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INTERPELLATION, POPULISM, AND PERVERSION: ALTHUSSER, LACLAU UND LACAN

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Introduction

From its inception right down to the present, Louis Althusser's concept of interpellation has had a major impact upon theories of the social constitution of human subjects, especially those which have drawn upon the work of Jacques Lacan. But in the course of this long history, the concept of interpellation has undergone an amazing political transformation. In Althusser's hands, interpellation works exclusively on the conservative side of the political agenda: producing subjects who fit the ruling ideological conception of the social order. By contrast, drawing more heavily upon the work of Lacan, later authors, such as Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek, have recognized that, in a generalized form, interpellation plays a more wide-ranging role in the social processes of constituting human subjects.[1] Laclau, for example, proposes that through a generalized form of interpellation, which consists of naming their demands, a populist leader transforms people into politically radical populist subjects who engage in a hegemonic struggle *against* mainstream ideology (whereas for Althusser, interpellation always and already works *in support of* ideology).

In this article I explore some difficulties for Laclau's theory: first, a difficulty in accounting for the variations in people's affective investment in what Laclau calls "the empty signifier" in terms of which a populist leader names the people's demands; second, a difficulty in saying how Thatcherite neo-populism relates to the classical populism of New Social Movements, on the one hand, and to the welfare state, on the other hand. I get around these difficulties by making two suggestions: (1) The name given by a populist leader to his sub-

[1] Althusser himself anticipates this connection with the work of Lacan, in his article "Freud and Lacan" (Althusser: 1971, 178–201)

jects should be considered as a gift of love in Lacan's sense, and (2) Laclau's category of institutional totalization should be refined to include both a perverse form of totalization (represented by the socialist welfare state) as well as a neo-populist hysterical form of totalization (represented by Thatcherism). I am thus able to establish a closer connection between Laclau's theory of totalization and the Lacanian typology of objects. The upshot of my suggestions is a generalized concept of interpellation that realizes the ur-Althusserian project of combining Marx and Freud – a project, which, I claim, continues to be of relevance today (Althusser, 1971: 177).

Althusser

In his famous ISA (Ideological State Apparatuses) essay (Althusser 1971) Althusser sets out to derive a general form for all the various and varied mechanisms by which ideology "transforms individuals into subjects." (Althusser, 1971: 152). His conclusion: in all its historically specific manifestations, ideology works its transformative effects by processes of what he calls "interpellation," namely hailing or addressing individuals by some variant of the policeman's call "Hey, you there!"

> Ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all) or transforms individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there!' (Althusser, 1971: 163).

How does Althusser justify the conclusion that all ideological mechanisms take this general interpellative form? Answer: By using particular instances of ideology – what he calls "ideologies in particular" – as a base from which to abstract a general form to which all ideological mechanisms conform. Which instances does Althusser select as a base from which to abstract the general form of ideology? Answer: He tells us that he will restrict consideration of ideology to instances of class societies and their "ruling" or "dominant" ideologies that circulate per medium of ISAs such as the school and the church (Althusser, 1971: 152).

But in the final section of the ISA essay Althusser focuses upon what at first sight seems to be a quite different instance of ideology: namely contemporary Christian Religious Ideology, which he lays out in the following terms: "God

addresses himself to you through my voice ... this is who you are ... this is your origin, you were created by God [in his image] for all eternity ... this is your place in the world ... this is what you must do ... by these means, if you observe the 'law of God," you will be saved ... and become part of the glorious body of Christ! Etc" (Althusser 1971, 165–166) Generalizing from this case, Althusser concludes that interpellation has a "doubly-specular structure", by which he means that it hails individuals "in the name of a Unique and Absolute Subject" – whether it is God, country, the President, Freedom, or whatever – who (a) functions as a mirror image in which individuals can "contemplate their own image," but who also (b) enters into a relation of "mutual recognition" with individuals, which, in turn. enables (c) "the subjects' recognition of each other, and finally the subject's recognition of himself" (Althusser, 1971: 168)

I now switch gears, and begin an exploration of some of the ways in which authors such as Butler, Copjec, Laclau, Rancière and Žižek have generalized Althusser's concept of interpellation. In particular, I am interested in the ways in which, by casting off its original meaning as a mechanism that, as *ideological* (*sic*) necessarily operates on the conservative side of the political ledger, the concept of interpellation becomes a tool for the radical side of the politics. I have space here to trace only one of the paths along which this political emancipation of the concept of interpellation has taken place, namely from Althusser to Laclau.

Laclau

Laclau adapts from Gramsci the concept of articulation as the construction of chains of equivalences between otherwise isolated and unfulfilled demands (Laclau, 2005: 73–74, 85). Articulation works, Laclau claims, by a generalized process of interpellation, in particular by issuing a general call to individuals in terms of a signifier that presumes to name their demands: "You want X?! If you want it then this will interest you!" This interpellation has the effect of drawing together the demands of select individuals, namely those who, as a result of the call, come to recognize their demands in terms of the common signifier (Laclau, 2005: 74). In providing a collective point of identification for what they demand, the common signifier also provides the individuals in question with a collective point of identification for who they are, thus paralleling the Althusserian process of interpellation both at the level of form and effects.

Laclau argues that these articulatory signifiers take on the characteristics of what he calls "empty signifiers." How does this come about? Laclau points out that a signifier under which different demands are collected together, must negotiate between two opposing tendencies. On the one hand, the various de-

mands that the signifier stitches together have different, perhaps even contradictory contents, which, in turn, means that it is emptied progressively of any coherent meaning as it accumulates ever more demands under its banner. On the other hand, as it accumulates more and more such demands, the signifier gains in authority – speaks for more and more people who identify themselves with its cause. In the extreme case of large scale populist movements, for which the signifier speaks for the people as a whole, it can be expected to be totally emptied of coherent content, but, in compensation as it were, attains maximum authority, in virtue of the magical trick of univocally representing the mutually contradictory demands of the people writ large.

So, for example, the pipe and ski hat that function as signifiers for the Zapatista movement began life standing for the Marxist revolutionary project of a small group of Mexican urban intellectuals, including the movement's leader, sub-commandante Marcos. But as the movement expanded, incorporating ever more demands under its banner – indigenous rural landowners, the urban poor, and so on – the signifiers were flooded by an excess of mutually contradictory meanings, to the point of being robbed of any coherence except for a generalized, inchoate opposition to the "established order" (an opposition that has continued to masquerade as a coherent political platform, rather than owning up to the patchwork ideological quilt that it is). In Laclau's terms, such signifiers are "empty signifiers," the emptiness of which reflects not so much a *lack* of meaning as an incoherent *excess* (Laclau, 2005: 98).

Within the overarching class of such articulatory practices, Laclau singles out a special sub-class that he calls "*populist* articulatory practices," which "divide society into two antagonistic camps:" first, a camp of the established order, and second, a populist camp – the "people's camp" – to which all the articulated demands belong. The established order, Laclau tells us, is itself an articulated set of demands that have managed to attain a certain institutional fixity as well as prominence, with the result that their ways of doing and thinking about things have attained the status of what Gramsci calls "common sense" (Laclau, 2005: 131–132).[2] The populist camp, by contrast, claims to make demands *for- and-as* the "people," but at the same time exists in what Laclau calls "an antagonistic relation" to the established order (Laclau, 2005: 74, 77, 81–83). Laclau refers to the collective identity that is formed by such populist articulatory practices as a "popular identity" (Laclau, 2005: 72, 74, 83).

What does Laclau mean by saying that there is an "antagonistic relation" between the establishment and the popular camp? He does *not* mean that the

[2] In general we must allow that in any social setting there may be several such pairs of camps.

establishment oppresses the people in any straightforward sense. Rather he means the tension between the two camps is more subtle, at an ideological level. To be specific, the demands that fall within the populist camp are "irrepresentable" in terms of the mainstream ideological categories that the established order deploys as a means of structuring the "common sense" of things (Laclau, 2005: 77, 84). To put it in Laclau's terms, populist articulated demands cannot be "absorbed … in a differential way" by the established order (Laclau, 2005: 73; see too Gramsci, 1997//1971: p. 59).

This is not necessarily a matter of the established order failing to recognize the articulated demands. Instead, it is a matter of it being unable to recognize any principle that might unify them (other than the fact of their oppositional status). It follows that populist articulatory practices provide resistance to the established order not merely in the straightforward sense of making demands that the establishment refuses to fulfill, but rather in the more subtle and radical sense of questioning the fundamental ideological categories in terms of which the establishment orders the realm of demands. The history of parliamentary democracy is replete with instances of such articulatory practices: splintered interest groups who, despite having little or nothing in common other than their oppositional status, form an alliance that masquerades under some commonplace but intrinsically meaningless label, like "the People's Party".

Even from this brief summary, we see that the key difference between Laclau and Althusser concerns the political status of "bad subjects," a difference that in turn reflects Laclau's debt to Gramsci. According to Althusser, with few exceptions, the constitution of subjects inevitably takes place within the mainstream – "ruling" – ideological horizon. The one out of ten "bad subjects" who opposes the established order and the ideological horizon that it sets in place, becomes mere grist to the mill of the RSA (Repressive State Apparatuses) and so are of no further political interest (Althusser, 1979: 163). For Laclau, by contrast – and here he follows Gramsci – it is exactly such "bad subjects" who are of political significance as potential populist subjects, who, in situating their demands outside the mainstream ideological horizon, provide the raw material for populist movements. By bringing the possibility of change to a social situation, such movements introduce a properly political dimension into the otherwise ideologically bounded routines of civil society.

A series of questions immediately arise that are crucial to thinking the relation between the mechanisms of subjection proposed by Althusser and Laclau: namely, who puts into circulation the names in terms of which populist articulatory practices unify demands, more specifically, how do the names come to not only gain acceptance but also to have constitutive effects – in any case, what is the source of their authority? Here Laclau is in accord with Judith Butler's criti-

cism of Althusser, namely that, by centralizing the case of Christian Religious Ideology, Althusser unintentionally and unfortunately "restrict[s] the notion of interpellation [and thus, by extension, the constitutive effects of naming] to the action of a voice … that recalls and reconsolidates the figure of the divine voice in its ability to bring about what it names" (Butler, 1997: 32).

Butler then offers an alternative less restrictive account. She suggests that "the act [of interpellation] works in part because of the citational dimension of the speech act, the historicity of convention that exceeds and enables the moment of its enunciation" (Butler, 1997: 33). So, for example, the policeman's shout "Hey you there!" works because it cites a conventional form of utterance that the police use in apprehending criminals, rather than because of the authority of the one who utters it. "As a result," she argues, "interpellation … has an origin that is as unclear as its end" (Butler, 1997: 34). In particular, it is invalid to equate the source of a name (the one who circulates it) with the authority who backs it up. On the contrary, rather than imposing his pre-existing authority upon the name, the one who circulates it – for example the policeman who shouts "Hey you there!" – may gain his authority through the act of circulation.

More specifically, we may say, the naming that constitutes the process of interpellation exists as a social practice, floating free of anyone's intention. Laclau makes a similar point, "the quilting function [which for Laclau coincides with the constitutive operation of naming] is never merely a verbal operation but is embedded within material practices which can [may] acquire institutional fixity" (Laclau, 2005: 106). Thus for both Butler and Laclau, any claim to a direct determinative connection between the process of interpellation and some sovereign big-Subject who calls the shots, misrepresents the diffuse nature of the process of interpellation. Indeed, rather than an originating cause, the big-Subject emerges as an ideological device that distracts subjects from the true nature of the call.

To leave it at that, however, is to say too little. In particular it leaves unanswered the question of how the names that are diffused by populist articulatory practices not only gain acceptance but also come to have constitutive effects. Laclau suggests that in the context of explaining the constitutive effects of populist articulatory practices, we should shift focus from the Althusserian big-Subject to the populist leader. But who is this leader, and how does he come to have an impact upon the subjectivity of his people? Laclau suggests that we take a purely "structuralist" approach to defining the function of leader. In particular, he asks "whether there is something in the equivalential bond which already pre-announces key aspects of the leader's function" (Laclau, 2005: 99). Specifically, Laclau suggests reducing "key aspects" of "leadership" to a purely

discursive function, immanent to rather than an independent external cause of the process of interpellation. In particular, he points out that demands are "always addressed to someone," who is a more or less fictional addressee whose identity is an artifact of the signifier that names the demand. By extension, demands that are articulated under a common signifier will be addressed to a singular individual, who, Laclau claims, will "almost imperceptibly" slide over into the figure of "the leader" (Laclau, 2005: 100).

But this account of the discursive construction of the leader seems mistaken on two fronts: It flirts dangerously with the suggestion that we understand Hitler's role in the Nazi party as a sort of discursively pumped up figure head, rather than as an agent who bears responsibility for the party's actions. But it also goes astray by placing the function of the leader on the side of the enunciated (*énoncé*). I suggest that, on the contrary, the function of leader is on the side of the enunciator (*énonciation*) – the one who speaks/gives/circulates the name. For example, consider the famous "Uncle Sam needs you!" poster. In this case, the function of leader does not rest with the pictured "Uncle Sam," but rather with the one who recruits on his behalf, albeit from an anonymous position that is erased behind the picture.[3] (In a similar way, in Althusser's little story of the "Hey, you there" the interpellator is not the law itself but the one who speaks on its behalf).

Having made these corrections, let us look at Laclau's account of how the name that a populist leader gives to his subjects sticks to them to the point of having constitutive effects. Laclau's point, with which I agree, is that the constitutive effects of the name result not merely from embedding it within stable significatory practices. The name must also be the site of what Laclau calls a "radical investment" of affect, a "passionate attachment" through which people produce the ersatz pleasures that compensate them for their failure to satisfy their demands (Laclau, 2005: 110, 117). As a result, Laclau claims, such names "will have an irresistible attraction over any demand which is lived as unfulfilled" (Laclau, 2005, 108). But where does this positive "attractive" affect come from, and how does it get pasted onto the name, let alone have constitutive effects?

Following Laclau, but also taking a leaf from Copjec's book, I suggest that we explain the source of a name's affect by invoking a concept that Freud puts forward in his *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, namely that the members of a group are unified by their common love of the leader. But who or what

[3] It would be a mistake to separate totally these two functions, as the famous phrase from the Kennedy era indicates|: "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country."

is "the leader," and what is the nature of the love that people hold for him? As Freud points out, the position of leader does not have to be filled by a real live person. On the contrary, especially in more highly organized groups, it may be filled by a "substitute" that is both fictional and more abstract – a "group ideal" or "common tendency, a wish in which a number of people can have a share," and which is "more or less completely embodied in the figure of what we may call a secondary leader" (Laclau, 2005: 60, cited from Freud, Chapter 6 of *Group Psychology*).

It follows that the name that the leader or "group ideal" confers upon the demands of his subjects, and through which he enlists their services, is a gift by the beloved to those who love him. This, in turn, it seems, allows a simple explanation of the affect that adheres to the name: as merely a metonymic overflow from the affect that adheres to the leader as the beloved. But unfortunately, as we will see shortly, this tempting explanation does not fit the facts. So here we must step back for a moment in order to understand better the relation between the beloved populist leader and his subjects.

The first point to make is that identification with the beloved is *not* with how he looks from our point of view, but rather with the point of view from which he looks at us. Specifically, to fall in love with someone is to come to see oneself through their eyes, rather than seeing oneself in them – which is why it is said that when we are truly in "love" we transcend the mere appearances that may have attracted us to the beloved in the first place; and instead, it becomes the beloved's opinion of us that matters. If that is right then we see immediately that Althusser's position must be radically revised. In particular, *contra* Althusser, it follows that the people's relation to a populist leader is not specular in nature, that is, not simply of a matter of the people making themselves in his image, but rather of adopting his point of view, including his point of view of the people.

Freud, of course, recognized this long ago, in the context of pointing out that the permissible, indeed mandatory form of identification for rank and file soldiers with their Commander-in Chief is that they love him in the sense of adopting his *perspective*, including (paradoxically) his view that the rank and file soldiers are inferior to their officers. Indeed, to identify with the Commander-in Chief in any more direct way, Freud argues, in particular to *imitate* the leader, would be seen as absurd, even subversive. In short, to make the point in Freudian terms: as in the case of a subject's identification with a hypnotist, soldiers are encouraged to identify with the Commander-in Chief as an *ego-ideal* rather than an *ideal-ego*; that is, rather than imitating him, they are encouraged to take on board his point of view, including the names he give them (Freud, SE XVIII: 114, 134; Laclau, 2005: 59. Note that the love at issue here may be a

matter of a devotion to the Army as an institution or abstract ideal, rather than to a particular Commander-in-Chief.)

The identification in question is inculcated through rituals of humiliation with which Hollywood has made us so familiar: rapid-fire and repetitive question-and-answer sessions through which the tough drill sergeant teaches recruits to answer to derogatory names: "Who are you, you disgusting little men?" We're disgusting little men, SIR!" The names in question, such as "grunts", eventually become terms of self-appellation/second-nature for the recruits, indeed may become sources of pride, a fact that is hard to explain even along Pavlovian lines unless one recognizes that by calling themselves such names, common soldiers identify not with the terms in which they are named, but rather with their superior officers, specifically with the institutional perspective that calls the common soldier such insulting names. In short, identification is with the position of enunciation (ego-ideal) rather than with the enunciating terms (ideal-ego).

In a similar way, Copjec argues, the success of Reagan as a leader depended upon the people identifying with him as ego-ideal, in the sense of looking at themselves from the perspective from which he viewed them (and liking what they saw) rather than taking him as an ideal-ego, worthy of imitation. That is why, as Copjec points out, newspaper exposés of Reagan's lack of proper leadership qualities had little if any negative impact upon his popularity (Copjec, 1995: 143; Laclau, 2005: 56–60)

So, it seems, Freud provides us with a simple and powerful explanation for the efficacy of interpellation within a populist setting: populist groups are consolidated by a people loving their leader, who thereby takes on the role of ego-ideal, which, in turn, means that the people identify with the point of view from which the leader sees them, and this, in turn, means identifying with the name that he gives them. This explanation additionally seems to resolve the issue of affective investment in the name given by the leader: such investment, it seems, arises as a sort of secondary spin-off from the primary relation of love for the leader.

But here we strike a difficulty. As Copjec points out:

> If you know anything about love, then you perforce know something about Lacan; you know what he means when he says that love is giving what you do not have. He means that what one loves in another is something more than the other, some unnameable thing that exceeds any of the other manifestations, anything he has to give. We accept someone's gifts and ministrations because we love him; we do not love him because he gives us these gifts. And since it is that something beyond the gift that we

> love and not the gifts themselves, it is possible to dislike the gifts, to find fault with all the other's manifestations, and still love the other – as the behavior of the hysteric makes clear. The unnamable excess, the exorbitant thing that is loved, is what Lacan calls the *objet a*...(Copjec, 1997: 143)

It follows that one may not love the name that one is given by the beloved, indeed, one may dislike it, think it silly, even refuse to identify with it, in the same way that in their heart of hearts few will thinks of themselves as a "darling," let alone a "snookums" But even so one accepts the name that the beloved gives, as one does all the other more or less silly gifts that one receives as tokens of love – in Gramsci's terms, one *consents* to the name (with more or less good grace) *even though one does not identify with it*. Copjec explains this consent in the following terms: "It is on the ... level ... of demand, that love is situated. Whether one give a child whose cry expresses a demand for love, a blanket, or food, or even a scolding, matters little. The particularity of the object is here annulled; almost any will satisfy – as long as it comes from the one [the beloved] to whom the demand is addressed" (Copjec, 1997: 148).

Žižek makes a similar point. In his analysis of the Kubrik movie *Full Metal Jacket*, he argues that, contrary to what one might expect, the soldier who follows the official rules to the letter – "over conforms," as Žižek puts it – turns out to be the "bad soldier". And conversely, in Robert Altman's television series *Mash*, the "good soldiers" are Hawkeye and his buddies, who, thanks to their cynicism, and despite the overbearing presence of the military disciplinary machine, manage to go about their business while maintaining at least a minimum of distance from the identity in terms of which the machine interpellates them (Žižek, 1997: 20–21). Thus Freud's picture of the army tells only half of the story: it is true that the soldier is encouraged to love the army and identify with the army point of view, but, in reality, if army life is going to work then the identification in question cannot be whole hearted. And similarly, one can argue, the integration of populist subjects is in no way compromised, on the contrary will be enhanced, by their taking a cynical distance from the names in terms of which they are interpellated, even as, at a more general level, they consent to the names in question.

The general conclusion, then, is that the production of populist subjects through populist articulatory practices cannot be reduced to acquiring a "popular identity" of some sort. In particular, Althusser is wrong to claim that such subjects identify with the big-Subject as ideal-ego. But so too *Laclau and Freud are wrong to claim that subjects identify with the leader as ego-ideal, and thus with the name that the leader gives them*. On the contrary, we have seen, if the populist thing is going to work then, rather than unreservedly identifying with such

names, subjects must maintain a certain distance from them. In any case, Laclau is wrong to claim that subjects have a "passionate attachment" to such names. On the contrary, as my examples from Copjec and Žižek suggest, it seems that even "good" populist subjects may scorn the names under which their demands are articulated.

A Little bit of Lacan

Let me now offer an alternative explanation for how the names that populist leaders give their people stick. I retain the Freudian idea that the names in question occupy the position of gifts from the beloved. I also retain Laclau's idea that populist articulatory practices play a constitutive role in the production of populist subjects. But, following Lacan, I complicate the relation between the process of becoming a subject and acquiring an identity.

Lacan proposes that the traumatic missed encounters that inevitably spoil relations with the beloved prompt responses in the register of demand, which, in turn, when unrequited, raise questions for the lover: "*Che vuoi*?" – "What does he [the beloved Other] want of me [that he fails me in this cruel way]?" (Lacan, 1977a: 312). This, in turn, occasions a split (*Spaltung*) within the ego between, on the one hand, an ego-ideal – the position from which the subject sees himself as the other sees him (and judges him to be lacking) – and, on the other hand, an ideal-ego – the position in which the subjects wants to be seen by the other (Lacan, 1977b: 268). At the site of this split, an unbridgeable abyss opens up between the two ego-functions. Why? Because when the subject looks at himself from the position of the other, he never looks from the place where he is; or, to put it another way, when he looks at himself it is never (as) himself that he sees: "When in love, I solicit a look, what is profoundly unsatisfying and always missing is that – *You never look at me from the place from which I see you*" (Lacan, 1977b: 103). In other words, the two points of identification for the subject – the ego-ideal and the ideal-ego – are in irresolvable tension – each undercutting and in that sense limiting the other.

How does the subject cope with this tension? Answer: the subject plays games, which, by "going some way to satisfying the pleasure principle," function as distractions from "what the other's absence has created on the frontier of his domain … namely a ditch, around which one can only play at jumping." Such games, Lacan continues, follow the logic of the *Fort-Da* game, played by Freud's grandson: throwing away and retrieving an object, which, although not intrinsically valuable, takes on value as a central prop in the game of *Fort* and *Da*. This game, Lacan tells us, is "accompanied by one of the first oppositions

to appear," namely the appearance and vanishing of an object. Lacan gives the name "*objet a*" to this object/play-thing (Lacan, 1977b: 62)

Lacan tells us that one form in which the *objet a* appears is as a gift from the beloved – the equivocal object that passes from the beloved to the lover in return for, and as an answer to the latter's demand. This object is equivocal because, while important as a token of love, it always falls short of the love that it expresses: "*I give myself to you … but this gift of my person* – as they say – *Oh mystery! is changed inexplicably into a gift of shit*" (Lacan, 1977b: 268).

Since, I have argued, the name given by the populist leader to devoted subjects is a gift from the beloved, we may suppose that it too constitutes an *objet a*, and thus, along the lines sketched above, occasions a splitting within the ego.[4] In conformity with the logic of the *Fort*-Da game, subjects will hold together this split by playing with the name – making it appear and disappear. In concrete terms, what form might this game take? Answer: subjects switch between, on the one hand, owning up to the name, and, on the other hand, stepping back in order to inspect the place that it nominates for them. Here, then, I suggest, we see the processes by which populist subjects are constituted – not by providing them with an identity, or even a composite of several conflicting identities, but rather by *introducing subjectivity as a sort of reflex function that emerges from the process of individuals holding together egos irremediably fragmented by the leader's interpellating them in the course of naming their demands*. Correspondingly, of course, the name in question is cathected – charged with affect – which may vary dramatically in its modality from subject to subject – for some, manifesting as a mutilated part, for others manifesting as a long lost object joyfully refound: "*I love you, but, because inexplicably I love in you something more than you – the* objet petit a *– I mutilate you*" (Lacan, 1977b: 268).

In sum, more than a discursive artifact of articulatory practices, the beloved populist leader plays a key causal role in the interpellation and constitution of populist subjects. To be specific, as a gift of the beloved, the name that he gives subjects in the process of interpellating them, takes on the function of an *objet a*, which, in turn, by occasioning a splitting of egos, introduces those who love him to the category of the subject. *Contra* Laclau, however, the constitutive processes that are set in motion thereby are not a matter of creating "populist identities," let alone (as Althusser claims) an identity that involves a specular

[4] Even if we accept that one of the forms in which the *objet a* may appear is as a gift of the beloved, there remains the converse question of whether all (or even nine-of-ten) of subjects will take the names given to them by a beloved leader as an *objet a*. As a means of bridging the gap between the social and the individual, I am making a speculative gamble on an affirmative answer to this question.

relation with the leader. Instead, taking up the burdens of subjectivity is a matter of coping with the ego fragmentation resulting from the failure of the act of interpellation to impose a determinate identity, a failure which, in turn, arises from the interpellation creating an unresolvable tension between mutually destructive identifications with ego-ideal and ideal-ego.

Let me now summarize the difference between my account and Laclau's account of the nature and origin of what Laclau calls "the radical affective investment" in the name through which a populist leader interpellates his subjects. I reject Laclau's idea that the articulatory name gains consent through a positive affective charge or, as Laclau puts it, an 'irresistible attraction" that, in turn, provides the driving force for unifying the people. Instead, I have proposed that such names are characterized by a highly variable – sometimes positive, sometimes negative – affective charge. In addition I argued that, when it comes to the relation between a name's articulatory effects and its affective charge, Laclau puts the cart before the horse: the affect attached to the name does *not* seal the deal in relation to the formation of populist subjectivities. Rather the affect emerges as a spin-off from the constitutive processes in which the name participates. Indeed in retrospect we see that, although Laclau gets it right when he claims that the name functions as *objet a* (Laclau, 2005: 115–117) he has mistaken the sense in which Lacan says that the *objet a* is a "love object." To be specific, the subject does not love the *objet a* in the shallow sense of treating it as idealized thing that he wants to posses; rather the *objet a*'s significance as a love object lies in its function as, like a first-born's lock of hair, a token from the beloved – a function that transcends any desirable characteristics that it may have intrinsically. In the next section, I extend my critical Freudian engagement with Laclau's Althusserian scheme for populist reason.

The Enemy, the Establishment, and the Excluded

According to Laclau, any populist articulatory practices postulate what he calls "an enemy" that functions as an external projection of the failure of the articulated demands to be satisfied. Specifically, an "enemy," whether real or imagined, is projected as an external stumbling block – an obstacle – to the satisfaction of the relevant demands (Laclau, 2005: 86). The key question upon which I shall focus here is the location of the "enemy" in relation to the establishment. In answering this question I shall adopt Laclau's simplifying assumption that the space of demands is polarized in the sense that all demands within it are *either* "absorbed" (that is, appropriated) by the establishment *or* articulated together with other demands that fall outside what the established

order is able to absorb.[5] What, then, are the possible relations between enemy and establishment?

First case: the enemy coincides with the establishment; in other words, the satisfaction of the articulated demands is blocked by the established order that occupies the seat of power. This corresponds to the classic case of populism: an antagonistic relation between "the people" and the establishment. Second case: regimes, such as Thatcherism and Reaganism. These share many of the features of classic populism: a bloc of articulated demands that speak *for-and-as* the people who are unified against a common enemy. But, by contrast with the classic populist scenario, such regimes manage the clever political trick of retaining a veneer of populism – speaking *for-and-as* the "common man." – while retaining a firm grip on the reins of power (a trick at which parties on the political right have proved far more adept than parties of the left).

In order to perform this trick, the articulatory practices that totalize the regimes must shift the location of the enemy who blocks the people from fulfilling their demands. To be specific, by contrast with classic populism, the enemy cannot be in the seat of power since it is occupied already by the articulatory practices. But equally, since the enemy blocks all articulated demands, the demands that it makes cannot belong to the set of articulated demands. It follows that there is *no* place left for the enemy *within* the polarized space of demands, which, in turn, means that the enemy is *excluded* from the social order altogether. In concrete terms, then, in so far as the enemy remains a presence, it exists as a debilitating scum or virus that inhabits the body of society without belonging to it.[6] In Thatcher's case, of course, that enemy is the dole-cheat; in Hitler's case, the Jew; in America today, the illegal immigrant from South of the border – social parasites, who function as the evasive but always recurring cause of political problems that seem too difficult to solve.

But here we strike a difficulty. It is commonplace to take Thatcherism and Reaganism as paradigms of populist regimes. Laclau denies this. Why? Because, he tells us, although it is true that Thatcherism, like populism, divides society in two – the "haves" and the "have-nots" – it does so in the context of *excluding*

[5] Note that by "absorption" here I do not mean "fulfillment," but rather something weaker that involves taking on board the demand as legitimate, and thus, in a weak sense promising to do something about it. Laclau makes this same simplifying assumption in the opening chapters of *Populist Reason*, but then dispenses with it later, when he introduces what he calls "heterogeneous demands" and "floating signifiers" (Laclau, 2005: 123–1244, 131, 148.)

[6] In drawing this conclusion, I am adopting Laclau's procedure of taking demand as the basic unit of social analysis, which, in turn, means that each and every social entity, friend or foe, is defined in terms of the demands that it makes – Laclau, 2005: 72–73.

the latter rather than finding them a camp of their own *within* the social body. In other words, under Thatcher, British society exists as a combination of (a) a totalized social body – the "people" – that coincides with the proper or "legitimate" segment of the *populus* – what Reagan, Nixon and other conservatives have called "the silent majority" – together with (b) an improper residue of the *populus* that falls outside the limits of *any* camp – the "real enemy of the people," *qua* the enemy of law and order. (Here Marx's *lumpenproletariat* makes a strange reappearance, entering from the right rather than the left wing of the political stage.) Thus, rather than a classic populist demographic of two rival camps, locked in a struggle for hegemony, Thatcherism is characterized by a pathological dualism, consisting of a single camp – the "silent majority" in bed with the establishment that represents them – together with an ill-defined bunch of camp followers. As such, Thatcherism falls under the category of what Laclau calls "institutional totalization" in which the "people" presents itself as exhaustive of the *populus* or at least as its proper part (Laclau, 2005: 81). Furthermore, and here Laclau's scheme seems at its strongest, there seems to be an important political point to distinguishing Thatcherism from classic populism, namely that under Thatcher the disempowered are doubly disenfranchised: not only shut out of the seat of power, but also, unlike the people under classic populism, excluded in the sense of not even having a camp of their own within the social order.

But even if we accept Laclau's argument here, his theory faces further difficulties. Not only does he fly in the face of the commonplace that Thatcherism is "populist," but also, in a paradoxical reversal that is worthy of Žižek, he asserts that Thatcher's *bête noir*, the British welfare state (the "Nanny state") shares the same totalizing structure as its nemesis Thatcherism (Laclau, 2005: 78–79). What are we to make of this paradoxical conclusion that runs together Thatcherism and the Nanny welfare state? It is tempting to take it seriously – after all there is a delicious irony, perhaps even a subtle political point to make by revealing that such diametrically opposed political regimes share the same deep structure. I suggest a different response, namely that Laclau's "revelation" is a *reductio ad absurdum* of his position, and thus a reason for rethinking his whole categorical scheme. In particular, I suggest that there is an alternative mode of institutional totalization that Laclau's scheme overlooks: namely a *perverse* mode of totalization, which makes the gesture of extending the category of the "people" to include those who have been excluded, *even while continuing to recognize the fact of their exclusion*.

Of course, as Laclau points out, in any instance of the formation of a people, the totalizing gesture by which a people is constituted involves some exclusion. Why? Here Laclau introduces a philosophical argument. To be specific, he argues that because of the differential (that is, relational) nature of any posi-

tive entity, it must have an "outside" in relation to which it is constituted. But, he continues, "a true outside is not [and cannot be] simply one more, neutral element but [instead must be] an *excluded* one, something that the totality expels from itself in order to constitute itself" (Laclau, 2005: 70). From which it follows that a people exists only if, in order to allow it to achieve closure, some part of it is excluded. But even if we agree with Laclau's argument here, we must allow that it is possible for a people to make a *gesture* towards being inclusive, even intend to complete the gesture, *provided that they disavow the possibility of so doing*.

How are we to understand the term "disavowal" here? Freud explicates this term (in German "*Verleugnung*") as a description of the splitting of the ego that accompanies the sexual activities of the pervert, who, instead of resorting to repression and symptom formation as a means of continuing his forbidden sexual activities, treats the domain of illicit activities as if they were subject to the law *even while continuing to acknowledge their illicit nature* – for example, the highly ritualized practices of the sado-masochist, which, even as they break the law, take a strict disciplinary, we may even say legalistic form (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1973: 118–120). And isn't such disavowal exactly what we find in the cognitive structures of the welfare state in its socialist form: an unwillingness to leave anyone out of the social contract – in particular, a commitment to cross any line in order to include the excluded – even as it is acknowledged reluctantly that the line has been, indeed must be drawn somewhere? (Note that the point of using the term "perverse" here is not to accuse citizens of the welfare state of perversion in any clinical sense, but rather to point to a similarity in structure between their disavowals and the disavowal that Freud takes to be characteristic of perversion in its clinical manifestation.)

In this light we need to expand Laclau's scheme of possibilities for the process of social totalization through which a people is formed. Instead of Laclau's simply binary scheme of institutional versus populist forms of totalization, which runs together Thatcherism and the welfare state (Laclau, 2005: 81) I suggest subdividing Laclau's category of institutional totalization into two subcategories, thus producing a ternary scheme. To be specific, I suggest that under the heading of institutional types of totalization we locate two sub-types: (a) a perverse, inclusive sub-type, which I take to be characteristic of the welfare state in its *socialist* form; (b) a hysterical, exclusive sub-type that includes not only Thatcherism but also the degenerate, bellicose version of the welfare state, which as Laclau puts it, introduces into its discourse enemies of "private entrepreneurial greed, entrenched interests, and so on" that function not as mere rival points of view but rather as improper parts – in Rancière's terms, as "parts that have no part" (Rancière, 1999: 9–19).

In general terms, I characterize the latter hysterical sub-type as a way of forming a people by conjuring up an enemy that people actively exclude rather than dispute. And because the enemy is excluded, it does not get to form a camp in its own right. As such, although the social is indeed divided, it is not divided against itself, but instead is divided into a proper part and a residue that Lacan calls a *caput mortuum* (Laclau, 2005: 140) – a residue that, we may say, is left over when the purified fraction of the people has been distilled from the mother liquor.[7]

I call this sub-type of institutional totalization "hysterical", firstly because by contrast with the perverse form of totalization, there is an unequivocally excluded part of the population, which, in Žižek's terminology, we may think of as "the social symptom;" secondly because, as in clinical hysteria, subjects acknowledge the symptom, indeed make it a center of attention, but without any sustained attempts to rationalize or take responsibility for it. As such, the symptom becomes the site of mystery: rather than solving it, subjects defensively (via a reaction formation) shift responsibility for it elsewhere (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1973: 376–322, 194–195. Note that I have in mind here conversion hysteria rather than anxiety hysteria and the related phenomenon of phobia).

For example, Thatcherism conjures up the dole-cheat and other social parasites, who, although excluded, and thus without an official base-camp let alone a share in institutional power, nevertheless, operating from the fringes of society (so the story goes) manage to provide a continuing and effective obstacle to the realization of Thatcher's neo-liberal utopia. Because of their exclusion (an exclusion precipitated by a refusal to negotiate with them) the excluded fraction remains a mystery. To be specific, it is said to be unclear what the enemy wants (even when they say what it is in so many words). As such, the people direct towards the enemy what Lacan calls the "*Che vuoi*?" ("What do you want?"). The enemy that is conjured up by this hysterical vision, whether fictional or not, is only a pseudo-enemy, however, in the sense that, although it figures as an obstacle to the people's demands, it does not occupy the seat of power; indeed, as I pointed out, in such cases the enemy cannot occupy the seat of power, since it is occupied already by the people themselves.[8] We may think of this hysterical form of institutional totalization as "neo-populist" in

[7] I am here intentionally mixing metaphors derived from chemical accounts of the process of precipitation with metaphors derived from chemical accounts of the process of distillation, in order to signal that, from a structural point of view, my distinction between an inferior "residue" and a superior "proper part" may also be read in reverse, in recognition of the fact that the symptom where the subject's principal identity lies hidden.

[8] Ironically, a Foucaultian conception of power enables this hysterical vision, by relocating power as immanent to the micro-practices of those who have been excluded.

the sense that although, like Laclau's populism, it maintains an aggressive discourse of social division, the division in question does not divide society into two antagonistic camps in the strict sense imagined by Laclau.

Finally, there is the category of what Laclau himself calls "populist totalization," namely classic cases of "populism" that we find in New Social Movements, for which the establishment occupies the seat of power and the people convene a rival camp that opposes the establishment. Usually in such cases the established camp will do double duty as the enemy as well – the eponymous "enemy of the people" – in which case it is clear that, by contrast with cases of neo-populism such as Thatcherism, there is no need for the enemy to be excluded. This, in turn, means that attention need not be fixed upon the excluded. Instead people's attention turns to strategies for fighting the establishment, in particular for absorbing it or, in extreme cases, relegating it to the field of the socially excluded. So, for example, a populist movement will pour energy into the dual project of fighting the establishment and making alliances (articulating). But, by the same token, it will finesse the issue of the exclusions that define its own borders – for example, the black civil rights movement, using a mixture of studied avoidance and pseudo rationalizations, finesses the issue of its own anti-semitism.

Such classic cases of populism, I argue, display structural features of obsessional neurosis. How? Because the symptom, *qua* the socially excluded, drops from people's attention in a similar way that, by rationalizing/normalizing it, the clinical obsessive shifts attention away from the symptom. In particular, as in the case of clinical obsession, the reaction by a classic populist movement to its own exclusions is *ambivalent* (in Freud's sense): that is, on the one hand, the movement more or less covertly flees from the excluded; on the other hand, it conceals its flight under a smoke screen of rationalizations, including its dedication to the struggle with the establishment. As Freud puts it: "under the guise of obsessional acts, the … suppressed approaches ever more closely to satisfaction" (from chapter V of "Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety" – Freud, SE XVI).

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It is time to bring together my claims comments about populism. I have distinguished three ways of totalizing social systems through processes of articulation: (1) a hysterical neo-populist articulatory practice, for which the enemy coincides with the excluded in the form of a persistent virus or scum (Marx's *lumpenproletariat*, Fanons' "dispossessed" or "wreteched of the earth"); (2) an obsessive, classic populist articulatory practices, for which the established or-

der takes on the lineaments of the people's enemy, albeit not an enemy who is excluded;[9] (3) a perverse type of institutional totalization, ignored by Laclau, that we find in socialist versions of the welfare state, which, in legitimating the enemy, pushes it into a niche within the established order.

Establishment
*
Obsessive * * *pervert*
* leader *
Enemy * * * * * * * Excluded
hysteric

My scheme here emphasizes structural parallels between (hysterical) Thatcherite neo-populism and the (obsessive) classic populism of New Social Movements, thus (contra Laclau) allowing us to conceive of them as variations within a single overarching category of populism. But my scheme also emphasizes the structural differences between Thatcherism and the (perverse) socialist welfare state, thus countering Laclau's paradoxical conclusion that Thatcherism and the welfare state share the same deep structure. In short, my scheme circumvents the two objections to Laclau's theory that (a) it locates Thatcherism outside the category of populism, but then (b) adds insult to injury by situating Thatcherism within the same category of institutional totalization as its nemesis, the socialist welfare state.

Let me end my account of Laclau's theory of populist reason on a speculative note. In the scheme for objects that he develops in Seminar XX, *Encore* (1998) Lacan suggests that there exist three types of objects: (1) the phallic signifier (incarnated in the master signifier), (2) the *objet a* that is associated with the always and already returning repressed (the Freudian symptom), and (3) the signifier of lack in the Other, the most obscure of the three because it hides behind/is easily mistaken for one or other of the other two. Laclau, we have seen, identifies what he calls "empty signifier" with one and only one of these three types of objects, namely the *objet a* (Laclau, 2005: 115–116). (Although, it must be added, on occasions Laclau's description of "empty signifiers" seems to lapse into talk about signifiers of lack in the other – Laclau, 2005: 105 – and on yet other occasions it seems to lapse into talk about master signifiers –

[9] Here we see an instance of Foucault's claim in his 1976 lectures at the *Collège de France*, that in the post-classical period the arts of war have provided a constitutive "lived" metaphor through which modern political struggle is experienced. Note that the two alternatives that I mention here cannot be distinguished as clearly as my rhetoric suggests. As Gramsci himself emphasizes, hegemony is always and already a site of on-going struggle.

Laclau, 2005: 96. Thus one might with fairness make the added criticism that, when talking about "empty signifiers," Laclau seems to run all three of the Lacanian objects together under the label of "*objet a*." On this point see too the articles by Šumič and by Glynos and Stavrakakis in Critchley and Marchart, 2004: 208, 317.)

I suggest, *contra* Laclau, that the category of empty signifiers should be broadened to include all three sorts of Lacanian objects. If we do this, I claim, we develop a neat correspondence between the three modes of totalization that I introduced in the previous section and the three types of Lacanian objects. In particular, it turns out that the political distinctions between the three modes of totalization coincide not only with the psychic distinctions between the three fundamental Freudian categories of perversion, hysteria and obsession, but also with the distinction between the three Lacanian objects. All of which adds support to Laclau's fundamental thesis with which I am agreement that, in theorizing populist reason and the constitutive impact of naming within a regime of articulation: "we are dealing not with casual or external homologies [between the social and the psychic] but with the same discovery taking place from two different angles – psychoanalysis and politics – of something that concerns the very structure of objectivity" (Laclau, 2005, 115). But that is an argument for another occasion.

Conclusion

Finally let me return to the question from which I started, namely the continuing theoretical significance of an Althusserian concept of interpellation. In the work of post-Althusserians, such as Laclau, interpellation is no longer taken to have a specular structure, nor is it restricted to the conservative political function of a support mechanism for the ruling ideology. On the contrary, in the form of a generalized process of naming, it has acquired a radical political function as a mechanism for the constitution of populist subjects by collecting together their demands under a common signifier. The emptiness *qua* lack of specificity of the signifier that discharges this constitutive function has the agreeable consequence that, unlike processes of socialization, interpellation opens its arms to all and sundry, thus displaying a *democratic* nature that makes it of special relevance for a radical politics.

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