

Warren Montag

Interpellation and Stigmatization: Althusser and Goffman

Abstract: *The essay explores some points of convergence between Louis Althusser and Erving Goffman, most visibly around the concepts of stigmatization and interpellation. Both explore the ways in which norms are imposed on already existing forms of individuality and corporeality, justifying sometimes violent procedures of control.*

Keywords: *Stigma, Interpellation, Louis Althusser, Erving Goffman, Roman slavery.*

Resumen: *Este ensayo explora algunos puntos de convergencia entre Louis Althusser y Erving Goffman, más explícitamente en torno a los conceptos de estigmatización e interpelación. Ambos exploran los modos en los que las normas se imponen sobre formas ya existentes de individualidad y corporalidad, a veces justificando procedimientos violentos de control.*

Palabras clave: *Estigma, Interpelación, Louis Althusser, Erving Goffman, Esclavitud romana.*

I begin with what might seem nothing more than a coincidence: two texts that by all accounts offer little that invites comparison except the fact that both appeared in 1963. One, *Psychoanalysis and the Human Sciences* by Louis Althusser, in fact, can be said to have appeared that year only if “appearance” applies to a transcription of two recorded lectures published as a book only

decades later. The other, by sociologist Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, was as eagerly anticipated as Althusser’s text was unexpected: the book was published by Prentice-Hall, a prominent commercial firm, on the assumption that it would appeal to an audience beyond the academic world. The two works’ opposing conditions of appearance are in fact linked to a set of differences: not only do they differ by virtue of their languages (French and English, as well as the stylistic characteristics proper to each) and disciplines (philosophy and sociology), but in their idioms. Althusser’s lexicon is philosophical: when he discusses psychoanalysis, his aim is to show the theoretical presuppositions that govern its conflicting tendencies in their historicity. Goffman, clearly influenced by Freud, but by means of Erik Erikson and the tradition of ego psychology, with its emphasis on the importance of assimilation and adaptation (the validity of which Althusser, following Lacan, rejects), adopts the popular idiom (which includes certain terms appropriated from the Americanized versions of Freud, e.g., “ego” or “identity”) that has emerged around and through the objects of his study, the stigmatized and those who stigmatize them, on the grounds that it is in this idiom that the complexity of the lived experience of stigma can be fully understood. Althusser, in contrast, argued that, because words were not instruments available to be used according to the will of the writer, strategy was as important in philosophy as in politics, and that the choice of words could be decisive: “the whole class struggle may be



summed up in the struggle for one word against another word. Certain words struggle amongst themselves as enemies. Other words are the site of an ambiguity: the stake in a decisive but undecided battle” (Althusser, 1971a, 14). For Althusser, the use of clichés and common idioms on the assumption that the more frequent their usage, the greater the likelihood that they will capture experience in its authenticity, can only leave analysis trapped in the space of the dominant ideas and thus condemned to reproduce it. Goffman, however, ostentatiously avoids technical terms, or rather liberally seasons his theoretical discussions with popular idioms in imitation of the speech both of the stigmatized (and those who scorn them), and of his presumed readership.

While we do not know whether Goffman ever read Althusser’s work, we know that Althusser’s library contained a copy of the French translation of *Asylums* and that he spoke informally to his students about *Stigma*, without, however, leaving any visible trace of his reading. Thus, if we can speak of an encounter between the two, it must be in the sense of an “objective” encounter, a historically determined convergence between concepts and modes of inquiry that, from very different starting points, arrived at a common theoretical problem or set of problems, conceived in the one case as interpellation and in the other as stigmatization. Further, while Althusser’s 1963 text marked the beginning of a nearly decade-long inquiry into the concept to which he finally gave the name interpellation, Goffman’s interest in stigma quickly shifted to the practices of social interaction more generally and the strategies individual actors employed in their quotidian encounters with others. In other words, Althusser was working to develop a critical account of the very notion of the rational actor, just as Goffman, had begun to reject the “collective” phenomena that appear in *Asylums* and intermittently in *Stigma*, and to adopt the conceptual underpinnings of game theory.

These opposing trajectories perhaps help explain a key problem that any attempt to compare Goffman and Althusser must face. While Althusser frequently employs the verbal form of interpellation (“interpellate” or *interpeller*),

Goffman takes great care to avoid the noun, “stigmatization,” or the verb “stigmatize,” preferring the participial adjective “stigmatized” (as in “stigmatized individual”). In place of the verb, he most commonly speaks instead of “having,” or “possessing” a stigma, which may be “inborn,” as if the stigma is always already attached to the bodily feature or condition with which it is associated, thus obviating the need for an account of the process by which it is stigmatized. The few times he alludes to the process of stigmatization, he tells us that individuals “acquire” a stigma, a verb ambiguous enough to suggest that individuals themselves take possession of stigma, as if they themselves were the agents of their stigmatization. The fact that his stated objective is to examine the effects of stigma, rather than its causes, however, does not and cannot allow him entirely to avoid an account of the process by which stigma is not only acquired by those deemed stigmatized, but also actively imposed by others. And this must also apply to those whose stigma is “inborn,” whose stigma is imposed retroactively, that is, the always-already stigmatized. The fact that Goffman’s account of stigmatization exhibits a number of essential ambiguities, however, does not distinguish him from Althusser. On the contrary, noting the gaps and silences that appear in *Stigma* allows us to see the ambiguities and contradiction proper to the commentaries on and applications of “interpellation” as the objective effects of Althusser’s exposition. Both Goffman and Althusser struggle with what we might call the material existence of stigmatization and interpellation, and the traces of this struggle are made visible by the fleeting but unmistakable presence of the concept of imputation in both works, the fictive foundation of the violence done to and suffered by those deemed owners of “their” bodies and the actions performed by them.

In a way that anticipates, and in certain respects perhaps in its precision surpasses some of his most important theoretical and political contributions, Althusser argues in *Psychoanalysis and the Human Sciences* that the discipline of psychology (from which psychoanalysis must be distinguished) emerged through a synthesis of three distinct concepts: the individual,

the subject and the ego (*le moi*) (1996, 106-107). It operates according to the founding assumption that “the subject is an individual possessing the structure of an ego,” an assumption that treats these three concepts as representing three ways of signifying the same reality (1996, 104). As Althusser points out, however, these concepts emerged in and in some sense continue to belong to different domains in which their functions are by no means identical. The single term, “individual,” for example, refers to at least two fundamentally separate concepts endowed with distinct meanings and functions: one in biology, the other in the social sciences (particularly as a component of the theory of the division of labor) (Althusser, 1996, 106). Similarly, the notion of subject, according to Althusser, is distributed along two axes: on one side, the legal or moral subject whose division into a subjected being and a subject of actions (an agent or actor) is originary and constitutive; on the other, the subject as the foundation of knowledge, more precisely, the subject of truth as the condition of possibility of the distinction between truth and error (1996, 106-107).

The legal or moral subject can be said to be free insofar as freedom is imputed to it by human and divine law in order that this subject may be held accountable: Althusser calls this subject-form the “subject of imputation,” that is, a being whose subjection necessarily precedes the retroactive attribution to it of the freedom or agency it requires to qualify as an author or actor (1996, 108). Finally, Althusser insists on the importance of the concept of the ego, a concept that illustrates the philosophical (and not simply linguistic) problems engendered by the process of translation (especially in the English language rendering of psychoanalytic concepts from Freud’s German). Freud’s term, rendered in English as “ego,” to give it a scientific air, is the ordinary first-person pronoun, *das Ich*, or “the I.” The French equivalent of the English “ego” (itself taken from Latin) and the German “*das Ich*” is not “*le je*,” as might be expected, but “*le moi*” (Balibar, 2005). What Althusser calls “the subject of truth” is not simply a reduction of truth to its origin in the thought or perception of the individual; the subject of truth requires

the subject to think its thinking and perceive its perception in a reflexive relation that positions an ego outside its own thought in order to affirm its truth (Althusser, 1996, 111-113). Althusser insists that here again, in the domain of knowledge, as in the domain of action and conduct, freedom, specifically, the freedom to think, and to think thinking, is imputed to the subject. In fact, he explains that freedom is necessary to the apprehension of the truth as true: the subject of truth is never present at the beginning, where confusion and inattention reign. Instead, because the subject of error is endowed with the capacity to overcome inattention and confusion and “convert itself into the subject of objectivity” or truth (1996, 112-113), it is deemed responsible for any failure to do so, just as it will be rewarded for having freely chosen to undertake and persist in the arduous journey to truth, that prolonged labor of the negative that allows it to become its contrary.

If indeed Althusser’s subject of truth is also a subject of imputation, we must be sure we understand the notion of imputation as he uses it. In part, the term “imputation” is drawn from Locke, specifically chapter 27 of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Locke defines the idea of the person as a legal, or more precisely, “forensic term” that designates the individual who is subject to judgment and punishable for actions that must be attributed or imputed to him as his own and no one else’s in order for there to exist the accountability that law, whether moral or civil, demands (Locke, 1997, II. 27.26). But Althusser’s concept of the subject of imputation also, and perhaps more fundamentally, derives from Kant’s notion of *Zurechnung* (also translated as “ascription” or “attribution”) as developed in *The Metaphysics of Morals*. Here, imputation, not by implication as in Locke’s text, but directly, assumes a central role. Kant defines the person as “a subject who is capable of having his actions imputed to him” (Kant, 1991, 50). Imputation, according to him is “the judgement by which anyone is declared to be the author or free cause of an action which is then regarded as *his* moral fact or deed, and is subjected to law” (1991, 53). And Kant adds, “that person —individual or collective [*physische oder*

moralische— who is invested with the right to impute actions judicially, is called a judge or a court (*judex s. forum*)” (1991, 53). To qualify as a person, the individual subject to whom freedom is imputed is declared a free cause of the actions that now become his or his own and for which he alone is responsible. The fact that one must be declared a free cause of one’s actions, means that the declaration of a legal judgment precedes and gives meaning to the perception that one is in fact the undetermined or self-determining cause of one’s own conduct. We must impute to the individual what we (and perhaps he) cannot know and treat him as if he were the free cause both law and morality demand he be. Thus, personhood is not discovered in, but projected and imposed upon, individuals (who are not free to refuse this imputation) to render them, as Althusser argued, responsible and accountable for their deeds. The right to impute action, or to assign responsibility, is exercised in the form of a declaration with the force (violence and coercion) of law, uttered in the space of the penal apparatus. Imputation is in fact the initial outline of what, within a few years, Althusser will call interpellation.

When Althusser replaced the concept of imputation, a concept perhaps too well defined and historically situated to serve the critical function required of it, with the more semantically diffuse term of interpellation, however, the replacement came at a certain theoretical cost. To explain interpellation, which remains even by the end of the ISAs essay an anticipation of the concept rather than the concept itself, Althusser, who makes no reference to his discussion of imputation nearly seven years earlier, examines what he calls Christian religious ideology. In fact, this “example” appears to suggest that interpellation arises on a theological or religious foundation, even as it illustrates what Balibar (following Jan Assmann (2000)) has called the theologization (and what we might call the dematerialization and decorporealization) of legal and political terms and concepts by Christianity (Balibar, 2016). By suggesting that the origins of the notion of interpellation lie in the theme of the call and the calling, as in the New Testament, signaled by the use of the Greek term *klesis*/ κλήσις (verb: *kaleo*/ καλέω) or the Latin *vocatio*

(verb: *voco*), translated into French as “*appel*,” Althusser overlooks the legal and indeed punitive meaning of the verb “call” in Greek and Latin: to be called into or summoned to court, to be indicted and therefore finally punished, a meaning well established in the legal institutions of the Roman empire long before Saul heard the call of the Lord on the road to Damascus. The many interpretations of interpellation as primarily a discursive, verbal or even symbolic act without any immediate relation to the apparatuses of social control, coercion and violence are an effect of Althusser’s contradictory and inconsistent account of both ideology and the interpellation essential to it. Recalling its link to the notion of imputation allows us to understand that if we can speak of a call, it is in the sense that we are called free, free agents, so that we can be called to account as responsible parties for the actions imputed to us. Our freedom is thus imposed upon us from without and worn like a mask (the meaning of “*persona*” in Latin) that covers and conceals the face or, in certain cases, that is carved or burned with a branding iron into the face, to produce what the Greeks and the Romans called a “*stigma*.”

In 1963, the same year that Althusser delivered his lectures on psychoanalysis, Erving Goffman published *Stigma: Notes on the Management of a Spoiled Identity*, a text that, on the face of it, appears to oppose the orientation of Althusser’s lectures or of the later works on discourse and ideology in which the concept of interpellation took shape. Goffman’s notion of stigma concerns what we might call informal, extra-legal, micro-level forms of discrimination or prejudice and has little to do with the machinery of the state. The stigmas that such prejudices impose on the objects of their disapproval are often unstable, unequally applied and historically reversible. Moreover, as Goffman’s title implies, the stigma attached to certain social groups or populations on the basis of physical abnormalities, phenotypical characteristics or culture, can be “managed,” that is, eluded, deflected, or its effects diminished at the level of individual “performance” (a term from his earlier work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*), and even occasionally reversed at the collective level.

Further, the various stigmas vary widely in their effectivity and their capacity to limit or constrain individual lives. Stigmatization, the process by which individuals are marked by stigma, however, is more complicated than prejudice in its operation. Like interpellation, stigmatization involves what Goffman himself calls “imputation.” According to his account, individuals impute, without knowing that they do so, a set of characteristics to the other individuals they meet. These imputed characteristics are not simply assumptions but are “normative expectations,” even “demands” imposed upon these others. If the others are later found to deviate from or fall short of the normal characteristics imputed to them “in potential retrospect,” as Goffman calls it, we experience them as bad, dangerous, sick, or failures. Such individuals are regarded as unfit to fulfill the responsibilities of a person, and their abnormality is seen, at least to a certain degree, as having arisen through the agency also imputed to them, a fact that renders them liable to that informal means of punishment called stigmatization.

If anything, the very notion of imputation common to Althusser’s interpellation and Goffman’s stigmatization appears to underscore what separates them and even what sets them in opposition to each other, rather than what unites them. Interpellation is universal or quasi-universal, addressed to every human individual, apart from the exceptions deemed out of range of the call (*l’appel*): criminals, those suffering from acute mental illness or in certain cases physical illnesses or congenital conditions and, perhaps most importantly, those categorized according to phenotypical or cultural specificities, i.e., racial or ethnic groups—precisely those understood by Goffman to constitute the stigmatized. This does not mean that the analyses of Althusser and Goffman complement each other according to a division of the social, or social and political, world into the mutually exclusive and relatively stable realms of the normal and the stigmatized. Such a position would rest on a relatively stable division between a normal or normalized world and a world of stigmatized groups. In fact, once we shift our focus from the individual (always already) interpellated as a subject, to the process

of interpellation in its practical state and from already constituted forms of stigma to the act or sequence of actions that produces stigma, we find that the means by which a universal and eternal subject is constituted is simultaneously the means by which individuals and collectivities are excluded from interpellation or from the dominant forms of interpellation (Macherey, 2014). As Hanan Elsayed (2017) has pointed out, Althusser’s allegory of the policeman who interpellates the individual in the street by shouting «*hé, vous, là-bas !*» demonstrates, alongside the “universal” constitution of free (separated) and equal (equivalent) individuals, the exclusion of those who are never addressed by police officers with the formal *vous* but only by the familiar *tu*, a mode of address reimported from the colonies, designed to mark as permanent the inequality between the addressor and the addressee. I have discussed elsewhere the fact that “*interpellation*” in French does not mean “to hail,” as Ben Brewster often translates interpellation. Historically, the term denoted the act of interrupting an assembly or calling an individual out of an assembly. In the medieval period, *interpeller* meant to issue a summons to a witness or suspect. At present, one of its most common uses is to denote the action by which police stop, question, arrest and detain individuals and is thus not merely a discursive act, or a form of intersubjective recognition, but an operation directed at the body to which the use, or simply the threat, of violence and coercion is central.

The case of stigma is, if anything, even more complicated. Behind the understanding of stigma is a double imputation: first, there is the act of imputing to individuals normal (or normalizing) attributes that they do not possess, and which accordingly become the criteria by which these individuals are determined to be not only different from, but less than, or inferior to, those regarded as normal. The realities, mental and physical, that precede and serve as the basis for stigmatization become stigmas only through a process of stigmatization that operates as the underside of normalization. As in the case of ideological interpellation, we often think of stigma as a matter of ideas, attitudes or beliefs whose existence is mental or discursive, even if the

effect of collective attitudes possesses a material (physical, corporeal and institutional) existence. In fact, the history of the term “stigma” over the last few centuries is a history of the forgetting of the violence whose persistence can be acknowledged only in the denials that contrast a civilized present to the savagery of the past.

Goffman begins the book with a brief account of the origins of the concept of stigma in ancient Greece:

The Greeks, who were apparently strong on visual aids, originated the term stigma to refer to bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier. The signs were cut or burnt into the body and advertised that the bearer was a slave, a criminal, or a traitor—a blemished person, ritually polluted, to be avoided, especially in public places. (Goffman, 1963, 1)

Stigma is thus “designed” and “cut or burnt into the body,” but Goffman does not tell us by whom and in what context; even his account of the purpose of stigma, “to expose something unusual and bad” is formulated with a vagueness that allows him to project the modern form and meaning of stigma back upon its origin (1963, 1). And stigma, for Goffman, is above all a sign, despite the fact that it is a “sign . . . cut or burnt into the body” and therefore a sign whose literal inscription on the body transforms it through a process that necessarily causes the bearer great pain (1963, 1). Goffman, however, regards the body as having no other significance than that of bearing the sign signifying disgrace: it is itself neither the object nor the target of the process of stigmatization.

In a similar way, he uses a series of euphemisms to describe the social effects of stigma on the stigmatized who is marked as a “blemished person . . . to be avoided” (1963, 1). In this category, Goffman includes “slaves, criminals and traitors” (1963, 1), those who by virtue of their social rank, or for having committed crimes, are stigmatized in the modern sense, that is, they are to be avoided. He offers an equally evasive explanation for the imposition of stigma:

“Society establishes the means of categorizing persons and the complement of attributes felt to be ordinary and natural for members of each of these categories” (1963, 2). Goffman calls these means “anticipations” and argues that “we” who “lean on them” in order to categorize the strangers with whom we come into contact, transform the anticipations “into normative expectations, into righteously presented demands” (1963, 2). It is only here, and in adjectival form, that Goffman first introduces a reference to norms. They are what may euphemistically be called expectations, but are in fact “righteously presented demands,” as if, implicit in every social interaction, is the demand (from the Latin *mando*: to command) that we meet the expectations against which we are measured and measure ourselves, and even more that others do the same (1963, 2).

But such expectations or norms, unlike laws, do not have a formal, written existence, primarily because, unlike laws, their number and the number of domains in which they may arise is limitless. We may not even know that a norm exists until it is violated: “Typically, we do not become aware that we have made these demands or aware of what they are until an active question arises as to whether or not they will be fulfilled. It is then that we are likely to *realize* that all along we had been making certain assumptions as to what the individual before us ought to be” (Goffman, 1963, 2). Several years later, in the revised edition of *The Normal and the Pathological* (1966), Georges Canguilhem would argue that “the abnormal, as ab-normal, comes after the definition of the normal, it is its logical negation. However, it is the historical anteriority of the future abnormal which gives rise to a normative intention. The normal is the effect obtained by the execution of the normative project, it is the norm exhibited in the fact. In the relationship of the fact there is then a relationship of exclusion between the normal and the abnormal. But this negation is subordinated to the operation of negation, to the correction summoned up by the abnormality. Consequently it is not paradoxical to say that the abnormal, while logically second, is existentially first” (1989, 243). For Goffman the phenomenon of “the historical anteriority of the future abnormal which gives

rise to a normative intention,” is the imputation “in potential retrospect” of a normality, projected in retrospect, that only potentially or virtually precedes the abnormal and furnishes the criteria by which it can be “disqualified” as a failure or a shortcoming (1963, 2). It is for this reason that Goffman reminds us that the assigning of stigma requires “a language of relationships, not attributes” (1963, 12).

Both Althusser’s discussion of subjection in *Psychoanalysis and the Human Sciences*, as well as “Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses,” and Goffman’s “Stigma” are marked by an avoidance of the physical, coercive and violent aspects of imputation/interpellation, on the one hand, and stigmatization, on the other, a fact all the more striking given the specific conjunctures in which texts took shape. To the extent that Goffman examined the stigma attached to race in the US, and the forms of disqualification attached to non-whites, especially African-Americans, his discussions concerned the immanence of norms in modes of communication and quotidian rituals. At the time of the book’s composition, the Civil Rights movement had launched a campaign of sit-ins throughout the South to de-segregate public spaces, such as restaurants, movie theaters, parks and libraries. Shortly afterward, the Freedom Rides, aimed to desegregate interstate transport, while the movement also initiated voter registration drives throughout the American South. There was nothing subtle about these violations not only of laws (most of which had been nullified through court decisions), but of norms, that is, the rules not only made visible, but perhaps constituted in retrospect by being violated not only by the organized movement, but by the actions of innumerable individuals no longer willing to show the deference and servility to whites only a few years earlier deemed normal. While the extraordinary violence mobilized to preserve the norms that regulated the hierarchical relations between white and black was in part carried out by the state, much of it, including the most deadly, consisted of actions by white individuals and groups, both formal and informal. The beatings, and often murder, of those who violated the norms of white supremacy, as well as the discursive assaults that preceded and

accompanied them, cannot be completely separated from the verbal and physical expressions of discomfort and disapproval on which Goffman tends to focus: indeed, they can be understood as points on a continuum. This allows us to acknowledge, beyond the effort of individuals to “manage” the stigma assigned to them, the existence of both collective resistance to stigmatization and an equally collective reactive attempt to re-stigmatize, or at least to prevent the de-stigmatization of key populations. But we can also see, beyond the limits of Goffman’s analysis, the violence, subtle or spectacular, that accompanies stigma like a shadow. Foucault’s reminder of the violence of the force of law applies to the less spectacular, often irregular and decentered, violence of norms, of which stigmatization is perhaps the most salient synecdoche: “It is a matter of defining and discovering underneath the forms of justice as it is instituted... the forgotten past of real struggles, of clear victories, of defeats that have been concealed, but that have left their indelible imprint. It is a matter of discovering the dried blood contained in legal code and not underneath the evanescence of history the absolute character of law” (Foucault, 2003, 56, trans. mod.). It is time to confront this violence.

The Greek word “*stigma*” (στίγμα) is derived from the verb *stizo* (στιζω), meaning to rick or puncture with a sharp pointed instrument. The verb may also mean to tattoo, as well as to cut or burn a mark on human skin or animal hide, that is, to brand. Stigma is the mark or brand produced by this action and a *στίγματις* was the one who bore the mark or brand. In both Greece and Rome, the imposition of stigmata was primarily reserved for punitive purposes: not slaves in general but runaway slaves, criminals guilty of certain serious offenses, as well as soldiers who deserted. In some cases, the “stripes” left by a severe whipping or scourging (100 lashes was a common penalty, according to Petronius) served as stigmata, visible markers not simply of the bad character of the offender, but of the pain and indignity of the process of stigmatization. Perhaps even more importantly, the stigmata, unlike the wounds on the body of Jesus and later Paul’s stripes and scars, were burned into the slave’s forehead, or in some cases his entire face,

and typically consisted of letters (F for *fugitivus* or Φ for *φυγάς*) or certain phrases. The runaway slaves in the Roman empire who bore them were called the *inscripti*, *literati*, or *notati* (those who are written upon, those marked with letters, those upon whom marks are made). Gaius on several occasions in the *Institutes* uses the formula “*servi . . . quibusve stigmata inscripta sunt*” or “slaves who have been branded with the stigma or mark of disgrace” (Gaius, I.13). In Latin, which lacks an equivalent of the Greek verb *στιγματίζω*, to stigmatize or to brand, perhaps the most common verb used to denote the act of burning, cutting or imprinting the stigmata is *inscribo*, meaning “to write upon” or “to furnish with an inscription or title.” But the verb *inscribo* has another meaning: to ascribe or attribute to, that is, to impute. Precisely in the case of stigma, the act of imputation is neither mental or intellectual, nor merely verbal or discursive. The stigma appears on the slave’s forehead literally, that is, in letters, *litterae*, engraved or seared, again literally, into the flesh by the *dominus* (or his agent), the owner or master whose power and proprietorship are displayed in the stigma as much as the criminality of the runaway slave who bears the scar for the rest of his life.

Roman legal compilations are surprisingly vague when it comes to the actual forms of stigmatization. There is little evidence concerning how the mark or stigma was most frequently made (whether through burning, scarification or some sort of tattoo) and what the exact nature of the typical stigma was: a pictorial image, a letter or a sentence. Neither is there any mention in legal sources of the exact location of the stigma on the body (Jones, 1987; Kamen, 2010). Two literary sources, however, Martial’s *Epigrams* and Petronius’s *Satyricon*, both from the first century CE, refer to the forehead, although the passages in question are ambiguous enough that it is possible to construe them as suggesting that the entire face was covered in letters. For more than a century, scholars have turned to a passage in Petronius’s *Satyricon* for a description of the stigma inscribed on the forehead or face of a runaway slave. The passage is all the more valuable in that the characters involved discuss how one must appear in order to pass, not simply

as a slave, but as a runaway slave who has been caught, punished and stigmatized. Three friends, Encolpius, a teacher, Giton, a young slave who is Encolpius’s lover, and Eumolpus, an aging poet, board a ship to escape the consequences of their many misdeeds in Rome. They soon discover that the ship’s master and owner is one of those they have wronged and they overhear him swearing to exact revenge on them. Encolpius and Giton decide to disguise themselves not simply as Eumolpus’s slaves (Giton is already a slave, but is indistinguishable from those who are free, in his dress, manner and activities) but as slaves who were caught and stigmatized after running away. Eumolpus says to the other two:

“My servant is a barber as you have already seen. He will shave both of you here and now and not simply your heads but also your eyebrows; then I will carefully trace [*notans*] an inscription on your foreheads that will make it appear as if you have been branded with letters imprinted through humiliating torture as punishment for running away; these letters will disguise your face and allay the suspicions of anyone who sees you” (Petronius, 1913, 209-211, trans. mod.). Encolpius continues: “we quickly and stealthily went to the side of the ship, and delivered our heads to the barber so that he might shave our hair and eyebrows. Then Eumolpus entirely covered our foreheads with large letters and with a generous hand spread the letters normally used to mark a fugitive slave [*notum fugitivorum epigramma*] over our faces” (1913, 211).

Petronius thus underscores the practices used to make the slave immediately visible and identifiable. Shaved heads were typical of rural slaves engaged in agriculture (who were also those most likely to run away), but less common among urban slaves. Shaved heads and eyebrows were meant to signify a runaway slave, but a more permanent and obvious mark, made by a process that Petronius calls “humiliating torture,” was precisely the stigma branded (the Greeks also called the process “cauterization”) or carved into the forehead, and perhaps the face as well. It is clear that the stigma consisted of letters (perhaps, as noted earlier, the Greek and Latin initials for fugitive) but possibly words as well. What is this *epigramma* or “epigram” of the

fugitive slave, as Petronius calls it? *Epigramma* is certainly used ironically: the word he uses to describe a phrase “inscribed” in the flesh of a slave’s forehead, most commonly refers to the inscription at the base of a statue (as well as the poetic form associated with Martial, a generation after Petronius). The ordinary or universally known stigma of the runaway slave in Greece is today understood to be that cited by the orator Aeschines: *κατέχε με, φεῦγῶ* or “detain me, I am a fugitive” (Aeschines, II.83). Slightly more than two centuries after Petronius, the stigmatization of slaves came to be regarded as unacceptable. In its place, runaway slaves were outfitted with a heavy iron chain around the neck, one of which, recovered in Rome in the early seventeenth century, bore the more elaborate inscription:

TENE ME, QUIA FUGI, ET REVOCA
ME DOMINO MEO BONIFACIO LINARIO.

“Detain me, because I am a fugitive, and return me to my owner (or master) Bonifacio Linario” (Creuzer, 1840).

It is clear from these historical sources that stigmatization was not simply, as Goffman argues, a sign attached or added to the body of the slave to indicate his or her inferior status, as sumptuary laws were intended to do in the late empire, so that the fundamental distinction in Roman law, the distinction between slave and free man, would be immediately visible to the observer. Nor was the stigma simply a warning to potential buyers or even those who observe the slave travelling alone that he had once run away and could do so again. We might have expected the “epigram of the fugitive slave,” as Petronius called it, the sequence of words, known to everyone because it was impossible to walk through a crowded Roman thoroughfare without encountering some of the *inscripti* or *litterati* whose foreheads bear the mark of the fugitive, so well known, in fact, that Petronius feels no need to repeat them to the reader, to be written in the third person (e.g., “detain him, because he is a fugitive . . .”). Instead, inscription in this case is a form of imputation or interpellation, a violent imposition of a phrase written in the first person and attributed to the former fugitive. Further,

the utterance is written in the imperative as if the slave is paradoxically commanding the person who reads the words of the stigma to seize or detain him, or as if, given that the slave is not a legal person, and does not possess the right to speak on his own behalf, the “I” who speaks is the master ventriloquizing the slave, not simply imposing his voice as a kind of prosthesis that the slave is forced to wear, but incorporating it in the most literal sense of the term, altering the body of the slave to transform it into an instrument of the master’s voice. But the terms of the epigram are universal, meaning they belong to nobody in particular. In fact, they are terms that belong to the lexicon of the law: both *κατέχω* and *teneo* can signify arrest or legal detention, while *φεύγω* or *fugio* often designate an escape from custody or an illegal flight or desertion. In this sense, if these are the master’s words, the individuals in question are not his property but merely his possessions; in truth, it is the law that safeguards property (including slaves) speaking through the master who in turn speaks through the slave in a kind of double ventriloquism.

This double ventriloquism, however, is not peculiar to Roman law, a sign of its well-known inconsistencies and discrepancies, as well as the silences, the most eloquent of which concern any possible limit on the master’s violence against the slave (until the reign of Hadrian in the second century CE). Nor is it limited to the slave. In Petronius’s narrative, the legal person, Encolpius, puts on the mask of the slave, a non-person who bears the inscription that imputes a paradoxical personhood to him: the slave commands anyone who finds him to detain him so that he can be returned to slavery. Encolpius thus pretends to be a slave who in turn is pretending to be a person, not, however, to declare himself free, but in order the better to secure his own subjection. We might recall Althusser’s account of the paradox of interpellation “the individual *is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i.e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection*” (Althusser, 1971b, 182).

This same ventriloquism appears in Kant’s discussion of imputation cited earlier. Kant defines the person as both a “subject . . . capable

of having his actions imputed to him” and as “the agent” who “is regarded as the author” of specific actions and their effects (Kant, 1991, 50). It is important to note that beyond the actions that are imputed to him, the authorship of these actions (which involves a self-determining will) must be attributed to him as well. Kant necessarily uses the passive voice in speaking of the act of imputation: it allows him to assert that actions and words “are imputed” to someone without having to specify by whom or perhaps by what (the law, the state, etc.). The anonymity that characterizes the act of imputation works to underscore both its universality and its necessity: without it, legal and moral systems would be impossible. For Kant, imputation is a kind of recognition of the element of transcendence that, precisely because it is transcendent, lies beyond perception or cognition and must be imputed, as if it were a necessary rational fiction. But imputation, particularly what Kant calls legal imputation, has a material existence, consisting not only of the apparatus in which it exists and operates, but also of the means of violence that accompany the imputation of responsibility and guilt, the punishment that must be meted out to the “wrong doer.”

From this follows another modality of the material existence of imputation. In the last instance, its object is the body considered, not as the dwelling place of the soul, but as a sensory nervous system capable of reacting to specific stimuli with a sensation of discomfort or pain that will in turn determine the individual in question to avoid repeating his misdeeds. It is true that at this point Kant appears to supply the previously missing agent or author of the act of imputation: if legal imputation is “the judgement by which anyone is declared to be the author or free cause of an action which is then regarded as his moral fact or deed, and is subjected to law,” Kant adds that the “person –individual or collective– who is invested with the right to impute actions judicially, is called a judge or a court (*judex s. forum*)” (Kant, 1991, 53). But here again a ventriloquism is at work: the judge or court, *judex sive forum*, the individual or collective person “is invested” (passive voice) with the right to impute actions and is thus an individual or

collective person to whom the capacity to impute is imputed. Even the subject who by virtue of consciousness, according to Kant, can impute authorship to himself must first have the power to impute imputed to him. We have thus arrived at a ventriloquism without a ventriloquist. This is the meaning of Althusser’s notion of the subject of imputation as simultaneously the imputed subject and the subject with the capacity to impute, if only to itself.

For Kant, there exist two distinct and even opposing forms of imputation. Both begin with a judgment that determines whether a given individual can be “regarded as the author (*causa libera*) of an action, which is then called a deed (*factum*), and to which laws are applicable” (1991, 53). The first form of imputation (*imputatio dijudicatoria*) is a critical act in Kant’s sense, an act of discrimination that, in separating those to whom authorship of an act may be imputed from those to whom it may not, founds the possibility of morality and moral judgment, that is, of deciding the good and the bad. Its field of operation, however, is restricted to the realm of criticism, that is, Kant tells us, it is moral, not legal, judgment and therefore judgment without the power to impose physical consequences for the actions it deems bad beyond the declaration of its decision.

But there is another form of imputation to which Kant gives the Latin title “*imputatio judicialia s. valida*.” This is a form of imputation that, having determined an individual to be a “subject . . . capable of having his actions imputed to him,” and then in imputing authorship of a given deed to an individual, “brings with it the legal consequences of this deed” (Kant, 1991, 53). To clarify, Kant has proposed the synonym or alternative “*imputatio valida*,” imputation endowed with force or power, both the force to impose on the individual the authorship attributed to him and the force to bring to the judgment not of good and evil, but of innocence and guilt, punishment. And as Foucault remarked in *Discipline and Punish*, no matter what the nature of the punishment, “it is always the body that is at issue,” (Foucault, 1977, 25). The act of imputation that is coextensive with the determination of guilt (*Schuldigkeit*) and blame (*Verschuldung*),

thus includes in its operation as its ultimate phase the pain inflicted on the body of the condemned individual, including the pain of deprivation and confinement. The judgment is fully realized in the corporeal consequences it imposes on the individual found to be free, responsible and guilty for the deed whose authorship has been imputed to him.

It is useful to recall in this connection that the words of the epigram imputed to the slave, "Detain me, I am a fugitive," are not spoken and thus are not a matter of a projected voice, even in a metaphorical sense. Neither are they written in the sense of the verb *scribo*, written like a letter, or as in the phrase *scriptum est*, "it is written," that is, written down or transcribed. The verbs used in conjunction with the making of a stigma signify writing by means of cutting, engraving or burning into flesh. Stigmatization in this sense represents a kind of inverted torture, the point of which is not to extract a statement from the slave, but to carve into or brand him with a statement by means of the most painful techniques possible. A slave as non-person could not serve as a witness (*testis*) or give testimony in a court of law, but information extracted from a slave could be introduced as evidence on the condition that the information was obtained through torture, perhaps to show that the slave was not the "free cause" of his speech, which, on the contrary, was forced from him by the infliction of pain.

Thus, the universal stigma exhibited by the runaway slave cannot be reduced to an act of signification, partly because it is never clear to whom the implied pronoun of the first person refers and partly because the words of the epigram would not have the same meaning if they were written on a piece of paper, even if the piece of paper were pinned to the slave's clothes or hung around his neck. The scars of the cutting instrument or the red-hot iron give eloquent testimony to the pain the captured fugitive endured both as punishment and as the price this particular non-person had to pay to enjoy the privilege of donning the persona that allows one to speak to others in the imperative, or to speak at all.

Bourdieu hailed Goffman as an explorer of *l'infiniment petit* of social life. If we apply

Althusser to Goffman's explorations, we see how the multiple practices and the innumerable, minute acts of everyday life described by Goffman become linked in chains to produce large-scale and diverse stigmatizations. To apply Goffman to Althusser is to make visible the inequalities and dissimilarities produced by interpellation, rather than the universal subject of which every individual is an expression. By marking the inscription that modifies the body of those to whom responsibility is imputed, both Goffman and Althusser participate in a modification of the modification, that is, the movement by which stigmatization is contested and resisted.

And yet, the concepts of stigma and stigmatization (as understood by Goffman), on the one hand, and imputation and interpellation (as discussed by Althusser), on the other, are founded on a forgetting of the violence and coercion of their origins. This forgetting, however, is not the delayed effect of the past, but is necessary to the present: it plays an essential role in rendering invisible the violence and destitution that remain consubstantial with stigmatization, imputation and interpellation in their practical existence today. It is an active forgetting that extends into the present by means of the de-materialization that renders invisible and unthinkable the forms of coercion and violence that are inseparable from stigmatization and interpellation and compels us to imagine that they possess a merely discursive or ideal existence. At the same time, these works, so obviously, perhaps too obviously, different in form, content and orientation, bear the marks, letters and phrases, visible to everyone but them, of a time of mass resistance to subjection and stigmatization. They have opened a space for theory and practice that only our vigilance can prevent from disappearing into oblivion.

References

Aeschinus, *Scholia Graecae*.

Althusser, L. (1971a). Philosophy as a Revolutionary Weapon. *Lenin and Philosophy* (Trans. Ben Brewster). New York: Monthly Review Press.

- . (1971b). Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses. *Lenin and Philosophy* (Trans. Ben Brewster). New York: Monthly Review Press.
- . (1996). *Pyschanalyse et sciences humaines: deux conferences (1963-1964)*. Paris: Livre de Poche.
- Assmann, J. (2000). *Herrschaft und Heil: Politische Theologie in Altägypten, Israel und Europa*. Frankfurt: Carl Hanser Verlag.
- Balibar, É. (2005). Le structuralisme : une destitution du sujet? *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, 45(1), 5-22. doi:10.3917/rmm.051.0005.
- . (2016). *Citizen Subject* (Trans. Steven Miller). New York: Fordham University Press.
- Canguilhem, G. (1989) *The Normal and the Pathological* (Trans. Carolyn R. Fawcett). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Creuzer, G.-F. (1840). Explication d'une inscription romaine inédite, précédée de quelques observations sur les causes et l'origine de l'esclavage chez les anciens en général et particulièrement chez les Romains. In *Mémoires de l'Institut national de France*, tome 14, 2^e partie, 1-35.
- Elsayed, H. (2017). "La Haine: Falling in Slow Motion". In Montag, W. and Elsayed, H. (2017) *Balibar and the Citizen Subject*. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh UP: 235-252.
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and Punish* (Trans. Alan Sheridan). New York: Vintage.
- Gaius, Institutes. (2003). *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the College De France, 1975-76* (Trans. David Macey). London: Picador.
- Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the Management of a Spoiled Identity*. New York: Prentice Hall.
- Jones, C.P. (1987). Stigma: Tattooing and Branding in Graeco-Roman Antiquity. *The Journal of Roman Studies*. 77, 139-155.
- Kamen, D. (2010). A Corpus of Inscriptions: Representing Slave Marks in Antiquity. *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome*. 55, 95-110.
- Kant, I. (1991). *The Metaphysics of Morals* (Trans. Mary Gregor). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Locke, J. (1997). *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. London, New York: Penguin Books.
- Macherey, P. (2014). *Le sujet de normes*. Paris: Éditions Amsterdam.
- Petronius (1913). *Satyricon* (Trans. Michael Heseltine). New York: Macmillan.

Warren Montag (montag@oxy.edu): Brown Family Professor in Literature, English and Comparative Literary Studies at Occidental College in Los Angeles. He is the author of *Louis Althusser; Bodies, Masses, Power: Spinoza and His Contemporaries; The Unthinkable Swift; and Althusser and His Contemporaries*.

Received: 27 October 2019
Approved: 15 November 2019