy', a method that would completely revolutionize psychiatric care. Saint-Alban has been a place of intense intellectual creation: Eluard and Tzara stayed there during the war; it was there that the idea of what today is called *l'art brut* began to germinate, thanks to Dr Lucien Bonnafé; Canguilhem, who took refuge there at the end of the war, wrote his thesis in medicine, *l'Essai sur quelques problèmes concernant le normal et le pathologique*;

- later, Fernand Deligny went there as well. All of this created an extraordinary atmosphere, in which Fanon's impassioned and unusual reflections naturally found a place.
28. William E. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Arc Manor, Rockville MD, 2008, p. 9.
  29. [My translation of the passages from *Peau noir, masques blancs* quoted in this text closely follows Charles Lam Markmann's 1967 translation of the book (*Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. C.L. Markmann, Pluto Press, London, 2008), and it is his version that is cited in the footnotes. I have nevertheless retranslated or modified several passages, for various reasons. In particular, I have translated the title of Chapter 5, 'L'expérience vécue du Noir', as 'The Lived Experience of the Black Man' rather than Markmann's freer 'The Fact of Blackness' (siding in this case with Philcox's more recent translation of the book). One change that should be mentioned here has to do with the French word *nègre*, which floats halfway between the English words 'negro' and 'nigger'. Markmann freely alternates between these two possible translations, while Philcox throws 'black man' into the mix as well. In this translation, I have uniformly translated *nègre* as 'nigger', since the subject of the text gives us no reason to hide the sting of the word. Trans.]
  30. *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 84; translation modified.
  31. [English in the original. Trans.]
  32. In the development of a child, the mirror stage, which takes place before the acquisition of language, coincides with the appearance of the ego, such as it projects itself and 'recognizes' itself in that specular relation by which it enters into the regime of the imaginary. But this ego, which is effectively doubled, is not yet a subject, which, for its part, is constituted by the entrance into the symbolic. The ego is doubled [*dédoublé*], while the subject is turned [*retourné*], which is not at all the same thing.
  33. 'And already I am being dissected under the white gaze, the only real gaze. I am *fixed*. Having adjusted their microtomes, they objectively cut away slices of my reality. I am laid bare. I feel, I see in those white faces that it is not a new man who has come in, but a new kind of man, a new genus. Why, it's a nigger!' (*Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 87; translation modified). The microtome is the instrument a biologist uses to slice tissues in order to view them under a microscope.
  34. 'I am a nigger – but of course I do not know it, simply because I am one' (*Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 148). Being black is an objective condition, which is not spontaneously felt as such by its bearer; it comes to be subjectified [*subjectivée*] only when the white gaze falls upon its black skin.
  35. Fanon makes a passing reference to Lacan, whose article on the family in Wallon's *Encyclopédie française* has clearly influenced him.
  36. 'Since the racial drama is played out in the open, the black man has no time to "make it unconscious"' (*Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 116).
  37. Fanon is interested in another aspect of the unconscious: that of the collective unconscious, which is cultural and not subjective in the sense of individual subjectivity. This collective unconscious corresponds to the power of norms, as analysed by Foucault.
  38. What is characteristic of religious ideology is precisely that it interpellates subjects one by one, each for himself.
  39. *Peau noir, Masques blancs*, let us not forget, was published in the Éditions du Seuil's 'Esprit' collection, and so in the same environment where Ricoeur conducted his researches.
  40. The last chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks*, 'The Nigger and Recognition', concludes with a paragraph entitled 'The Nigger and Hegel' (pp. 168–73; translation modified), where the formula 'dirty nigger!' (p. 172; translation modified) is examined from the point of view of the struggle between master and slave.
  41. Fanon proceeds with psychoanalysis in the same fashion, taking an interest in it precisely because of its limits: transposed onto another terrain, it no longer works (according to him, we find no trace of the Oedipal triangle in the Caribbean family).
  42. *Black Skin, White Masks*, pp. 82–3.
  43. [The text was translated almost immediately into English by George J. Becker, and published in 1948 by Schocken Books as *Anti-Semite and Jew*. Trans.]
  44. Fanon is no more 'Sartrean', in the sense of globally adhering to a system of thought, than he is 'Hegelian' or 'Freudian'. He brought a lucid eye to bear on Sartre's work, sorting out what seemed useful to him from what did not. He rejects, for example, Sartre's enthusiastic and incendiary account of the thematic of Negritude in 'Orphée noir' ('Black Orpheus'), a text Sartre wrote to serve as the introduction to Senghor's *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache* (1948), reprinted in *Situations III* (Gallimard, Paris, 1949). [For an English translation, see 'Black Orpheus', trans. John MacCombie, *Massachusetts Review*, vol. 6, no. 1, Autumn 1964–Winter 1965, pp. 13–52. The text was also published as a stand-alone pamphlet in 1976 by French and European Publications, in a new translation by S.W. Allen. Trans.]
  45. Of the Jew and the Nigger, Fanon says that they are 'brothers in misery': 'At first thought it might seem strange that the anti-semitic's outlook should be related to that of the negrophobe. It was my philosophy professor, a native of the Antilles, who recalled the fact to me one day: "Whenever you hear anyone abuse Jews, pay attention, because he is talking about you." And I found that he was universally right – by which I meant that I was answerable in my body and in my heart for what was done to my brother. Later I realized that he meant, quite simply, an anti-semitic is inevitably a negrophobe.' (*Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 92; translation modified.)
  46. This is the central theme of the work he published in 1961 through Éditions Maspero, *Les Damnés de la terre*, for which Sartre wrote the preface. [Translated into English by Richard Philcox as *The Wretched of the Earth*, Grove Press, New York, 2004. Trans.]
  47. *Réflexions sur la question juive*, Gallimard, Paris, 1954, p. 96.
  48. From this vertical perspective, where the gaze that sanctions the operation of recognition comes from above [*est surplombant*] and emanates from a source that remains hidden, all subjects are equal [*tous se valent*]. When Christ says 'Suffer the children to come unto me', he does not specify whether these children should be black, white, or any colour at all: in this sense, one may say that subjects he convokes are simply determined, and not overdetermined. But this message is configured by means of an operation of abstraction, by which religious ideology permits itself to pretend that, for it, all subjects are equal, whatever their situation. But outside of the perspective that defines this operation of abstraction, an operation that artificially and artfully [*artificiellement et artificieusement*] erases differences, this is not the case at all.