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## The Interpellation of the Body: Althusser and Kafka

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**Abstract:** *This essay stages an encounter between Althusser's essay on the ideological state apparatuses and Franz Kafka's "In the Penal Colony" in order to pose the problem of the body. I argue that this encounter produces the concept of a body that exceeds the limits of the legal subject and its interpellation.*

**Keywords:** *Body, Interpellation, Ideology, Althusser, Louis, Kafka, Franz.*

**Resumen:** *Este ensayo presenta un encuentro respecto al problema del cuerpo entre el ensayo de Althusser sobre aparatos ideológicos del Estado y "En la colonia penal" de Franz Kafka. Argumento que este encuentro produce el concepto de un cuerpo que excede los límites del sujeto legal y su interpelación.*

**Palabras clave:** *Cuerpo, Interpelación, Ideología, Althusser, Louis, Kafka, Franz.*

Althusser once remarked that to read, or more precisely, to read *en philosophe*, as a philosopher or in a philosophical way, meant to discern "the lacunae in the fullness of [a text's] discourse, the blanks on the crowded page" (2009, 28).<sup>1</sup> To be sure, this reading *en philosophe* has nothing to do with "filling in" these lacunae and blank spaces, a reparative act that presupposes these absences are that of a pure negativity or lack and therefore symptoms of the text's defects. Nor would this act of reading be that of penetrating a

supposedly mystified or illusory surface in order to reach the hidden depth of the text, where its truth or meaning might finally be discovered. On the contrary, the protocol of reading that Althusser sought to develop meant taking a text as it is, even if what it is, as Pierre Macherey would argue in *Pour une théorie de la production littéraire*, is not immediately given (2006, 111). Yet we have to be very careful here, because in one and the same breath Macherey states that, in spite of or rather because of this "complexity," nothing in the text remains hidden. In this sense, the readings produced by Althusser (as well as Macherey) are anything but "suspicious" or "paranoid": they trace the very movement of the text itself, in order to see what it says without saying that it says so. Althusser's own texts (and he would certainly admit it) are not exempt from saying something other than what its author authorized: it is only too easy to find divergences within his own thought and writings (which render any talk about "Althusserianism" or "Althusserian Marxism" meaningless). To take just one example, ideology as it is discussed in his fairly early essay "Marxism and Humanism" or in some of the other essays published in the volume *For Marx* (1965) is strikingly different, I would argue, from the account he gives in the Ideological State Apparatuses essay (hereafter ISAs) several years later, in 1970 (after the events of May 68). To put it very schematically, this difference is above all a difference in the theoretical problematic that Althusser found himself writing and thinking in: for all of the criticisms Althusser



directed against Marxist Humanism in the earlier essay, there is still something “humanist,” or at any rate idealist (a synonym for humanism in Althusser’s language) about the conception of ideology he advances there, insofar as ideology is still related, if not exactly to consciousness, then at least to imaginary relations. In the ISAs essay, however, Althusser seeks to produce a notion of ideology that possesses a material existence, one immanent in its apparatuses, as an individuating and interpellating force on and around the body. Yet, it is here that we encounter a problem, because, if I am correct in suggesting that interpellation takes place at the level of the body, then I must confront the fact that nowhere in the text of the ISAs essay does Althusser ever mention the body, or at least, the human body. Of course, as Althusser also argued, the absence of a word is not the same thing as the absence of a concept (2009, 101). And it is perhaps for no reason other than this that we may take Althusser’s insistence on the material and materiality in the ISAs essay as indices of the present-absent concept of the body that shapes and haunts the text. The question, then, becomes how we might grasp or register those indelible traces which run throughout the text.

As Balibar has recently argued, many of the newer commentaries on Althusser focus on his writings on art (theater and painting in particular), not in order to read these writings “as applications of theory within a particular field (say aesthetics or culture), but rather that we view them as ‘analyzers,’ theoretical *dispositifs* or *machines* constructed by Althusser to resolve theoretical problems and identify the objects of theory” (2015, 2). While Balibar calls our attention to the fact that the deployment of artworks on the theoretical field is not unique to Althusser (he cites the examples of Lyotard on Duchamp, Deleuze on Proust and Kafka, and Derrida on Artaud), he argues that what is striking about Althusser’s recourse to artworks is “that they are in fact essentially descriptions of singular *experiences* resulting from an ‘encounter’ with a work or group of works, an ‘event’ in other words, but from which general consequences can be drawn for a much larger field” (2015, 3). In light of this, it may well be instructive to stage an

encounter between Althusser’s ISAs essay and a text by another author in which the body figures as central and luridly hypervisible: Kafka’s “In the Penal Colony.” If this pairing seems arbitrary (indeed, the names of these two authors are rarely seen together),<sup>2</sup> it is worth recalling that another important component of “In the Penal Colony” (and that which may serve as a connective tissue between these two texts) is a very particular apparatus, the *Apparat*. And even if this essay will not take the form of a comparison, it is worth pointing out that in a manner that resembles Althusser’s discussions of ideology, Kafka does not present readers with a single conception of law, one that could be discerned within, if not abstracted from, each of his texts and neatly organized into a coherent totality: rather, a reader finds in Kafka’s writings various conceptions of law, conceptions that diverge from or break off of one another so completely that there is no question of collecting these fragments and forming a whole, as if, to borrow a figure from Deleuze and Guattari, these fragments were so many “pieces of a puzzle belonging not to any one puzzle but to many” (1983, 43). Indeed, any coming-together of these errant or perhaps lawless splinters of law could arguably only take the form of a collision. To go further, we could say that the law in Kafka is immanent in each of Kafka’s texts and one of the most striking examples of this would certainly be that of “In the Penal Colony,” in which the law exists nowhere but in the *Apparat* as it is inscribed on the condemned body that it simultaneously kills. The point here is not to argue that Kafka grasped that which escaped Althusser or to apply Kafka to Althusser (and even less so to apply Althusser to Kafka): rather, I argue that placing these texts side by side, witnessing their apparatuses function and malfunction, may allow us to *faire bouger les choses*, to stir or shake up these texts in order to think them anew. For, if to read Althusser alongside Kafka compels us to grasp the centrality of the body to ideology and the ideological state apparatuses, then to read Kafka alongside Althusser will allow us to grasp a tension internal to Kafka’s notion of the body, or rather between the two bodies in Kafka’s story, the *Leib* (with all of its Christian resonances), and the *Körper* (the material body

devoid of an interiority). Indeed, in the space opened up by the encounter or collision of these texts, it becomes possible to think the concept of a body capable of resisting or even shattering its apparatuses, a body capable of its own liberation.

With this aim in mind, let us begin tracing the (present-absent) theory of the body in Althusser's ISAs essay. If the human body is absent from the essay, we can at the very least begin with the material, or, indeed, the physical—in fact, a particular physicality, one which will also allow us to elude any mind-body dualism from the outset. For, however much Althusser may suggest that interpellation has everything to do with recognition, that is, *recognition* as an act of consciousness or, in the case of *interpellation policière*, of a guilty conscience<sup>3</sup> (a reading that is made all the more difficult to resist by Ben Brewster's decision to add "hail" into his English translation), this interpretation could only be sustained by gliding over if not suppressing the text's *décalages*. The scene in which Althusser describes interpellation is all the more suggestive and alluring for its brevity. According to the well-known schema, individuals become subjects "by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there!' (Althusser, 2014, 264). Immediately after staging this "theoretical theater," Althusser cuts to another angle, so to speak, this time focusing not on the call but on the interpellated subject:

Assuming that the theoretical scene I have imagined takes place in the street, the hailed individual [*l'individu interpellé*] will turn round. By this mere 180-degree physical conversion, he becomes a *subject*. Why? Because he has recognized that the hail [*l'interpellation*] was 'really' addressed to him, and that 'it was *really him* who was hailed [*interpellé*]' (and not someone else)." (2014, 264)

If it is tempting (and far too easy) to take refuge in the language of recognition in this passage (perhaps because of its very "obviousness"), it is

nevertheless important that the reference to the physical and corporeal not be overlooked: "By this mere 180-degree physical conversion [*simple conversion physique*] he becomes a *subject*." The implications of such a remark, one far too easy to neglect, are crucial for grasping the centrality of the body in Althusser's essay: the recognition (if we must retain this word and its repercussions) of oneself as a subject takes place within the body, that is, within the "physical conversion" of the body as it turns toward the one (the police officer? a colleague?) who has interpellated him or her. Indeed, the expression itself of the "physical conversion" captures Althusser's refusal to separate the mind from the body here, as if conversion were not simply a spiritual transformation but was possible only insofar as it occurred alongside or within the movements of the body (a notion which differs from that of Pascal's vulgar, if scandalous, materialism in which the movement of the body, in particular, kneeling, unilaterally produces belief in the mind). The importance of the corporeal here may be easier (and more difficult) to grasp if we take seriously the metaphor of the *interpellation policière*, not because it remains "descriptive" (the limits of which Althusser warns us about in the first part of essay),<sup>4</sup> but because the police officer and police force in general are not properly speaking a component of the Ideological State Apparatuses but of the Repressive State Apparatus. At the very least, the decisions to refer to the police at this moment suggests the very real—and very physical—violence at work in interpellation.<sup>5</sup> To be sure, Althusser refuses a clear distinction between ideology and repression or ideology and violence. Furthermore, for Althusser to assign the Repressive State Apparatus the role of ideological interpellation at this central moment in the text suggests that ideology and repression do not have an inverse relationship but are coextensive with one other. In any case, Althusser's metaphor here compels or obliges us to ask what the relationship between these two components, or, by way of anticipation, *bodies* of state apparatuses, is. Indeed, we are forced to ask what the body itself might be in the ISAs essay.

To begin to offer a response to this question (or at least to specify the question itself)

we might begin by returning to the notion that ideology has a material existence. One of the results of such an argument, and one, I argue, that has not been properly grasped (because it is only symptomatically given in the text), is that any discussion about Althusser's notion of ideology that does not constantly refer back to the ideological state apparatuses in which ideology is always immanent, can never fully account for the break Althusser produces in the notion of ideology. Indeed, this would be the very basis that allows Althusser to criticize what he calls the "ideology of ideology," that is, the belief that ideology is composed of nonmaterial ideas and must be "interpreted" by a theoretical vanguard to be dispelled. Yet, from the beginning of the section Althusser's writing is tentative and uncertain. He states immediately that the "affirmative form" in which this thesis is given means that the thesis itself remains "unproven" (2014, 258). In a rather flippant or laconic tone, he asks that his readers, "in the name of, say, materialism," let themselves "be favorably disposed toward" the thesis, for "a long series of arguments would be necessary to prove it" (2014, 258). It is important to note this tone not simply for its rhetorical effects but because it marks a genuine uncertainty about the thesis itself. It is not difficult to see why: the thesis has little in common with ideology as it has traditionally functioned in Marxist theory or ideology critique:

While discussing the Ideological State Apparatuses and their practices, I said that each of them was the realization of an ideology (the unity of these different regional ideologies –religious, ethical, legal, political aesthetic, etc.– being assured by their subjection to the ruling ideology). I now return to this thesis: an ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice or practices. This existence is material. (2014, 259)

In Warren Montag's reading of this passage, he notes the discrepancy, one Althusser himself appears to overlook, between the latter's use of "realization" and the phrase "always exists in" (Montag, 2013, 151). Montag does not seek to resolve this tension, rather, he allows it to

perform its work in Althusser's text. By placing these two statements into one it becomes possible to see Althusser's Spinozism, that is, his commitment to immanence in opposition to transcendence and teleology. Thus, for Althusser, Montag argues,

ideology always exists in the apparatus that is its realization...ideology is immanent in its apparatuses and their practices; it has no existence apart from these apparatuses and is entirely coincident with them. Ideas have thus disappeared into their material manifestations, becoming like causes that "exist" only in their effects (or, to add a Freudian reference that is entirely in keeping with both Spinoza and Althusser, ideas in this sense are causes, that are ever only constituted *nachträglich*, retroactively, as the effect of their material effects. (2013, 151-152)

If we take Althusser's thesis, however provisional, seriously, then we must admit that ideology neither has an ideal or spiritual existence nor does it even exist in the minds of individual subjects. Indeed, whatever limitations the ISAs essay may have, it is impossible to deduce from it a notion of ideology as "false consciousness" or something which veils a more substantial reality considered as true. However, if we cannot yet say that the body is at stake in Althusser's discussion, this would be because the body, or rather the human body, *le corps humain*, never appears in the ISAs essay. Indeed, nowhere in the essay does ideology ever refer to the body. Yet, Althusser does use the term for body (*le corps*) in the essay; but the vast majority of these uses refer to nothing other than the repressive and ideological state apparatuses themselves.

After listing the organizations and institutions that compose the various ideological state apparatuses, Althusser writes "As a first moment, it is clear that while there is one (Repressive) State Apparatus, there is a *plurality* of Ideological State Apparatuses. Even presupposing that it exists, the unity that constitutes this plurality of ISAs as a body [*en corps*] is not immediately visible" (2014, 243). While the use of "body" here may strike a reader as nothing more than

convenient shorthand for speaking about a composite organization, the persistence of the term throughout the text suggests that Althusser may be gesturing at something else. The next use of the term “body” occurs after Althusser argues that the Repressive State Apparatus and the Ideological State Apparatuses cannot ultimately be separated, even if one functions “massively and predominantly” by repression and the other by ideology (2014, 245). It is this last attribute that “leads us toward an understanding of what constitutes the unity of the apparently disparate body [*du corps apparemment disparate*] of the ISAs” (2014, 245). The ISAs themselves are thus composed into a singular body. This unity does not consist in a physical or spatial unity, but a unity of function. Finally, in the next passage where we find the term body, Althusser uses “body” and “bodies” four times in the space of one sentence. This is the last time the word appears in relation to the ideological state apparatuses:

If the thesis I have proposed is well founded, it leads me back to the classical Marxist theory of the state, while making it more precise in one point. I argue that it is necessary to distinguish between state power (and its possession by...) on the one hand, and the state apparatus on the other. But I add that the state apparatus contains two bodies: the body of institutions which represent the Repressive State Apparatus on the one hand, and the body of institutions which represent the body of Ideological State Apparatuses on the other. (2014, 246)

A couple of points should be clear at this point. There is certainly a notion of the body in Althusser’s ISAs essay, but it is not a body reducible to the human body. Secondly, the body of the ideological state apparatuses, which, as we have already seen, is in some sense already a grouping or combination of separate institutions, is united with another body, that of the Repressive State Apparatus. For Althusser, the unity of these two bodies is nothing other than the entirety of state apparatus itself. It is at this point that we may begin to trace the absent-present concept of the body in the ISAs essay: if, as Montag has

suggested, the ISAs essay is a very “Spinozist essay,” and even more so in the moments that Althusser refuses to name Spinoza, then it is very likely that Althusser may be drawing on Spinoza’s notion of the body here, a notion of the body that is always already a composite. Indeed, for Spinoza, the human body would necessarily be included in this world of bodies and composites of bodies. Although we do not have the space to explore in detail Spinoza’s notion of the body, it may be helpful to refer to Part II of the *Ethics* (interestingly entitled “Of the Nature and Origin of the Mind”), in which Spinoza writes:

When a number of bodies of the same or different magnitude form close contact with one another through the pressure of other bodies upon them, or if they are moving at the same or different rates of speed so as to preserve an unvarying relation of movement among themselves, these bodies are said to be united with one another and all together form one body or individual thing, which is distinguished from other things through this union of bodies. (2002, 253)

If this is the conception of the body that might be at work in Althusser’s essay, then we can think of ideological state apparatuses as a composite of bodies that exerts its pressure or force on the human body (itself a composite). There is nothing immaterial about this force: this apparatus interpellates or apprehends the human body, drags it out of and individuates it from the bodies of the masses (thereby decreasing the power of the masses), and imputes<sup>6</sup> it with an identity so that it is recognizable (and can thus be held accountable) as the body proper to particular subject (whether citizen, immigrant, man, woman, white, person of color, etc.) and as the subject or author of certain actions or crimes. Althusser’s essay, however, merely opens up these problems and questions: by focusing his essay on ideology, subjection, and reproduction, he does not even begin to address the problem of the body. The consequences of this are enormous: aside from the fact that it has led readers to conclude that interpellation is above all a theory of ideological recognition or, rather,



misrecognition, it has also led many to see in the ISAs essay an entirely functionalist conception of capitalist society bereft of any hope of revolt or revolution. Yet such a functionalist vision of capitalist society finds its double in the text devoid of discrepancies (and therefore openings). Althusser's work, as we have already seen, is anything but an enclosed system. Indeed, our task is to restore to the text the very *décalages* that readers wishing to find in Althusser a functionalist are unable to see. As I have already indicated, however, this is not a matter of filling in the blank spaces or of completing the essay. In fact, in order to carry out our task, we must turn to other texts, in particular, one in which the body is impossible to overlook.

For, if the human body is (paradoxically) absent or missing from the reaches of the ideological and repressive state apparatuses in the ISAs essay, it is completely within the grip of the *Apparat* in Kafka's penal colony. To be sure, this *Apparat* is not identical nor is it reducible to what Althusser calls the *appareils idéologique d'Etat*. And yet, with the *Apparat*, a reader is presented with the mechanism by which law is immanent in its inscription by the apparatus on the body of the condemned subject. The very design of Kafka's apparatus is suggestive in this regard. The machine consists of three main parts, each having "acquired a kind of popular nickname [*volkstümliche Bezeichnungen*]" (1971a, 142). Of the three parts, the most suggestive is that which is called the "Harrow" [*die Egge*]. As the officer explains, the "Harrow" is "a good name for it. The needles are set in like the teeth of a harrow and the whole thing works something like a harrow, although its action is limited to one place and contrived with much more artistic skill" (1971a, 142). Kafka's metaphor of the harrow here suggests that the body, above all, the condemned body, is like a piece of land in need of cultivation: the harrow of the apparatus "prepares" the body, that is, it tears into the flesh of the body, breaking it up, as if the flesh were unfertile or corrupted soil, in order that the sentence or judgment (*Urteil*) might be planted within the flesh.<sup>7</sup> But the metaphor ends here: there is no yield or harvest, at least not for the condemned individual, for this judgment is at

once a form of execution: the subject of the law is a subject of death in the penal colony.

In this sense, the law is not so much a formal code that an individual freely chooses to obey (or not) but exists or is actualized in those moments of its inscription on the body: the law is nothing other than this very torture. This explains why, once the researcher raises concerns over the fact that the condemned individuals never learn of their judgments, the officer replies "There would be no point in telling him. He'll learn it on his body" ("Es wäre nutzlos, es ihm zu verkünden. Er erfährt es ja auf seinem Leib.") (1971a, 145). According to the logic of the officer, to know one's punishment has little to do with an act of recognition; on the contrary this learning takes place on the body, it is inscribed into the very texture of the body. The term translated as learn (*erfährt*) could also be translated as feel, bear, experience, or suffer: the body of the condemned bears the knowledge of the sentence or judgment on it; it suffers this sentence. Indeed, learning here is coextensive with bodily suffering and pain, if not, ultimately, death.

But a more serious question arises at this point, one which concerns the crime and the punishment. For, if the sentence or judgment is unknown to the condemned individual (or knowable only through their "wounds") the very fact of having transgressed any law is also unknowable: not only does the condemned man not know his sentence, he does not even know that he has been sentenced (1971a, 145). The "evidence" of the crime, apparently, is the word of the condemned man's captain. Whether or not he is really guilty is beside the point, for the "guiding principle" of the officer "is this: Guilt is never to be doubted" (1971a, 145). Indeed, this guilt is inscribed within the body as a simultaneous punishment for those acts that are likewise imputed to the subject, those acts of which there can be no doubt that the condemned individual committed, and for which he or she must be punished.

And even if the subject does not know the charge or that they have been charged, they will nevertheless come to bear some "understanding" of, if not "enlightenment" through, the law, that is, through the apparatus. Or at least, this is

what, as Gailus, has argued, the officer “believes or wants to believe” (2001, 299). Again, what matters here, at least from the perspective of the officer, is the body:

“...But how quiet he grows at just about the sixth hour! Enlightenment comes to the most dull-witted (*Verstand geht dem Blödesten auf*). It begins around the eyes. From there it radiates. A moment that might tempt one to get under the Harrow oneself (*Ein Anblick, der einen verführen könnte, sich mit unter die Egge zu legen*). Nothing more happens than that the man begins to understand (*entziffern*) the inscription (*Schrift*), he purses his mouth as if he were listening. You have seen how difficult it is to decipher (*entziffern*) the script (*Schrift*) with one’s eyes; but our man deciphers (*entziffert*) it with his wounds. To be sure, that is a hard task; he needs six hours to accomplish it. By that time the Harrow has pierced him quite through and casts him into the pit, where he pitches down upon the blood and water and the cotton wool. Then the judgment (*Gericht*) has been fulfilled and we, the soldier and I bury him.” (1971a, 150)

A number of things make this passage interesting. Above all, the officer’s remarks suggest that the previous statement that the condemned man will learn/suffer the sentence with the body was more than an off the cuff remark provoked by the perceived judgment of the researcher. Since the very beginning of the story, the officer has expressed a strange attachment to the apparatus as well as an admiration for the commandant who initially designed it. Indeed, the very first line of the story is delivered not by the narrator but by the officer: “It’s a remarkable (*eigentümlicher*: peculiar, singular, strange) piece of apparatus” (1971a, 140). This attachment to if not desire for the apparatus comes to the fore in this moment, when the officer describes in startling detail the effects of the apparatus registered in the expression of the face of its victim. In particular, the officer, in a strange moment that foreshadows the end of the story, professes that this seductive exhibition could entice one to experience it oneself. The “*Verstand*” that is

produced within the body by the torture of the apparatus draws the viewer in, or at any rate, the officer. Yet, the viewer does not experience, or, rather, “decipher” it. Indeed, what was conceived of earlier in the text as learning and suffering (*erfährt*) has, at this point, been translated into deciphering (*entziffert*). Yet, the deciphering at work in the text is not one that would belong to a surface-depth model, as if some illegible or latent secret were brought to light. What is deciphered is the legible illegibility of the violence of the judgment: the body deciphers the judgment, the inscription, its wounds. The judgment-inscription is nothing other than the wounds on the body, decipherable by no one but the wounded body itself: “You have seen how difficult it is to decipher the script with one’s eyes; but our man deciphers it with his wounds.” The judgment is illegible but for the body, that is, judgment is immanent in its inscription or wounding of the body. The final line of the translation brings out the ambiguity at the heart of the officer’s speech: while in the German text, the beginning of the line reads, “Dann ist das Gericht zu Ende” (literally: Then the judgment/trial has ended/is over), the English translation reads the line in a quasi-redemptive manner: “Then the judgment has been fulfilled.” To fulfill is to make complete, realize a preordained end. We could also argue that to fulfill a judgment is to set right the law and therefore redeem the law’s trespasser. In the case of “In the Penal Colony,” this redemption takes the form of an inscription on the body. To have “HONOR THY SUPERIORS!” inscribed into the body is thus to command the body to do so. But this fulfillment is also a killing and is therefore a frustrated or self-destructive fulfillment. The moment (a long tortuous period, to be sure) of *Verstand* is always already missed. Indeed, there is something in the uncanny nature of this “*eigentümlicher Apparat*” that prevents fulfillment and redemption, if not its very functioning. In fact, the only time “redemption” (*Erlösung*) occurs in the text is near the end of the story, after the officer is killed by the apparatus (and the condemned man is let go). “Redemption” is inscribed in the text only to tell us that it is has been missed. Once the officer is killed, the explorer,

somewhat hesitatingly, examines his body, spending the most time looking at his face:

And here, almost against his will, he had to look at the face of the corpse (*Leiche*). It was as it had been in life; no sign was visible of the promised redemption; what the others had found in the machine the officer had not found; the lips were firmly pressed together, the eyes were open, with the same expression as in life, the look was calm and convinced, through the forehead went the point of the great iron spike. (1971a, 166)

Everything the officer has claimed throughout the story is called into question with his death. What the researcher witnesses is “no exquisite torture such as the officer desired,” but “plain murder” (1971a, 165). Nothing works as the officer had promised. The needles do not even write; instead they violently puncture the officer’s body. Yet, as Butler has argued, the apparatus of Kafka’s penal colony highlights not only the “breakdown” or “malfunction,” but more importantly, the “constitutive possibility of breakdown, or malfunction.” (2015, 24) Indeed, what type of “counterdiscourse,” she asks, might “emerge in the midst of breakdown, animating the remnants of a broken ideological machine for critical purposes” (Butler, 2015, 37)? It is here that our analysis of the body, not the body as such, but the particular notion of the body, or rather bodies, that Kafka uses in “In the Penal Colony” becomes central. For the malfunctioning of the apparatus has everything to do with the effects of its interpellation-inscription on the body, effects that set the body against itself, and thus the very problematic of the body at work in Kafka’s story.

In fact, the appropriate question here (and one not immediately visible in the English translation) would be: what is the tension internal to the notion of the body in “In the Penal Colony”? For in the story, Kafka uses two different terms that could be translated as “body”: *Leib* and *Körper*. Indeed, there is a sort of play between these two: *Leib*, which appears four times in the text, becomes *Körper*, the more prevalent term, appearing ten times, which, in turn, turns back into *Leib* and so on. It is hardly surprising that,

given the trajectory of the story, this play only ends with the appearance of the term *Leiche* (“corpse”). In a certain sense, *Leiche* serves to resolve the tension between the two terms. One of the most interesting moments of this tension occurs in consecutive lines spoken by the officer, in which he elaborates on the inscription process of the apparatus: “So there have to be lots and lots of flourishes around the actual script; the script itself runs around the body only in a narrow girdle; the rest of the body is reserved for the embellishments” [*Es müssen also viele, viele Zieraten die eigentliche Schrift umgeben; die wirkliche Schrift umzieht den Leib nur in einem schmalen Gürtel; der übrige Körper is für Verzierungen bestimmt*] (Kafka, 1971a, 149). What is above all striking here is the way in which the officer uses these two different words for the body as it undergoes two distinct, yet related, mechanisms or processes of punishment. To put this another way, the condemned body is split into two distinct bodies. On the one hand, the “script itself” [*wirkliche Schrift*] is written on the *Leib*. During this process, the apparatus separates or tears this body from “the rest of the body” or the “remaining” or “leftover” body [*übrige Körper*]. The *Körper* is, in turn, “reserved for embellishments.” In an important sense, this splitting of the body into two calls into question the very immanence of the law in the apparatus, and thus in the body. The division or dualism of the body mirrors the division of the judgment itself between the actual script [*eigentliche Schrift*] and the embellishments or ornamentations [*Verzierungen*], and thus re-inscribes within the text a relation of essence and appearance, if not depth and surface. It is not that surprising, then, that the term used for the body of the actual script would be *Leib*. The term radiates with theological implications and is found in phrases such as “*der Leib Christi*” (the body of Christ), a body invested with (spiritual) life, both human and divine. On the other hand, *Körper* is a more common as well as more material term for body: not only does it refer to the human body, but it can also refer to animal bodies, as well as, to turn once more to Spinoza, to bodies moving through space, colliding or concurring with one another. But while this body for Spinoza is not reducible to



a more primary essence or substance,<sup>8</sup> in Kafka's "In the Penal Colony" this body, the *Körper*, is the body of "embellishments," a phenomenal body produced as a remainder from the *Leib*. It is necessary to think through the implications of this division, for, as we have just seen, this division also produces a division within the notion of the law and judgment, a division that is also an opening and thus, perhaps, "a way out."<sup>9</sup> For in inscribing itself into the body, the apparatus produces a remainder, a body in which only embellishments and ornamentations can be inscribed, and not the law or judgment itself. While this body may certainly be harmed, mutilated, or even killed by the apparatus, as surface it harbors no interiority that might "internalize" its interpellations. On the other hand, the *Leib*, the body invested with a spiritual existence and therefore an interior life, is that which is imputed with a subjectivity and must therefore recognize itself as a subject, and very often a guilty subject. The *Körper's* interpellations are only ever skin deep, are only ever embellishments or ornamentations, and that is why this subversive remainder can only be overcome by its transformation into the *Leiche*: execution would be nothing other than the suppression of the very *décalages* engendered by the apparatus. But let us note that execution is not inevitable, for, while the officer is indeed killed by the apparatus, the condemned man is ultimately let go. Would it be too much to suggest that, in the very figure of the condemned man, we may glimpse the *Körper*, that is, the body that by all means is surrounded, confined, imputed, subjected, interpellated, but only ever on the surface, for this body is nothing but surface, and that this body may, precisely under particular conditions, get up from and leave the apparatus?

Indeed, would it be too much to suggest that we may also glimpse the conflict internal to the notion of the body in Kafka's text in the very absence of the human body in the ISAs essay, an absence that is nevertheless present in the *décalages* proper to the essay? Perhaps the very absence of the human body in the ISAs essay is what allows us to trace a line demarcation through this body, through its very tension, and is therefore a strategic absence on the part of Althusser. Of course, "strategic" should not be

understood in relation to the gambit of a *maître-penseur*, but, rather, in relation to a theorist who "is well and truly *internal* to the conjuncture in which he must act if he is to be able to act *on it*" as Althusser once remarked of Lenin (Althusser, 2011, 105). In this sense, we can now grasp why Althusser used the body where he did and where he did not, while recognizing the fact that this came with certain costs. Yet, in this encounter with Kafka, we are now in a better position to see the "body" (that is, its literal as well as material inscriptions) as the site not only interpellation, but of contestation. As Butler has argued if "the instrument of torture in Kafka's 'In the Penal Colony' destroys the body on which it writes, then there must be a body prior to that inscription, stable and self-identical, subject to that sacrificial destruction" (Butler, 2007, 177). We may now see that it is not the human body as such that is prior to its inscription, but the *Leib*, even if, the *Leib* is always already interpellated (for stability and self-identity are unthinkable without interpellation). The stability of the *Leib* finds its double in the stability of the *Leiche*; yet, the third term here not only undoes this stability, but even draws a line of demarcation through the notion of interpellation itself: for the *Körper*, that which is reserved for embellishment and which is likewise produced in the moment of interpellation-inscription, is that which brings us back to Althusser's *corps*. In this sense, the *Körper* and *corps* are productions or performances whose elements do not exist prior to their combinations as such. If interpellation takes place at the level of bodies, and if by bodies we follow Althusser and include not only the human body but all bodies, then interpellation is nothing other than the encounter, and very often the violent encounter and confrontation of bodies; in this sense, interpellation is not the automatic recognition of an individual subject to a subjecting body, but the very confrontation between these bodies. In this case, the outcome of this encounter is not given in advance; nothing guarantees the subjection of the interpellated body.<sup>10</sup> The outcome remains the aleatory and always temporary result of the balance of forces immanent in this interpellation-confrontation. Perhaps this is why the curtain falls on Althusser's little theoretical theater the

moment after the interpellated subject turns and faces the police officer, that is, the Repressive State Apparatus. While the interpellated subject may be arrested, harmed, or even killed, there is no reason why this performance of bodies should not or could not lead to liberation.

In this essay, I have attempted to stage an encounter between Althusser's *appareils idéologique d'Etat* and Kafka's *Apparat* in order to think a concept of the body irreducible to the body of the legal (human) subject and thus an improper body, that is, a body not belonging to any subject but one constantly reconfigured with and against other bodies: the body as a "*connexio*," which, as Vittorio Morfino has argued, "must not be thought as given once and for all, like a Parmenidean structure: its taking hold, its historicity, is founded on a weave of encounters that have occurred or have been missed, that were short or durable, and that all take place precisely on the basis of the existence of different temporal rhythms" (2015, 16). This is not to say that this body is a free body: indeed, the body is always already interpellated, but only on the condition that interpellation is not a one-off event in which, once interpellated, the subject works all by itself. For, to read Althusser alongside Kafka, it becomes possible to grasp the fact that interpellation itself depends on the very possibility of its reproduction, that interpellation is subject to the very fragility (because of the materiality) of the ideological state apparatuses in which interpellation is immanent (and we know from Kafka how fragile an apparatus may be that is not properly maintained or reinforced by an entire network of state apparatuses). This body remains undertheorized by both Althusser and Kafka (and there is no question of "synthesizing" these two authors in order to discover or produce it); yet, it is possible and necessary to intervene in the absences or interstices produced by the encounter of these two texts, for this encounter assures nothing more nor less than the opening of pathways toward a concept of the body that might shatter apparatuses of every type: the body or rather bodies of the masses.

## Notes

1. I would like to thank Judith Butler and Warren Montag for commenting on earlier drafts of this essay.
2. There are at least a couple of references to Althusser and the ISAs essay in discussions of Kafka's "In the Penal Colony." However, in two essays at least, there is too much of a willingness to accept that "interpellation" concerns the psyche, while Kafka's story concerns the body, a view that the present essay seeks to dispute. See Rutherford 2001 and Gailus 2001.
3. See Butler 1997.
4. Althusser writes that Marx's base and superstructure model remains metaphorical and descriptive and thus needs to be elaborated (2014, 239).
5. Fred Moten reminds us that "Althusser makes sure to let you know that interpellation is, in essence, more fearsome" than, to borrow one of Althusser's own examples, a mere knock on your door by a friend whom you immediately recognize (2017, 31). On the meaning of the term "*l'interpellation*," see Montag 2017.
6. Althusser refers to the "subject of imputation" as one of the consequences of "the whole paradox of psychology whose origin is manifestly political: the subject is the one who is subjected to an order, who is subjected to a master, and who is at the same time conceived of in psychology as being the origin of its action. This means that it is a subject of imputation, that is, that it is the one that has to justify its own acts, its own behavior, to a third party" (2016, 73-74)
7. According to the OED, A harrow is an agricultural tool consisting "of a heavy frame of timber or iron, set with iron teeth or tines, which is dragged over ploughed lands to break clods, pulverize and stir the soil, root up weeds, or cover in the seed."
8. See chapter 3, "The Problem of Attributes," in Macherey 2011.
9. A way out is not the same thing as freedom, as Kafka's "A Report to an Academy" suggests. See Kafka 1971b.
10. Both Banu Bargu and Stefano Pippa have recently written on the aleatory in the ISAs essay. See Bargu 2015 and chapter 3, "Contingency and Ideology" in Pippa 2019.

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Received: 27 October 2019  
Approved: 15 November 2019