

Althusser and Feminism: Towards a Non-Essentialist Theory of Patriarchy

PhD Thesis

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Abstract

My thesis attempts to construct an original non-essentialist theory of gender and the social reproduction of patriarchy by examining Louis Althusser's theory of interpellation and applying it to feminism. My aim is to provide the best possible account of Althusser for feminist purposes. With the translation and publication into English of formerly unpublished manuscripts, those interested in Althusser's thought have been given an opportunity to use his ideas in the context of social critique outside of the rigid Marxist problematic of which they originate. Attention is subsequently drawn to the thought of Judith Butler, who like Althusser sought to develop a non-essentialist theory of the subject. I examine Butler's specific interpretation of Althusser in the development in her own theory of gender as performative, arguing that her understanding of Althusser does not emphasise the non-essentialist tenets of his ideas. By extension Butler can be read to commit the very essentialism she sought to distance herself, where Althusser does not. In order to illustrate my argument that Althusser achieves a non-essentialist theory of gendered subjectivity, I examine the memoirs of the 19th Century French hermaphrodite Herculine Barbin from both an Althusserian and Butlerian perspective. Herculine's unique position in a world which rigidly defines us according to a sexed binary provides us with an interesting case study by which to examine how sex is constructed and whether, and to what extent, that binary can be contested.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Introduction

In my thesis I have sought to construct the strongest possible account of a non-essentialist theory of gender and the social reproduction of patriarchy by using the ideas and concepts developed by Louis Althusser. I argue that such an account could have been developed as early as 1975, when certain ideas of Althusser's were already accessible to an English-speaking audience but, as I explain in this thesis, previous attempts to develop such an account have fallen short. What is certainly the case is that recent translations and publications of previously unpublished materials support the account of Althusser developed in this thesis. Althusser focused on developing a non-essentialist theory of subjectivity that was concerned with the reproduction of capitalism. For the most part, Althusser focused on subjectivity in the context of economic activity and relations, drawing attention to the social construction of beings who accommodate and perpetuate specific economic praxes. Gender and patriarchy are certainly not at the forefront of Althusser's thought, but his published oeuvre demonstrates that he did share in these concerns and, moreover, provided the means of theorising them.

For the purposes of my thesis, I make a distinction between three different Althusser: the first is the historical Althusser who emerges from the totality of his oeuvre. The second is the Anglophone Althusser developed out a partial engagement of his works. The final Althusser is my own; an Althusser produced out a critical engagement with his oeuvre considering recent publications and translations, whilst also resulting from a critical engagement with the Anglophone tradition's portrayal of Althusser. By using recent publications and translations, my thesis reconstructs Althusser for the purposes of feminist analysis, and the development of a new non-essentialist critique of gender and patriarchal society. It is for this reason that my thesis is an engagement with Judith Butler. Butler's specific interpretation of Althusser has been the best attempt so far to engage with his ideas in the pursuit of a non-essentialist theory of gender construct a non-essentialist theory of gender. At the same time I believe Butler's understanding of Althusser, as sophisticated as is it, does not fully account for that which made Althusser non-essentialist. In so doing, Butler can be seen to repeat the very essentialism she sought to distance her own contribution to feminism.

The fundamental non-essentialist tenets of Althusser's thought that are missing from Butler's account are: the structural relations constitutive of subjectivity; the denial of any temporal distinction between the subject and those constitutive relations; and the specific dynamics in the social formation (society) within which those constitutive relations exist. Central to Althusser's non-essentialism is, firstly, the belief that our sense of self is entirely the effect of particular relations between the subject formed and certain authoritative figures. This is a constitutive relation insofar as the subject formed is entirely the effect of the authoritative figure whose authority names the subject. Changes in those relations will therefore result in changes in the subject formed. Butler, in short, never appreciates the role played by an external figure in the forming of subjectivity.

Secondly, Althusser denies any temporal distinction between the authoritative figure and the subject formed. The subject does not exist in a kind of social vacuum but acts entirely within the parameters of what is made possible by those constitutive relations. Butler, however, alludes to a temporal distinction as she attempts to account for gender subversion, thereby suggesting that the subject is the original source and initiator of their actions. Finally, Althusser never loses sight of the greater social formation in which the subject exists. The subject always contributes to the social formation, typically in a reproductive sense, but on other occasions the subject's actions threaten to change the social formation. This is clear when we consider individuals or collectives whose actions threaten to change contemporary socio-political relations, as with the suffragettes who contested early 20th century patriarchal society, or the development of the trade union movements whose economic demands and protests were antithetical to capitalist accumulation of wealth. For Althusser, the subject's actions originate from constitutive relations rather than from the subject themselves, he emphasises the dynamics between those constitutive relations and the social formation. The subject is an effect of those relations, rather than the other way around. Butler never examines the wider social formation in which gendered subjects exist, nor does she consider the effect that changes in the wider society may have on the nature of gendered subjectivity at any given time.

Each of these tenets plays a necessary role in reading Althusser's theory of subjectivity as strictly 'non-essentialist'. My argument is that Butler's own theory of gender can be interpreted to draw on the very essentialism she sought to avoid. Butler's theory of performativity is one of the most sophisticated engagements with Althusser to date and yet is marred by fundamental limitations to be outlined in this thesis. Furthermore I do not want to suggest the tenets identified above have only come to light through by recent published additions to Althusser's oeuvre. Rather Althusser's commitment to non-essentialism can be identified throughout the 1970s. To take an example, Althusser's emphasis on constitutive relations and the specific role played by the authoritative figure

in those relations was thoroughly developed in *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (1970, 2006 118-123).¹ Equally, Althusser's emphasis on the need to situate an analysis of subjectivity within an overall focus on the social formation is clear in *Montesquieu, Rousseau, Marx* (1972, 2007: 48-50) and his famous chapter 'Contradiction and Overdetermination' in *For Marx* (1965, 1969: 100-109). My point is simply that these new texts emphasise concerns of Althusser which until now have been underappreciated, and Butler's work is a primary example of their undervaluation. Finally, what is clear to me, and is an underlying point I wish to communicate throughout this thesis, is that Althusser is not a stepping stone from which to develop a non-essentialist theory of gender (as in the case of Butler's theory of performativity), but rather that Althusser's oeuvre provides an innovative framework for such a theory and a new contribution to social analysis and contestation

One final point I wish to make is that Butler's engagement and employment of Althusser's thought to the development of a theory of gender may be sophisticated but it is by no means exhaustive. Significant works in the theorising of gender and patriarchy have similarly drawn on and engaged with Althusser's ideas, what I call the Anglophone Althusser. The height of Second Wave Feminism during the 1960s to 1980s (Fraser, 2012: 5) utilised Althusserian concepts, with Juliet Mitchell's *Women: The Longest Revolution* (1984) and *Women's Estate* (1971) being among the most explicit. Later important works (and more contemporary to Butler), like Sylvia Walby's *Theorizing Patriarchy* (1991), implicitly draw on Althusser to frame an analysis of patriarchal society without mentioning his name. These and others will be examined throughout. That said, I am not concerned with proving second-wave feminists, or others, wrong in how they understand Althusser. Second Wave feminism, for example, was never theoretically concerned with non-essentialism (Moi, 2010: 3-4). Indeed, what distinguishes later feminist thought, and specifically Butler's contribution to feminism, is the development and provision of a non-essentialist theory of gender. Hers is the same project as Althusser's albeit in the context of a feminist analysis of relations oriented around gender rather than economically organised relations. It is for that reason that this thesis is partly a critical examination of Butler, as she comes the closest in the context of feminism to providing a non-essentialist theory of gender, an objective I claim she ultimately falls short of achieving.

In the remainder of this introduction, I will outline the primary concepts which will be employed throughout my thesis before outlining the structure to follow. I will begin by explaining key concepts within "essentialism" and "non-essentialism" and the perceived problems with essentialism. From there, I will identify what I understand to be satisfactory criteria for an adequate theory of gender

¹ Where I give two dates, the first denotes the date of the original publication (predominantly in French) and the second is the translated version I am using. The original date will always be provided where necessary.

within a non-essentialism framework. Finally, I will outline the methodological concerns surrounding my undertaking of this project, drawing on reflexivity theories, before outlining the overall structure of the thesis.

Two Approaches to Subjectivity, Subject and Subjection

In this section I will explain the essentialist and non-essentialist approaches to subjectivity, the subject and subjection. These concepts are notoriously difficult to define and inconsistently employed. Some treat subjectivity alongside related concepts like identity (Moi, 2010: 57), whereas others treat identity as diametrically opposed to subjectivity (Mitchell, 1982: 5). I believe that essentialism understands subjectivity and the subject as independent from subjection, whereas non-essentialism does not. This will become clearer with the description below, but I want to introduce this section with Marx's description of ideology as a '*camera obscura*' as this is a helpful metaphor for understanding these concepts. Having explained the opposing interpretations of Marx's analogy, from an essentialist and non-essentialist perspective, I will turn to the different approaches to agency which subsequently emerge.

Marx provides the analogy of the '*camera obscura*' in *The German Ideology* (Marx and Engels, 1982: 47). The analogy depicts ideology as a set of false ideas, a camera or a room which projects the world incorrectly to the person looking through it: 'men and their circumstances appear upside-down' (1982: 68). I contend that two interpretations of what is going on within the analogy is an effective approach to outlining the concepts of subjectivity, subject and subjection from an essentialist and non-essentialist perspective. To begin with essentialism, the analogy would be read as an individual approaching the *camera obscura*, looking through the pinhole and perceiving the world incorrectly. The individual need only step back from the camera to see the world for what it really is. Within this interpretation, the individual was already a subject with a particular subjectivity. The subject is the thinking individual who perceives the world with their own senses, has conceptions of how the world works and the relations between things. The subject acts but when doing so, they act according to their subjectivity, that is, how they understand themselves; importantly, the capacity to know oneself is independent from the *camera obscura*. The camera may present the world incorrectly and indeed it may even present false notions of oneself. The camera may impose sexist, racist and classist depictions of oneself which may either create a false subjectivity based on either subservience or domination. The subject will then act accordingly. Remember, however, that the subject and their subjectivity are independent from the *camera*

obscura, meaning that the subject can, under certain circumstances be a thinking, conscious individual without the imposition of false ideas.

Subjection here plays a very minor role. We are subjected to the *camera obscura* in the sense that our perceptions of the world and ourselves are subordinated to the it, but that need not always be the case. We are not inevitably subjected to the camera to think and conceive of the world, ourselves and our position within it. This is what I understand to be essentialism. Fuss's *Essentially Speaking* (1989) describes essentialism as the 'belief in true essence – that which is most irreducible, unchanging, and therefore constitutive of a person or a thing' (Fuss, 1989: 2). The essentialist subject is the subject whose subjectivity is not necessarily dependent on the camera, who can understand the world, society and their place within it independent of any historical and social changes in the world they inhabit. As Butler describes, essentialism believes there are 'features are in some sense fixed and available prior to the signifier that names them', or the belief in consciousness as 'pregiven' (Butler, 2011: 159).

What is more, essentialism potentially separates the subject from subjectivity. By this I mean that our consciousness, our perception and engagement with the world around us does not require a sense of self. An obvious example of this would be Rawls' Original Position, an asocial (if not pre-social) space devoid of all norms, expectations, and any sense of who we are. In this space what remains unchanged is an underlying capacity for reason (Rawls, 1971: 12). Central to Rawls's thought experiment is the assumption of an essential reason which is irreducible to the social or is in a sense pre-given. The Original Position is the position of the person who perceives the world and themselves without the projections of the *camera obscura* or, for that matter, any ideas about themselves. essentialism manifests in the belief of social norms, ideas, and the subject is still capable of reason independent from the camera. From a Marxist perspective, G. A. Cohen equally invokes essentialism in the form of ahistorical, asocial reason '[g]iven their rationality [...] and their inclement situation [...] when knowledge provides the opportunity of expanding productive power they will tend to take it, for not to do so would be irrational. In short, we put it as a reason for affirming the development thesis that its falsehood would offend human rationality' (Cohen, 2001: 153). The driving force of history is our capacity for reason and our nature to use it to better produce that which we need to survive. This is unchanging and does not require any specific sense of self (subjectivity). In fact Cohen implies above that to not act according to our rational nature would be to 'offend' that which is essential to us: human reason.

Non-essentialism interprets the *camera obscura* analogy differently. Where essentialism begins with the subject independent of the camera, the non-essentialist perspective begins with the subject already belonging to the camera. The subject as the thinking, perceiving, conscious individual is always thinking, perceiving and conscious of the world around them from the perspective of the camera. The non-essentialist believes that the subject's subjectivity – how they understand themselves – is equally the result of the projections of the camera. How we act and engage with the world around us is reducible to the camera. In this second reading, subjection, conceptualised as subordination, plays a central role. Here the subject is always subjected to the camera, as their sense of self is entirely subordinate to it. There is no pre-given sense of self, or no socially independent consciousness. The subject is therefore always a subjected subject. Notions like independence and imposition are an anathema because both assume a subject independent from the camera or who exists prior to it in order to have the camera meaningfully imposed upon them. Marx himself suggests that the subject is inevitably subjected to the camera, continuing his analogy by writing that 'this phenomenon [the *camera obscura*] arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process' (Marx and Engels, 1998: 68). To see the world inverted through the camera is inevitably rooted in 'historical life-process', in productive and social practices, as it is to see the world inverted naturally through our own retinas. Consider the role Weeks applies to 'labour' as a set of practices constitutive of the subject and their subjectivity and the similarities that can be drawn between 'labour' and 'historical life-processes':

The gender division of labour is the product of culturally and historically specific determinations, not the inevitable product of sex differences... Rather than an original, authentically human essence from which we are estranged and to which we should be restored, labor (sic) refers in this account to variable practices that are constitutive of ever-changing forms of existence and modes of subjectivity (Weeks, 2018: 121-122)

The constitutive nature of labouring practices Weeks discusses here is the same as the non-essentialist reading of the *camera obscura*. Imposition (of the camera) is substituted for constitution as 'constitution' captures the non-essentialist belief that the subject is always subjected to that which constitutes them. To be a subject is to be subjected as our consciousness of the world is constituted by those labouring practices Weeks identifies, or by Marx's *camera obscura*. The point is that the subject is 'always linked to something outside of it- an idea or principle or the society of others' (Mansfield, 2000: 3). Marx's analogy is after all explicating his understanding of the concept 'ideology' and it is precisely the constitutive nature of ideology in terms of the subject and their

subjectivity which frames the analysis of my thesis throughout. A kind of typology is constructed in non-essentialist analysis which requires analysis of the subject to be an analysis of that 'outside of it' which constitutes the subject in the first place.

The emphases of ideology and its constitutive role over the subject draws our attention to the relationship between the concepts 'subject' and 'subjectivity'. As discussed above, essentialism separates the subject from subjectivity, meaning that our consciousness and engagement with the world can occur independently from how we understand ourselves. Non-essentialism thoroughly disagrees with this premise. In the thesis to follow, one of the primary mechanisms of ideology is the constitution of subjectivity, that is, how we understand ourselves. A significant point here is that we cannot conceptualise the world around us and act in a way which is not already thoroughly integrated in our understanding of ourselves. Consciousness is already consciousness as a sexed, gendered, raced and classed individual. Sex, gender, race, class are questions of subjectivity insofar as they provide us with a sense of self. To be a gendered subject is to assume, from a non-essentialist position, consciousness is already intertwined with a gendered understanding of oneself.

Throughout my thesis I will be exploring what it means to be a gendered subject without always drawing on the concept of subjectivity. This is because, from a non-essentialist perspective, the subject cannot be understood without subjectivity, to the point that the two concepts are often used interchangeably. This is captured by Althusser when he claims that consciousness is the effect of unconscious social norms and ideas: 'ideology has very little to do with "consciousness"... It is profoundly unconscious' (Althusser, 1969: 232-233). Althusser and non-essentialism in general gives primacy to subjectivity, subsuming the concept 'consciousness' within subjectivity rather than treating them as meaningfully distinct. When we think, we always think as socially constituted subjects.

It is this inextricable linking of the subject to subjectivity which frames Laclau and Mouffe's description of the subject as 'positioned' (Laclau and Mouffe, 2014: 7). The metaphor of the positioned subject is central to Laclau and Mouffe's non-essentialism and, as thinkers whose work critically responds to and engages with Althusser (ibid: 90-93), I will turn to them in more detail below. To be a positioned subject is to be positioned by something with respect to how the subject understands themselves, that is, their subjectivity. The metaphor 'positioned' repeats the relationships between the subject and subjection insofar as it emphasises the subjection (or subordination) of the subject to the constitutive outside. Subjectivity is, in the context of Laclau and Mouffe, our constructed (or positioned) sense of self.

With the concepts subject, subjectivity and subjection having been outlined from the essentialist and non-essentialist perspectives I can now turn to the different understanding of agency which emerge. 'Agency' defined by Hall 'brings us face to face with the political question of how we can motivate ourselves and others who work for social change and economic justice' (Hall, 2004: 124). Agency here is conceptualised as the capacity to act and subvert predominant dynamics which organise our lives. Hall believes an understanding of the subject is predicated on an understanding of our ability to critically act and engage. Hall claims that agency remains at the heart of discussions of subjectivity today and this is not simply an academic, abstract, and impractical question. Agency is, in small and large ways, a matter of life and death (Hall, 2004: 124). Our ability to critically engage with the society we belong originates (according to essentialism defined above) from the subject. The subject is consciously independent from the *camera obscura* (however it manifests) and in the absence of the camera is still capable of conscious activity. This essentialist conception of agency is what Hall is advocating when he invokes the centrality of the 'I' in his description of agency below:

In textualizing my selfhood, in opening up for critical analysis, both self-directed and communal, my own affiliations, choices, exclusions, valuations, and engagements as a queer, white, atheist, middle-class, academic American, among other aspects of my subjectivity, I at least open up for discussion and revision the responsibility that I bring to those subject position(ing)s (Hall, 2004: 129).

The depiction of the 'I' in Hall's description of agency is both the origin of one's subject positionality, and of its subversion. In other words, I bring about and can subvert the very sources of self-understanding. Agency in Hall's description is such that the subject is no longer a clear effect of that which positions the subject but is the origin or cause of the very positioning of the subject. Agency is thus at the centre of essentialism. As will become clear below, agency is also thoroughly accounted for within a non-essentialist framework, but is fundamentally understood differently. Agency to subvert is not brought about by a social vacuum, independently from the constitutive outside, but is made possible by that very outside. Non-essentialism is therefore partly an exploration of the conditions which make subversion possible. Put crudely, it examines the features of the very constitution of the subject that enable the same subject to subvert the social order by which it has in fact been constituted.

Having outlined the essentialist and non-essentialist conceptions of the subject, an important question remains: what is wrong with an essentialist perception of the subject? My thesis is about constructing a non-essentialist theory of gender out of Althusser's thought. An underlying assumption of this endeavour is that there is something wrong with essentialism in the first place. To defend this assumption, I am going to draw on Laclau and Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*

(2014) and Butler's *Bodies that Matter* (2011). Both texts have featured briefly above and identify two significant problems with essentialism: the first is that essentialism has an authoritarian tendency; and the second is that essentialism incorrectly identifies subversion as originating from the subject.

Beginning with the authoritarian tendency within essentialism, Laclau and Mouffe explain that it was an essentialist conception of proletarian class subjectivity which rendered Leninism authoritarian. Even though we are discussing collective rather than individual subjectivity, the example is still pertinent. Leninism assumed that there was such thing as an essence of a class, a fixed and ahistorical property central to what makes that class. By claiming to have knowledge of that which is essential to the proletariat, Leninism exhibits authoritarianism in two ways. The first is the authoritarian position in which it places those who claim to have access to the "true" essence of the proletariat. The second is the authoritarian act of fixing what is otherwise a heterogeneous group of people:

Leninism evidently makes no attempt to construct, through struggle, mass identity not predetermined by any necessary law of history. On the contrary, it maintains that there is a 'for itself' of class accessible only to the enlightened vanguard- whose attitude towards the working class is therefore purely pedagogical. The roots of authoritarian politics lie in this interweaving of science and politics. As a consequence, there is no longer any problem in considering the party as representative of the class- not of the class as flesh and blood, of course, but of that entelechy constituted by its 'historical interest'. Whereas the democratic practice of hegemony increasingly calls into question the transparency of the process of representation, the authoritarian practice has laid the ground for the relation of representation to become the basic political mechanism (Laclau and Mouffe, 2014: 49).

Laclau and Mouffe are signalling two problems concerning authoritarianism. In one sense, we see how essentialism has the potential to create hierarchies based on the difference between those elites who have access (and define) the true essence of X and those who do not. The 'enlightened vanguard' are so defined by their monopoly of access to the essence of the subject in question, in this case the essence of the proletariat. By claiming that '[t]he roots of authoritarian politics lie in this interweaving of science and politics', Laclau and Mouffe mean that there is an authoritarian tendency in the act of searching for something fixed or objective (irreducible) in the subject with which we are concerned. If, however, we were to assume that the subject in question, individual or collective, was not fixed by a particular attribute or property, and that their subjectivity was constituted, we would remove the possibility of that authoritarian tendency. To deny that a subject has a fixed sense of self would be to undermine any attempts to claim unique knowledge of the

subject in question. This is clearly equally true in the context of gendered subjects as it is for class subjects. Claims to unique knowledge of what it is to be a man or woman can render possible hierarchies and subsequent authoritarian relations between people, between those who know what a 'true' woman is and can enforce it and those who do not and who must be corrected.

Still drawing on the quotation above, an equally worrying dimension of authoritarianism within essentialism is the authoritarian act of defining what the essence of something is whilst at the same time defining that essence by what it is not, by foreclosing the possibility of certain properties, for example behavioural traits, from the definition of what it is to be X. For example, to be a proletarian subject is essentially to be economically exploited, and therefore a member of the proletariat cannot be exploiting. This is what is meant when Laclau and Mouffe discuss the 'interweaving of science and politics', whereby they mean the specific act of fixing meaning, which is otherwise unstable and contentious. By science, Laclau and Mouffe mean claims to objectivity and, when imposed in a field like the political which is heterogeneous and conflictual, we witness attempts to impose a rigid structure of meaning and thereby attempts to dominate in an otherwise perpetual struggle.² The interweaving of science and politics in this context is the act of defining the proletariat class, by attributing certain essential features to the proletariat whilst simultaneously denying others. Rigid lines of demarcation are set in the act of definition, distinguishing what something is by what is not (and what it could have been). By extension, these lines of demarcation run the risk of creating hierarchies between variations of subjects. Those who do not exhibit the essential features of a proletarian (or gendered) subjectivity as coherently or obediently as others are lesser versions of that subjectivity: to call a person we may describe as proletarian 'bourgeois' is to invoke an essential notion of the proletariat as a standard by which to judge others.³

Conceiving of drawing the lines of demarcation as authoritarian is similar to the notion that such an act of definition is an act of violence on the heterogeneous nature of meaning (Frazer and Hutchings, 2011). The 'originary violence' discussed by Frazer and Hutchings (2011) outlines the way language

² See Schmitt (2007), whose claim that politics is automatically conflictual is taken by Mouffe on other occasions (2007, 2009) to frame her belief that politics is a sphere of contesting and stabilising meaning which is otherwise heterogeneous.

³ In an entirely different context, Antony Flew's famous 'No True Scotsman Fallacy' clearly exemplifies the kind of hierarchy based on essentialist premises. His example shows a Scottish man reading a newspaper and a story emerging about a 'sex maniac' in Sidcup, responding to himself that 'No Scot would do such a thing!' The next Sunday the same Scottish man reads in the paper that a Scotsman has committed even worse crimes than the previous news headline entailed. His reaction is subtly different but telling: 'No true Scotsman would do such a thing!' (Flew, 1975: 47). This example is an illustration of precisely the authoritarian streak in essentialism which imposes (and thereby constructs) arbitrary lines of demarcation based on definition of what is or is not essential to a subject.

imposes lines that demarcate what we are by what we are not by creating 'difference, classification', and by extension, essentialism is the construction of those lines of demarcation, what they describe as an originary violence (2011: 10). Indeed, that within 'society individuals can be classified and grouped; [that] they can have their individuality obliterated and overlain with some other order of 'naming'' (Frazer and Hutchings, 2011: 10) betrays specifically an authoritarian violence barring other possibilities for subjectivity. Having explained the critique that essentialism is authoritarian and the different dimensions to that critique, I would like to turn to the alternative critique that essentialism incorrectly identifies spaces for subversion as originating from an otherwise constituted (or positioned) subject.

Returning to Hall's discussion of agency and the capacity to subvert, agency is depicted as independent from society insofar as decisions can be made independently from the norms and expectations imposed on the self. It is clear, then, that subversion of those norms originates from that socially irreducible agency. Furthermore, subversion of the social can originate from any *a priori* or, as Butler suggested, fixed and pre-given feature. For example, perhaps the problem with contemporary gender norms is that they conflict with internal female qualities, constraining or limiting what is naturally female. This is exemplified in the notion that femininity limits women's ability according to narrow confines of what it is to be a 'woman' (Greer, 2006: 78-9). Contestation of femininity thereby originates from the dissonance between contemporary notions of femininity and the fixed attributes of the female subject. We are the source of our own agency, our ability to subvert, insofar as contemporary norms conflict with who we essentially are.

The precise contents of the fixed features in the context of feminist analysis of gender and patriarchy are for present purposes irrelevant. These features tend to vary according to different schools of feminist thought. For example, where Greer and other second-wave feminists might presume the existence of underlying female features, some French feminists identify an underlying heterogeneity or 'maternal-semiotic' (indefinite possible of meaning) intrinsic to all which is equally violated, imposed upon, negated by the predominant norms of society (Delphy, 1995: 199).

What is relevant – a point I would like to emphasise – is that this notion of heterogeneity internal to the subject is importantly different from the heterogeneity developed within non-essentialist thinking. The 'maternal-semiotic' for example is very different from Laclau and Mouffe's 'field of discursivity':

'[w]e have referred to 'discourse' as a system of differential identities - that is, of moments. But we have just seen that such a system only exists as a partial limitation of a 'surplus of meaning' which

subverts it. Being inherent in every discursive formation, this 'surplus' is the necessary terrain for the constitution of every social practice' (Laclau and Mouffe, 2014: 98).

Here, the possibilities of meaning occur at the level of discourse within which the subject is located and therefore subversion and contestation does not originate from some pregiven attribute of the subject, but that without (be it discourse, power or, as I will argue later, ideology), that which constitutes the subject and their subjectivity. Every social practice, including subversive social practices, are made possible by an excess at the level of discourse, not the level of the subject. In other words, in essentialism, the subject is the origin of change, whereas in non-essentialism the subject is the effect of change. This invites the reader to ask: why does change happen?

In keeping with the theme of effect, this critique is a critique to the extent that essentialism *incorrectly* identifies subversion at the level of the subject. Non-essentialist theorists, of whom I have discussed a couple, claim this is false. Essentialism fails to see that the subject is entirely the effect of society's norms and ideas, and typically fails to identify patterns or correlations in correspondences between changes in subjectivity and changes in the wider world. For non-essentialism, the subject's critical engagement with society is an engagement already made possible by that society.⁴ I argue that Butler, in her attempt to adhere to non-essentialism, fails to do so insofar as she confuses this line of causality and identifies the subject as occupying a central and originary position of social change, thereby committing the very essentialism she sought to avoid. This will, however, be further elaborated as I discuss Butler's limited engagement with Althusser throughout my thesis. The point to note is that non-essentialism argues that, were a subject to subvert the predominant norms of society, such subversion is not the choice of an agent independent from those norms and ideas but the derivate of already-existing changes, instabilities or 'surplus[es]' within the dynamics which position and constitute the subject.

Having established the non-essentialist critique of essentialism, namely, that essentialism is both authoritarian in tendency and incorrectly identifies the source of subversion, it is appropriate that I draw this section of the introduction to a close. My thesis is not an exercise of non-essentialist apologetics. It was pertinent to elaborate on the criticisms applied to an essentialist conception of subjectivity because this further explicated what the alternative looks like. I am contributing to that alternative by providing a non-essentialist theory of gender and patriarchy in the form of

⁴ A similar relation exemplifying the subject's relationship with society in the context of change is the relation established between discourse (our subject) and materiality (norms and ideas) outlined by Fairclough. For Fairclough, materiality conditions discourse but discourse can act back on that materiality (2001: 30-31). The difference being for us here that the acting back on the part of discourse is the exacerbation of changes in the material.

Althusserian thought. If Althusser is a resource for feminism, it is because he provides a truly non-essentialist theory of gender and patriarchy where Judith Butler fails. It is also because I will argue that he satisfies other criteria for an adequate theory of gender and patriarchy related but not exclusive to non-essentialism. I will now explain these criteria.

Towards an Adequate Theory of Gender and Patriarchy

Clearly one of the criteria for an adequate theory of gender and patriarchy is that such a theory conforms to non-essentialism. This has been laid out above. A theory of gender and patriarchy must not resort at any point to *a priori* fixed notions of subjectivity for fear of authoritarianism and incorrectly identifying the subject as the originator of subversion. This is not the only criterion for adequacy, and I believe there are three others which Althusserian thought must satisfy in order to be an original and adequate resource for feminist analysis. These are that the theory: A) accounts for social change; B) accounts for agency; and C) does not commit the offence of ‘twiddling thumbs’. Criteria A and B are *prima facie* in contradiction to the non-essentialism I have just outlined. Nevertheless, I will explain to the contrary that social change and agency can be conceptualised within a non-essentialist framework, although they are conceptualised differently as a result. Criterion C is an objection continuously made to postmodern or poststructuralist analyses of domination. It claims that in focusing on the socially constructed nature of relations of domination and oppression, we risk failing to recognise, or trivialise, the very real effect social constructions have on people’s lives. In this section I will discuss each one of these criteria in turn.

To begin with adequately accounting for social change, feminist analysis of gender and patriarchy is not merely an exercise of understanding and commentary. I do not think it is controversial to claim that feminist analysis is motivated by a desire to change contemporary gender dynamics and patriarchal society (if understood, at least for now, as a society characterised by male dominance over women). A good example is Pat Horn’s description of feminist theory as equally a practice of ‘feminist struggle’ (Horn, 1995: 71). That is not to say that feminist theory has always been articulated in political struggles, as experienced by the union between feminist theory and practice in the form of the Women’s Liberation Movement.⁵ It is to say, however, that feminist theory is motivated by the analysis of, and subsequent struggle against, the object of their scrutiny, namely

⁵ See Mitchell (1971) for a clear description of the Women’s Liberation Movement and its various manifestations in different countries.

gender and patriarchy. An assumption underlying this analysis is, then, that far from historical inevitabilities, gender and patriarchy are plastic, historically contingent, and subject to change.

Furthermore, we may want to claim that patriarchy has changed in form and content throughout history. To conceptualise change within a non-essentialist framework is, to repeat my discussion above, to understand change as originating at the level of the larger social whole to which the subject then contributes and exacerbates. To return to Marx's analogy of the *camera obscura*, subversion and contestation do not occur because the subject removes themselves from the camera, but rather subversion and contestation is made possible because of the camera, itself determined by material developments in society. Social change emerges at the social, at the level of discourse, power or ideological dynamics, and the subject then acts to articulate change to its logical conclusion, which then brings about further variations at the level of those dynamics. Non-essentialism is determinist to the extent that the subject is the effect of rather than effects change, but it does not automatically assume historical stasis. Such an assumption would undermine a non-essentialist school of feminist thought from the outset and, to that end, must account for and theoretically elaborate precisely this cyclical relationship between that which constitutes the subject and the subject's subversive actions.

It is here that the second criterion of accounting for agency emerges. I previously explained how non-essentialism is antithetical to a notion of agency entailing a consciousness independent from the social, exemplified in Rawls's Original Position. That said, we do not want to deny that people consciously engage with their surroundings in the pursuit of changing them. People can identify certain ideas, norms or social dynamics as abhorrent and critically engage with them. In short, contrary to the determinism potentially attributed to non-essentialism, people are not the passive recipients of the society in which they exist.⁶ It would be incorrect to assume that non-essentialism's focus on determinism translates as a denial of agency. Determinism is indeed central to non-essentialism insofar as non-essentialism situates consciousness as the effect of the social; however, non-essentialism can (and should) entail situating agency within which the dynamics the subject is constituted. We can act to change the discursive or ideological paradigms which form us, but given that our ability to act on those paradigms is made possible by them, we are simultaneously limited

⁶ Consider the determinate one-sided relation between the signifier and the subject that Lacan establishes in *The Signification of the Phallus*: 'This passion of the signifier now becomes a new dimension of the human condition in that it is not only man who speaks, but that in man and through man *it* speaks [...] that his nature is woven by effects in which is to be found the structure of language, of which he becomes the material' (Lacan, 2006: 578). That we are reduced to the material of language (signifier) in Lacan is representative of the critique often applied to non-essentialism that it falsely trivialises human agency to mere passivity.

by them. To give an example, critical engagement with religious doctrines is only possible because of the presence or manifestation of secularism or some internal frailties emerging within the religious doctrine. Either way, what the subject does is because of the very norms with which they are engaging and does not emerge *ex nihilo*. The specific content of those dynamics will be explored throughout my thesis. That said, I have mentioned above that the subject can 'exacerbate' changes. By this I mean that the subject can take instability in the predominant hegemonic norms of society and go on to stabilise them further, possibly contesting that very hegemony. In other words militancy is a tendency symptomatic of a particular society. In an important footnote, Laclau and Mouffe render agency possible solely because of the impossibility of those dynamics (here discursive) to retain dominance or hegemony:

Hegemonic practices are suturing insofar as their field of operation is determined by the openness of the social, by the ultimately unfixed character of every signifier. This original lack is precisely what the hegemonic practices try to fill in. A totally sutured society would be one where this filling-in would have reached its ultimate consequences and would have, therefore, managed to identify itself with the transparency of a closed symbolic order. Such a closure of the social is, as we will see, impossible (Laclau and Mouffe, 2014: 184).

Here the concept of 'suture' is what makes agency possible. Agency is possible because of the inherent limitations of discourse to consolidate and solidify meaning (Howard, 2013: 183). The 'original lack' is never filled indefinitely and is made possible because of the failure of discourse to consolidate meaning. As Butler notes, however, such impossibility is not the field of endless possibility. Rather agency is consciousness to act and engage with the social world within constraints set by the world (Butler, 2011: 71). This is agency but a comparatively far more limited one than the notion of agency associated with essentialism. It is a compromise between absolute determinism and independence, where one is unduly pessimistic whilst the other is unduly naïve.

Turning now to what I call the problem of twiddling thumbs, Geraldine Finn provides us with a good introduction:

The tendency of the "French" dispositions is toward a politics of "*lyrical nihilism*": a praxis of fiddling-while-Rome-burns premised on the assumption that in the postmodern condition – where social meanings are both arbitrary and self-referring social realities where simulacra and where we are all prisoners of language anyway- politics is no longer possible. The tendency of this version of postmodernism is to a sort of political quietism at best and cynical opportunism at worst (Finn, 1996: 71, emphasis in the original).

What Finn is discussing is an approach which seems to assume that it is enough to take apart norms and ideas, social systems of classification, through forms of philosophical analysis, whilst forgetting that these norms have material effects on people's lives. It is not enough to say that the concepts of gender and sex are discursive constructs (Foucault, 1998), we must also simultaneously recognise their material effects on how we live. We must avoid obfuscating philosophical contemplation with subversive political, material practice. Moi for example tries to see a balance by emphasising the socially constructed nature of gender dynamics whilst also committing a struggle against those dynamics as if they were real. What Moi strives for is the simultaneous engagement with three positions of feminism which entail the struggle for equality (in value), the recognition of difference (we do not after all want to assimilate women under men) and the taking apart of gender binaries imposing hierarchical relations between people (Moi, 1988: 6-7).

I mentioned previously that feminism is a struggle against asymmetrical relations, but far from an observation, this struggle constitutes my final criterion. An exercise of feminist praxis is, as a struggle, in direct opposition to the political quietism that Finn mentions, whereby we are satisfied with merely identifying the socially constructed nature of gendered relations. A non-essentialist feminist praxis must, therefore, be particularly careful not to twiddle its thumbs, contesting the fixity of gender norms whilst not forgetting that these norms (fixed or otherwise) constitute lives. Such theorising must contribute to that very struggle by accounting for social change and agency. By outlining the methods of social change and the role that agency plays in contesting gender norms, tempered by a non-essentialist framework, my thesis actively engages in that struggle and avoids the problem of twiddling its thumbs.

I have now outlined the three criteria which I believe to be required by an adequate theory of gender and patriarchy and the ways that a non-essential theory can satisfy those criteria. In returning to the three Althusser with whom I began this introduction, it is my belief that the ideal Althusser, developed from a thorough engagement with his oeuvre in the light of recent translations, provides a truly non-essentialist means of satisfying these criteria. At the same time, I wish to argue that Butler's theory of gender as performative fails to provide a satisfactory non-essentialist contribution to feminist thought. Butler's focus on agency and her failure to reconcile agency with non-essentialism undermines her project. Equally, Butler's theory of performativity is partly indebted to her specific understanding of Althusser, one which which eventually translates to the essentialism that she sought to avoid. Ultimately Butler uses Althusser as one of many theoretical tools to develop her own contribution to feminism. My point, however, is that the translation of previously unpublished manuscripts, for example *On the Reproduction of Capital*

(1995, 2014) and *How to be a Marxist in Philosophy* (2017a), provide a unique opportunity to reassess Althusser's oeuvre. This reassessment will prove that, far from being merely a platform for the development of feminist analysis, Althusser directly provides the means for that analysis in the form of a truly non-essentialist theory of gender and patriarchy. This is my Ideal Althusser, but one that gives nothing to the thinker other than what the totality of his oeuvre licenses.

Before moving on to outline the structure of thesis, I want to clarify what I mean by the material, and briefly address the concept of 'humanism', as this is a concept that is frequently employed. Throughout my thesis, the concept of the 'material' will continuously be discussed, predominantly in the context of the term 'material relations'. Indeed, it is perfectly reasonable to ask what I mean specifically with respect to the material. Material as opposed to what? The concept is itself employed throughout Althusser's works but never explicitly clarified. On one occasion, he suggests that there are 'modalities' of the material (Althusser, 2006: 11) and in a recently translated text *Philosophy for Non-Philosophers* (2017a), Althusser almost exclusively reserves the term 'material' for 'raw material', that which is worked on in practice (2017a: 99). Althusser further explains that that the material is 'in the last instance "physical" matter' (Althusser, 2006: 113). In keeping with this notion of physicality, I believe that the material denotes all things physical as opposed to all things ideational. For example, materialist analysis as opposed to idealism firmly grounds all phenomena within the physical reality, physical relations between people, physical institutions and the historical developments of those relations and institutions. A form of idealism would render certain phenomena like ideas and norms irreducible to the physical world, developing entirely on their own. It is this very definition which characterises one of the salient distinctions between Marx's and Hegel's dialectic, where the former's commitment to materialism focuses analysis on the physical changes in society rather than the latter's focus on changes in ideas (Wolff, 2002: 26-27).⁷ By phrases like 'material relations', I therefore mean those historically relative and mutating physical relationships exemplified in the physical relations between children and their parents, and physical historically relative institutions like families and the school.⁸ Having clarified this point, I can now turn to 'humanism'.

⁷ It is precisely the insistence on reducing everything to the physical which is why Althusser emphasises that ideology has a 'material existence' (Althusser, 2006: 112).

⁸ By no means is this an exhaustive exploration of the 'material'. Nor does reducing the material to physical matter definitively clarify the issue. Butler, for example, describes the material as a process, as something which is never fixed but perpetually materialising and re-materialising (Butler, 2011: xviii). Nevertheless, for my purposes, I believe the concept has been sufficiently clarified to progress further.

Up until this point I have been discussing non-essentialism but an equally persuasive term which emerges in the literature is 'humanism'. I do not want to complicate the established dichotomy between essentialism and non-essentialism, nor do I want to obfuscate the multiple facets of humanism. I am sure there are desirable notions of humanism that I do not want to refute. Nevertheless, time and again Althusser discusses humanism as opposed to non-essentialism (Althusser, 1967; Althusser and Balibar, 1972). I therefore need a working definition of what I mean by humanism when I oppose it, as it is that definition alone I oppose. In this thesis, I will understand humanism as essentialism. In *Bodies that Matter* (2011), Butler argues that essentialism designates certain features of people as fixed, as independent from the social, and humanism entails universalising those features at the expense of differences between people from different locations and temporalities. For example, to claim all people are rational (with a specific understanding of reason to mean pursuing better conditions of production under conditions of scarcity) would be to universalise a western notion of reason to people belonging to other cultures and to negate possible alternatives specific to those cultures. This is precisely what Butler means when she associates an 'all-consuming humanism' with 'a figure for imperialism' (Butler, 2011: 77-78), where differences between people are negated and characteristics of people under one culture are elevated to the norm.⁹ Returning to my discussion of G.A. Cohen above, we can see how Cohen commits humanism when he attributes a specific notion of reason to all people at all times (under conditions of scarcity), and his claim that those who fail to exhibit that reason 'offend human rationality' (Cohen, 2001: 153). To 'offend' is to deviate from productive reasoning which we all supposedly have, and I believe the specifically negative connotations surrounding 'offend' relate to assumptions Butler claims underlines humanism. The supposedly fixed and essential attribute is elevated to a norm, an imperative which it becomes an offence to deviate from.

Given the multiple facets of humanism and the specific understanding of humanism related to my thesis, I will avoid using the term except when it is included in a citation. Humanism in the context of my thesis only refers to the extension of essentialist thought and any other aspect of humanism (for example the normative associations of humanism) is not implied in my opposition to the concept. Having now clarified the interpretation of essentialism and non-essentialism which frames my thesis and outlined the criteria I have set for measuring an adequate theory of gender and patriarchy

⁹ The same critique is applied to a language which elevates the male experience to the standard of normality and subsequently nullifying the multitude of different experiences specific to women. This was a primary focus of Irigaray, one of several French feminist thinkers whose thought Butler critically responds to and who will be discussed below (Irigaray and Carlston, 1989; Irigaray and Guynn, 1995).

within non-essentialist limits, I will now move on to briefly outline the reflexive concerns surrounding my specific relation to my research before finally outlining the structure of my thesis.

Reflexivity in My Research

My research is focused on the subject and the processes by which the subject comes to be (subjectification), specifically in the context of patriarchal society. Given what I said above, this should already raise concerns as to the limits of the author's subjectivity in relation to his research. I explained above that, from a non-essentialist perspective, self-awareness is reducible to the social background. Subjectivity is always entwined in the social and therefore identity is always a social identity. Two concerns pertaining to reflexivity immediately emerge. The first is that, if subjectivity is always social, subjectivity is already limited by the boundaries of social norms which frame consciousness. Notions of what it is to be a man from a certain class, with a particular sexuality and race, are not fixed features of myself as the author of this text but originate from the social within which my consciousness exists. To that end, while certain perspectives, experiences and knowledges are afforded to me, other perspectives, experiences and knowledges are foreclosed from me. By occupying a particular 'subject-position' or positionality (Mouffe, 1999), I am automatically not occupying others.

I will draw on the inherently exclusionary nature of subjectivity in the main body of my thesis, but, by virtue of being me, there are substantial limits to what I can know and experience. The second immediate reflexive concern raised comes from the social within which the subject is formed. The social – here, patriarchal society with its specific discursive, ideological or power dynamics – is not a homogenous entity. Not only are my experiences limited in respects to others' within the society I share, but equally limited with respects to those belonging to other societies we may wish to describe as patriarchal. A clear example of the absence of reflexivity is Okin's contention that all societies and cultures are patriarchal (Okin, 1999: 13). Even if we can claim that all societies do exhibit asymmetrical, unequal, and dominant relations between men and women, Okin has categorically no idea as to the nuanced manifestation of patriarchy specific to other societies. Indeed, it will amount to the very imperial humanism we wish to avoid if we think that our experiences of patriarchy in our society are universally experienced in the same way.

These reflexive concerns regarding my relation to my research are further exacerbated by the fact that, as a man, I undoubtedly benefit from the type of society I am analysing, and that Althusserian

thought is initially antithetical to any kind of academic modesty. Althusser presents his own writings as a 'science', by which he means his analysis goes beyond the limits of what is thinkable at any given point and renders a whole new form of analysis possible by breaking through those prior limits (Althusser and Balibar, 1972: 133). What is this claim but ultimately the suggestion that the observer takes on a value-free position with respect to the object they are analysing? Admittedly, the notion of science is a complicated one and one which I cannot do justice to here, but the dichotomy between science and ideology within which Althusser foregrounds his analysis assumes that the researcher can be separate from the object of their study. However, we have already established that the researcher as a subject is fundamentally a socially entwined consciousness. Additionally, when one's object of study is the very process of that social entwinement, the emergence of the subject within the social, we cannot reasonably endorse Althusser's claims to scientific knowledge.¹⁰

What then is the position for a researcher like me, whose object of study is a society which frames his consciousness and benefits him because of sex and gender which frame that very consciousness? The answer cannot be that I should not participate in this research. I have already explained that the quietism associated with post-modern and post-structuralist thought is antithetical to feminist praxis. Reflexivity here in the context of a feminist thesis, embedded in struggle, does not condone silence in light of the epistemological limitations but recognises that there are these limitations must limit and construct my analysis.¹¹ For example my analysis must be sure not to universalise the judgments drawn from culturally relative phenomena like the family, which, in my instance, assumes a nuclear family structure consisting of two heterosexual parents. my analysis is drawn from someone from a specific temporality and a specific location, with specific and thereby limited experiences. To that end, although I am constructing the best possible Althusser, an ideal Althusser from a careful examination of his oeuvre, I cannot underestimate the influences effecting that construction. Even so, I believe that the explanation of Althusser's thought that follows is more faithful to his work and aims than the conventional Anglophone perceptions of his thought, the most sophisticated of which is Butler's engagement with Althusser.

Were I to conclude this section on reflexivity here, two points of serious concern would immediately arise. In the first instance, can I claim now to have been reflective, to have recognised my limitations outright and then proceed with my analysis? In the second instance, am I claiming that my

¹⁰ I should hasten to add that I believe one can be Althusserian without endorsing his dichotomy between ideology and science and that, for me at least, such a dichotomy plays a small and expendable role in his overall thought.

¹¹ In the same way that the discourses construct us through limitations and in limiting us construct us, as exemplified in Foucault's opposition to the repressive hypothesis of power (Foucault, 1998).

understanding of Althusser is *right* whereas Butler's is *wrong*? As a follow up question, am I stating Butler's contribution to feminist theory, be it to our understanding of gender or of our agency in contesting gender, is redundant? The answer to all three of these is a categorical no.

Turning to the question of reflexivity, it is important not to simply outline one's limitation within their research and assume accounts have been settled. Reflexivity is not a hoop I need to jump through and then proceed with that criteria formerly satisfied, as to do so would simply be to pay lip service to reflective research. Ahmed captures this concern when discussing her own involvement in the development of racial equality documentation (Ahmed, 2008:108). Ahmed's paper investigates the performative implications of a report she contributed to, which claimed the University where she worked was institutionally racist. Ahmed goes on to write:

A document that documented the racism of the university became usable as a measure of good performance. Here, having a good race-equality policy quickly got translated into being good at race equality. Such a translation works to conceal the very inequalities that the documents were written to reveal. The document becomes a fetishized object, something that has value by being cut off from the process of documentation. In other words, its very existence is taken as evidence that the institutional environment documented by the document (racism, inequality, injustice) has been overcome; as if by saying that we "do it" means that's no longer what we do' (Ahmed, 2008: 108-109)

Ahmed's concerns are my own insofar as she is worried about the performance of an admission as a licence to continue irrespective. An institution is no longer racist because it has outlined its institutional racism for all to see. The speech act of admission serves precisely to consolidate the failing, to contain it and present oneself as separate from it – the 'it' in Ahmed's case being institutional racism. In my context, reflexivity *cannot* be a practice of outlining my limitations in one isolated section of my thesis and thereby licence me to continue as my subject positionality is no longer framed by those limitations. This thesis is my own and by extension the limitations constituting who I am and my perspective breathe through every interpretation, engagement and understanding of every text and thinker that follows. It is for this very reason that the title of my thesis is *towards* a non-essentialist theory of patriarchy, as reflexivity demands I recognise that my contribution is in no way definitive. I settle no accounts, but want to encourage others to examine Althusser as offering new and innovative contribution to feminism given the opportunity posed by his increasingly accessible oeuvre.

If my contribution is limited and framed by my subject positionality, do I really want to say Butler is in a sense wrong? By this I mean am I saying Butler's own understanding of Althusser, as will be discussed in the subsequent sections, is incorrect? Equally, is my thesis an exercise in saying Butler

commits essentialism and is therefore theoretically redundant? The answer to both questions is categorically not and the reason for this results from a sincere reflexive exposition of oneself. I am, among many things, a student of politics. Delving further into my formative years as a student in politics, it is clear to me that my studies have (intentionally or not) been informed by the antagonistic and combative notion of politics developed by Carl Schmitt's *Concept of the Political* (2007). Schmitt posits that politics in all its manifestations is fundamentally a question of friends and foes, and that the study of politics is a pessimistic investigation into conflict. Developing from this and despite the non-essentialism I seek to espouse in my thesis, I cannot deny I hold the same misanthropy of people found in the classical political theorists Hans Morgenthau which necessarily leads to conflict and struggle (Fromkin, 1993:). I am subsequently inclined to say yes, Butler's interpretation of Althusser is opposite to mine, and that this thesis is in conflict with her own contribution to feminist thought. A constitutive limitation of my subject positionality is precisely to see a contribution to something as an aggressive act aimed at negating the contribution of someone else.

If I were to juxtapose my thesis to Butler, what am I fundamentally doing but trying to theoretically silence Butler's contributions to feminism? Moreover, I am trying to do so, as man, by utilising the ideas of another man, all in the name of feminism. Butler herself suggests that this kind of antagonistic and vitriolic reasoning is a 'hegemonic cultural discourse predicated on binary structures' (Butler, 2006: 13) and later goes on to suggest that such a way of thinking is endemic within the 'exclusionary practices of normative heterosexuality' (ibid: 74). Butler is very much concerned with feminist theory undermining its openness and creativity by committing the very exclusionary and regimented reasoning which is characteristic of my own understanding of politics. To that end, I do not want my thesis to be solely on feminism, but also to be a feminist thesis. Returning then to my statement above that I believe I can project a more faithful Althusser than the Althusser presented by Butler; this statement is problematic. I am not saying that I know the true Althusser and Butler does not (a point made all the more suspicious given Althusser is dead). Instead, a reflexive and dare I say feminist statement would be the following: the Althusser I have to offer is born out of a temporal subject positionality that is mine, made possible by exciting new translations and publications of Althusser's to which Butler did not have access. Butler, by extension, is not wrong, nor has her contribution diminished. Her Althusser is hers, equally the product of a temporal subject positionality. Nor is my claim that performativity is redundant for feminist theory. Butler's investigations into Althusser and her own theory of performativity have made possible my contribution here. To that end, I do not want to juxtapose and nullify Butler, but rather, in the spirit

of Bertell Ollman, to 'dance' with Butler (Ollman, 2003: 169). I do not want to force Ollman's metaphor into a context about which he was not speaking, but his 'dance of the dialectics' is notably more gentle, concerted, and dare I say patient than an endless march forward. Ollman writes that within the dance routine 'the present ceases to be a prison for thinking and, like the past and future, becomes a stage in a temporal process with necessary and discoverable relations to the rest of the process' (ibid: 161). I recognise Ollman is discussing dialectical thinking about social change, however, as a method of reasoning to dance is equally to interact with, and understand the necessary and discoverable relations I have with Butler. This investigation into non-essentialism is after all only made possible by Butler. To dance is a metaphor which, again from a reflective standpoint, aims to contribute to feminist theory not by silencing, but by appreciating and engaging those with whom I write.

This dance with Butler, the steps in the dance routine where I take a step back and Butler proceeds forward, will manifest itself most clearly when I discuss strategic essentialism. I may believe that Althusser as I understand him provides an exciting and non-essentialist theory of patriarchy and social reproduction. I may also believe that Butler's own theory of performativity commits the very essentialism she wishes to avoid, but that is not to say performativity is redundant and nor is the space for essentialism in feminist theory nullified. My brief examination into strategic essentialism, with its focus on utilisation of the signifier and Butler's theory of performativity as a case of strategic essentialism, will not only be a moment of Butler stepping forward in our dance, but a moment of feminist rather than normative heterosexual theorising – a significant occasion of making my PhD thesis on feminism a feminist PhD thesis.

For fear of taking the dance metaphor too far, I would like to make one final point, that I am a truly terrible dancer. I slip, trip, and make embarrassing mistakes (not least in front of other people). In the same way, I will make mistakes for the reader to bear, where the language I use occasionally reverts back to the exclusionary reasoning that has dictated my study of politics for so long. Reflexivity is not a license for one's limitations to go forward unchecked, but nor is it about overcoming one's subject positionality. Where I make mistakes, I invite the reader to point them out, to critique but also to see them as a mistake in what is otherwise a (ropey) dance routine.

What of Essentialism?

I have explained above that reflexivity in my research is in part about taking a less aggressive, masculine and antagonistic approach to Judith Butler. I do not want to emulate a rationale which suggests my application of Althusser to feminist theory requires the negation of another's contribution. At the same time, my thesis is a contribution to feminist theory within the theoretical paradigm of non-essentialism, and indeed I have explained above salient concerns with essentialism warranting this approach. Does that mean that I am claiming essentialism has no place in feminist theory nor our general understanding of subjectivity and social change? Insofar as reflexivity requires I adopt a more dialogical approach with Butler, surely so too does it require I do not assume essentialism is hereby nullified. My thesis is concerned with providing a new and interesting non-essentialist understanding of gender, patriarchy and social change; however, I want to frame my contribution within a recognition of at least one potential space that essentialism maintains in the form of 'strategic essentialism'.

In way introducing essentialism, consider the following excerpt from an interview with Gayatri Spivak:

I think it's absolutely on target to take a stand against the discourses of essentialism, universalism as it comes in terms of the universal-of classical German philosophy or the universal as the white upper class male...etc. But *strategically* we cannot (Spivak, 1990: 11)

Strategic essentialism here is poised as a simultaneous critique of essentialism, as theoretical deconstruction, and also a recognition of its political value for social and material change. In the specific context of feminism, Spivak goes on to say:

Anti-sexism [feminist critique] is reactive in the face of where we are thrown. I am sure you wouldn't agree that notions of feminism could in fact be located in terms of sexual difference understood as genital difference. That is a total reduction of feminism, but as anti-sexism is reactive, it seems to me that there one has to produce a reverse legitimisation of sexism itself (Spivak, 1990: 12)

Spivak's point here is that the discourses we wish to critique espouse an anatomic essentialism reducing the subject to an *a priori* signifier of the genital, and feminism is in part concerned with contesting such a reductive approach to the gendered subject. At the same time, feminism is a reaction, a product of a society which is organised according to such essential reduction. Spivak emphasises here that feminism should (at least in part) be about reversing the very sexist-essentialist reductionism not by way of appealing to an entirely different conceptual framework, but

by engaging and utilising the very essentialist significations which constitute us. To illustrate this point, it is short sighted to think we can critically engage with negative stereotypes of what it is to be a woman (based on essentialism) arguing that there is no such thing as the woman (non-essentialist). Such a method of critical engagement only serves to trivialise the very problematic experiences which arises from something ultimately discursive in nature. It is to commit the twiddling thumbs mentioned above, where the reality of those experiences are trivialised or rendered as unreal as the signifiers which caused them.

Stuart Hall captures my sentiment about appreciating the material effects of the signifier whilst at the same time critiquing those effects as socially contingent and non-essential:

What trail through history is more literally marked by blood and violence, by the genocide by the Middle Passage, the horrors of plantation servitude, and the hanging tree? A signifier, a discourse, yes, that is my argument (Hall, 1997: 368)

In the same way that sexual difference or race may ultimately be just signifiers, that does not mean that they are *merely* signifiers. A commitment to non-essentialism leaves the space for strategic essentialism precisely because what we see as discourses are constitutive of very real lives and experiences. Strategic essentialism is predicated on non-essentialism insofar as it utilises essentialism concepts for the purposes of galvanising social change, all the while recognising the socially constructed nature of those concepts in the first place.

An immediate concern with strategic essentialism is in focusing on galvanising groups around a signifier for social change, runs the risk of endorsing an essentialist notion of agency. Does the strategy of utilising essentialist concepts for the purposes of social change presume an *a priori* which is not bound by the limits of their constitution? It will become clear later that one of my criticisms of Butler is precisely the essentialist space she attributes to agency in the context of contesting typical gender performances. In the same way then, am I saying that strategic essentialism is simply incompatible with a non-essentialist contribution to feminism? In response to this point I want to return to Laclau and Mouffe's concern with authoritarianism in essentialism (Laclau and Mouffe, 204: 49). I posit firmly that my commitment to a more dialogical and open approach of theorisation would be completely undermined if I foreclosed the possibility that essentialism has anything to contribute to non-essentialist theory, not least in the form of strategic essentialism. Spivak herself accepts the contentions of drawing on strategic essentialism but this is more of an honest admission, like someone who puts their hands up and says "I did, and I would do it again":

One thing that comes out is that you jettison your own purity as a theorist. When you do this you can no longer say my theory is going to stand against anyone else's because in this sense the practice really norm the theory, because you are an essentialist from time to time. (source)

It is precisely this acceptance which means I am not essentialist in my approach to non-essentialist, at least insofar as I am not theoretically authoritarian in pursuing a 'pure' theoretical approach. It is my non-commitment to a rigid purity which is why my thesis is *towards* a non-essentialist theory of patriarchy.

In concluding this section I want to draw on an illustrative example which strategic essentialism can help us understand and one where a non-essentialist theorist should want to understand the sincerity of, rather than dogmatically force the example within its own rigid confines. In other words, I want to provide an example where strategic essentialism can help us understand, whereas once upon a time I would have tried to *explain away* through non-essentialism.

I would like the reader to consider to the song and music video of 'Love is a Battlefield' by Pat Benatar released in 1983. The music video entails a young woman (Pat Benatar) running away from home in what appears to be a family dispute. The young woman walks around the city presumably trying to find somewhere to work and live. Her endeavours are fruitless until she begins working as a dancer in a sleazy club for men. Whilst having a break from her shift, a fellow dancer is harassed by a one of the clientele, demanding he leave her alone. As the man pursues her, our heroine intervenes by pushing her fellow dancer behind her. What follows is a roughly a 30 second instrumental break in the song whereby all the women dancers join together in dance to intimidate the male harasser. The song finishes with the women dancing out into the street, with congratulating one another as dawn breaks and our heroine eventually sat on a coach assumingly on her way to start the new chapter in her life.

From a strategic essentialist perspective, the significant moment is when women come together in defence of one of their colleagues and intimidate the male client who forced himself upon her. It is striking that here we have a group of vulnerable women, all there for one reason or another, coming together at this point to protect one another. At no point is this a deconstructive scene, where women and men defined by genital sexual difference is contested. The connection between signifier (genital) and sign (woman/man) defining asymmetrical gendered discourses is not broken down but rather employed. The women are galvanising around the signifier, as it is only *women* who are dancing against the male harasser. Where a rigid non-essentialism historically may trivialise this moment by way of explaining it away, by way of identifying the women's movements as

predetermined, strategic essentialism recognises the bravery and significance of this example. In the music video the women have grouped together around their shared subjectivity, constituted in asymmetrical terms in relation to men, and in that grouping offer a subversive moment. Later in my thesis I will examine the notion of 'play' within the interpellative paradigms of our subjectivity. I will not explicitly draw on strategic essentialism but it strikes me that the relationship between strategic essentialism and interpellation warrants further research. I will contend for example that one's capacity to play and subvert is explained by material changes in the interpellative relations. Strategic essentialism is obviously important because where a non-essentialist approach may try to explain the conditions for social contestation, strategic essentialism clearly goes into detail about what that contestation looks like.

Given the concerns of my thesis as an endeavour to examine Althusser's contribution to feminism, my exegeses into strategic essentialism was always going to be limited. I do, however, want to emphasise the exciting opportunities it provides in the context of substantiating non-essentialist critiques into patriarchy and gender. Strategic essentialism offers a theoretical framework to examine synchronic moments of contestation, as in the case of 'Love is a Battlefield', and to do so in a way which respects the sincerity and significance of those moments. What follows will not be an exploration of strategic essentialism in the context of Althusser and a critique of gender and patriarchy. Nonetheless I hope the reader recognises an open mindedness of the author which may sometimes not be fully reflected in the analysis below. Where my endeavour is concerned with non-essentialism and Althusser's contribution to feminist thought, I want that endeavour to be framed from the outset as neither negating entirely the contribution of essentialism, nor failing to recognise the contributions strategic essentialism offers to those committed to non-essentialism. With that in mind, the remainder of this introductory section will outline the structure of my thesis to follow.

The Structure of my Thesis

Given that the project of my thesis is to provide an original non-essentialist theory of gender and the social reproduction of patriarchy by way of an accurate engagement with Althusser's oeuvre, I will adopt the following structure. In the first substantive chapter titled 'Althusser's Theory of Gender and Patriarchy', I will explain Althusser's non-essentialist theory of gender and the social reproduction of patriarchy by providing in depth textual analysis of his works. This chapter will be

divided into three sections. The first section titled 'Interpellation and Gender' will outline Althusser's theory of interpellation and social reproduction as it emerges in his primary texts *For Marx* (1969), *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (2006). This section will also explore interpellation as it emerges in more contemporary translations including *Freud and Lacan* (1964), *Psychoanalysis and the Human Sciences* (2016), culminating in a thorough engagement with *On the Reproduction of Capitalism* (2014). It is the translation of this final text which introduces important concepts for an application of Althusser's thought to feminist critique, the most pertinent being the introduction of "state ideology".

In section two of this chapter titled 'Patriarchy, Social Change and Agency', I will explain how Althusser's theory of gender and patriarchy outlined in the previous section adheres to the criteria constituting an adequate theory of gender and patriarchy set in this introduction. In this section, I will draw on a developing trend in Althusserian thought called 'aleatory materialism', but for my purposes I will focus on the non-essentialist presentation of agency and social change in *Machiavelli and Us* (2000) and *Politics and History* (2007). These are early works of Althusser and are often assigned to the periphery of his thought, but in the case of *Machiavelli and Us*, Emilio De Ípola (2018) claims that this text betrays an underlying focus on agency throughout Althusserian thought. I think this is true, but I want to emphasise that this is a non-essentialist notion of agency whereas De Ípola fails to appreciate the nuance of Althusser's notion of an agent. In addition, in this section I will examine *Notes on ISAs* (2014) which illustrates Althusser's non-essentialist theory of social change.

In the final section of this chapter titled 'Butler's Engagement with Althusser', I will outline Butler's understanding and engagement with Althusser, as she attempts to construct a performative theory of gender. The purpose of this section is to provide in-depth analysis of Butler's engagement with Althusser, outlining the extent to which she draws on Althusser's theory of interpellation to create her own theory of performativity. This engagement occurs throughout Butler's works, but is prominent in: *Bodies That Matter* (2011: xvii, 81-82, 143, 171), *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997a: 106-131) and *Excitable Speech* (1997b: 24-41). Althusser is continuously directly or indirectly evoked as she develops her theory of performativity, but hers is an unfaithful evocation. Butler uses Althusser, but in so doing she never thoroughly engages with the non-essentialist components of his thought. This is apparent predominantly in her discussion of interpellation, which is completely void of the concept 'Authoritative Subject', a concept that I will explain is central to Althusser's non-essentialism.

By foregrounding an exploration of Butler's engagement with Althusser after a section which explicates Althusser's theory of gender and patriarchy, this section will be adequately positioned to criticise that engagement. The point that will be made is that Butler's theory of performativity develops precisely from the errors in Butler's engagement with his thought. Butler's construal of Althusser misses key dimensions to his thought and as she uses him as a platform for a performative theory of gender, which as I will argue ultimately suffers from the very essentialism she sought to avoid. Were Butler to have made Althusser more central to her analysis rather than a starting point for that analysis, the essentialism that creeps in could have been avoided. This will occupy the discussion in the next chapter, but the purpose of this final section is to explicate how Althusser features in Butler's thought and the degree to which her engagement with Althusser is insufficient.

The previous chapter outlined Althusser's theory of gender and patriarchy, the specific developments that emerge in his thought throughout his texts and critically engages with Butler's use of Althusser to substantiate her own theory of gender. The present chapter will discuss Butler's theory of Gender. In the first section of this chapter titled 'Butler and Performativity', I explicitly outline Butler's theory of performativity with reference to her key works, explaining how performativity satisfies the criteria necessary for a satisfactory feminist analysis. In the second section of this chapter titled 'Performativity and Essentialism', I outline the essentialist, rather than non-essentialist underpinnings of Butler's theory of gender. Butler's theory of gender adequately conceptualises social change and agency whilst avoiding the problem of twiddling thumbs, but it is not an adequately *non-essentialist* theory of gender as she hoped it would be.

With the Althusserian and Butlerian theories of gender explained and their respective commitments to non-essentialism explored, the final chapter of this thesis, 'The Case of Herculine Barbin', will draw direct comparisons between Butler's and Althusser's theory of gender and their respective attempts to pursue non-essentialism. In the first section titled 'Barbin through Butler's and Althusser's Eyes', I will explain the differences between the two theories of gender with reference to Herculine Barbin's memoirs (Foucault, 1980). To do so, I will provide a Butlerian and Althusserian reading of the experiences of Herculine Barbin, a 19th Century French hermaphrodite. In the second section of this final chapter, 'Barbin, Essentialism and Non-Essentialism', I will demonstrate why the Althusserian reading better accommodates the non-essentialist overtones of Barbin's autobiography. In addition, I will demonstrate why a Butlerian reading of agency, when applied to Barbin's story, betrays an essentialism and by extension a notion of control over who we are, which simply does not correspond to Barbin's autobiography. Althusser never discussed Barbin's memoirs,

nor is it clear he was ever aware of them. They nonetheless exemplify the possibilities for the provision of a truly non-essentialist theory of gender and patriarchy.

Chapter 2 Althusser's Theory of Gender and Patriarchy

This chapter seeks to explain Althusser's non-essentialist theory of gender and the social reproduction of patriarchy. It is an exercise in providing the best possible Althusser for an analysis of gender and patriarchy which develops from a close reading of Althusser's oeuvre. In other words this chapter is about making Althusserian thought the framework for an analysis of gender and patriarchy. I do not, however, want to give the illusion that Althusser's thought on subjectivity and social reproduction has remained uniform throughout his deliberations on these topics. As will be clear, Althusser always remains committed to non-essentialism, but recent translations of some of his works into English have the capacity to amend Althusserian notions of subjectivity and social reproduction. At times these texts introduce new concepts that develop certain ideas about subjectivity or society hitherto underdeveloped English speakers interested in Althusser. They provide an opportunity for researchers in Althusserian thought but simultaneously deliver a warning. Althusser's thought is not homogenous, nor is my ideal Althusser a definitive interpretation of his ideas and oeuvre and no doubt future translations will warrant further examination.

In the first section of this chapter, I focus specifically on the question of what Althusser's theory of gender and the social reproduction of patriarchy looks like. I will then move on to the second section, which demonstrates how such a theory accommodates the criteria set out in my introduction for what constitutes an adequate theory of gender and patriarchy. This section will also entail a defence of Althusser against primary criticisms levelled against him. In the final section, I will directly address Butler's engagement with Althusser. In this section, I will outline what I believe to be Butler's failure to sufficiently explicate and draw on the non-essentialist components of Althusser's thought. In doing so, Butler violates the very non-essentialism that provides the theoretical motivation for her theory of performativity. This will lead me into my next chapter where I address Butler's theory of performativity.

As most expositions of a person's thought are introduced by some biographical information, I feel compelled to do the same. Yet to choose what biographical details to include in a thesis about Althusser's thought is a difficult endeavour, not least because his autobiography *The Future Lasts Forever* (1992) is full of fascinating details relating to the life of a man troubled by mental illness. No doubt in many ways Althusser's life exemplifies certain themes which run through the body of his ideas. The Catholicism of Althusser's teachers is reflected in the expressively Catholic examples he employs to communicate his theory of subject formation (Althusser, 1992: 91-97). Equally the importance he applies to the family in the context of subject formation reflects aversion to his own

family, stating how thankful he was that to be a prisoner of war afforded him space from the ‘most *frightful, appalling, and horrifying of all ideological State apparatuses*’ (Althusser, 1992: 104 Emphasis in the original). As interesting as these and many other details are, they are irrelevant to my purposes in this thesis. Rather, the kind of Althusser I aim to illustrate below is one concerned firstly with explaining social change, and secondly concerned with explaining social stasis. My argument below is that despite changes in Althusser’s focus, his earlier concerns with social stasis remain the backdrop of his analysis throughout his life. In making this argument the point I want to focus on here is that Althusser’s ideas and the development of those ideas can be accurately disaggregated into an Althusser-before-Lacan and an Althusser-after-Lacan. By this I mean that the Althusser concerned with explaining social change emerged prior to his exposure and eventual academic relationship with the Psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, and the Althusser concerned with social stasis developed after his engagement with Lacan.

In *Politics and History* published in 1959, Althusser’s primary concern was with identifying social formations as characterised by contradictions, and those contradictions resulting in social change ‘it is precisely *this contradiction in the relation, i.e. the existing contradictory relation*, that decides the fate of the republic: it will perish’ (Althusser, 2007: 49. Emphasis in the original). Althusser’s focus here is on developing a theory of contradiction and social change in the context of social analysis. In 1962 Althusser began examining Machiavelli and the potential contributions Machiavelli’s Prince may have in the context of a social theory of contradiction (Matheron, 2000: vii). The result of these and later deliberations on Machiavelli were published under the title *Machiavelli and Us* (2000) but this period around 1962 marks the end of what I have crudely described as Althusser-before-Lacan, given that Lacan is completely absent from both important texts. Lacan’s theoretical absence in this period is even more important given that by 1959 Althusser was clearly aware of his ideas, introducing his students to Lacan’s contribution to psychoanalysis at the time (Montag, 2013: 118). Lacan’s absence then is more telling as it suggests Althusser had not incorporated the ideas of Lacan, or deemed them relevant to his examination of social change.

By 1963 however we witness a turn in Althusser’s focus and at the same time the inauguration of the period I have named Althusser-after-Lacan. By 1963 Lacan had been effectively expelled the Société Française de Psychanalyse as a training analyst. That same year Althusser gave two lectures titled ‘The Place of Psychoanalysis in the Human Sciences’ and ‘Psychoanalysis and Psychology’ In the first lecture Althusser explains that Lacan conceptually redefines Psychoanalysis within what we would call a structuralist framework and by extension renders it applicable for a critical examination of society, and in the second lecture he explicates in detail the essentialist underpinnings of

psychology compared to the non-essentialist nature of Lacanian psychoanalysis (Althusser, 2016). Still in 1963 we witness the beginning of a correspondence lasting 6 years between Althusser and Lacan (Althusser, 1996:147-173). In 1964 Althusser published *Freud and Lacan* and in the same year intervened to get the now unemployed Lacan a teaching post at École Normale Supérieure (Corepet and Matheron, 1996: 2). What follows is a series of important publications which signifies Althusser's turn away from social change to social stasis, focusing in particular on the subject. Some of these explicitly discuss Lacan, as in the case of 'Three Notes on a Theory of Discourse' (1966a: 60-61) and *Reading Capital* (1972) originally published in 1965 (1972: 53). In other cases Lacan's influence is equally vivid even when he has not been explicitly mentioned, as will be demonstrated below in the case of Althusser's famous paper *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (1970, 2006).

Why have I chosen to delineate Althusser's intellectual development according to these rough categories Althusser-before-Lacan and Althusser-after-Lacan? The simple reason is because Lacan provides Althusser with the theoretical tools to develop his own theory of the subject (Montag, 2013: 125). As Ricoeur explains, 'Althusser's claim about the illusory nature of what constitutes us as subjects is based on the Lacanian notion of the mirror-structure of the imagination' (Ricoeur, 1994: 64).¹² Lacan belongs to what Howard describes as the an early generation poststructuralist whose contribution to poststructuralism comes in the form of 'employing structural linguistics' in the context of 'questions of subjectivity and truth' (Howard, 2013: 13-14), thereby developing structural methods for analysing social phenomenon. The precise manner in which Lacan does so will be explicated in the following section but a point I wish to emphasise now, and reiterate throughout this section, is that these two Althusser's - the one concerned with social change and the one concerned with social stasis - are not diametrically opposed. 1963-64 may mark a crucial period of change in Althusser's focus of analysis but I believe that change is fundamentally one of building on an analysis of social contradiction. An analysis of social contradiction necessarily requires an appreciation for the mechanisms of social stasis, an appreciation for how the subject comes to be. In other words, Althusser's examination of social stasis is always only in the service of understanding how social formations can change.

¹² For the purposes of this discussion, Lacan's mirror-stage is about a child's initial sense of self entirely originating from something external, in this case the reflection from the mirror. Where the child was previously an unsignified ensemble of body parts, the reflection of the mirror unites those body parts into a child from which the child's sense of as a human being is constituted (Lacan, 2006: 79). A helpful explanation of the mirror-stage and the specifically external source of subjectivity can be found in Wright's *Psychoanalytic Criticism* (Wright, 1987: 120)

2.1 Interpellation and Gender

What would Althusser have to say about gender were it a predominant object of his analysis? How would Althusser understand patriarchal society and the mechanisms of its reproduction? These are the questions upon which this section will focus, by analysing ideas developed in *For Marx* (1969), *Reading Capital* (1972), *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (2006), *Freud and Lacan* (1964) and *Psychoanalysis and the Human Sciences* (2016). The latter part of this section will explore the contributions made to Althusserian thought on the topics of (gendered) subjectivity and social reproduction in light of the recent translation of *On the Reproduction of Capitalism* (2014). Formerly a set of unpublished manuscripts from which Althusser's famous *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* originate, the manuscripts were written 1968-1970 in Paris, in the midst of the student riots which characterised Paris at that time (Balibar, 2014: ix). *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* was first published in 1970 when the political instability had substantially calmed, but as Bidet writes in '[t]he spirit of 1968 runs through the entire text, that of a May that was as much the workers' as the students', a May that witnessed the biggest strike in French history' (Bidet, 2014: xx). For that reason, the manuscripts depict (albeit briefly) an uncharacteristically optimistic Althusser, an optimism revolving around the possibility of social change. The theorisation of social change found within *On the Reproduction of Capitalism* provides an opportunity to construct an Althusserian contribution to feminism, a contribution made possible precisely because of these new texts previously inaccessible to English speakers.

Subjectivity

Turning to the first question: to understand how Althusser would conceptualise gender, we need to start with how he understands subjectivity, because to be gendered is, in Althusserian thought, to be a gendered *subject*.¹³ From as early as 1965 with the original French publication of *For Marx* (translated into English in 1969), Althusser situates his understanding of the subject in opposition to the essentialist perspective outlined in my introduction. He describes Marx's (and thus his own) perspective as one of '*theoretical anti-humanism*', writing that '[i]t is impossible to *know* anything about men except on the absolute precondition that the philosophical (theoretical) myth of man is reduced to ashes' (Althusser, 1969: 229, emphasis in the original). By anti-humanism, I believe

¹³ In the sense that subjectivity has been explained in my introduction.

Althusser means non-essentialism as explained in my introduction, where humanism simply denotes essentialism taken to its logical extreme in a bid to universalise certain essential concepts of what it is to be a person. I do not for that reason attribute much importance to the emphasis on humanism, as the concept can come to mean a lot more than what he meant by it. In addition, one will note in the same text that Althusser describes the essentialist perspective as an example of 'ideology' or an 'idealist illusion' (Althusser, 1969: 230). I do not want to confuse concepts at this early stage but it is clear in his earlier writings, namely those which come before *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (1970/ 2006), for example *For Marx* (1969: 11, 13-14, 124-125) and *Reading Capital* (1972: 16-17, 31-34, 60-61) that 'ideology' is a set of false beliefs and narratives. This is notably not true for some of his unpublished works, as in the case of *Three Notes on the Theory of Discourse* (1966a: 51-53) or *Letters to D* (1966b: 71). I will return to this later but the ambiguity surrounding Althusser's use of the concept needs to be appreciated from the outset.

To return to his opposition to essentialism, as Smith explains, this manifests itself in the endorsement of precisely the kind of non-essentialist theory of subjectivity that I outlined in my introduction:

By antihumanism Althusser means that the self, the human subject, does not so much constitute but is constituted by the structural relationships in which it finds itself. It is the belief not that men make their own history but that history makes man or rather that history makes itself that is at the core of this professed antihumanism (Smith, 1984: 529)

Althusser's rejection of essentialism is here manifest in his belief that consciousness, 'the subject', is constituted by a series of relationships. Subjects are constituted by the society in which they exist and historical changes in society induce changes to the subject. The constituted rather than the constitutive nature of subjectivity, framed within non-essentialism as I understand it, emerges in the specific employment of the 'unconscious' in the final essay 'Marxism and Humanism' in *For Marx*:

So ideology is not an aberration or a contingent excrescence of History: it is a structure essential to the historical life of societies...It is customary to suggest that ideology belongs to the region of 'consciousness'. We must not be misled by this appellation which is still contaminated by the idealist problematic that preceded Marx. In truth, ideology has very little to do with 'consciousness'... It is profoundly unconscious. (Althusser, 1969: 232-233).

The context with which Althusser employs the term ideology clearly means something different to merely 'false ideas' mentioned above. In the quotation above ideology occupies the place of a referent or set of ideas from which consciousness and self-awareness are constituted. Althusser's

specific description of ideology as a 'structure' denotes a structure of norms and ideas from which consciousness emerges. Consciousness is the effect of or constituted by that structure, indistinguishable from that structure insofar as it consists in an ensemble of social relations. Althusser situates ideology at the level of the unconscious, emphasising that ideology is not something done to or imposed on a pre-existing consciousness but provides the background conditions of consciousness. Althusser emphasises that 'ideology has very little to do with 'consciousness'', arguing that we cannot meaningfully distinguish between ideology (notions of race, sex, class, etc.) and consciousness. To be conscious is always to be a gendered-, sex- or class-conscious individual, and to be a subject is always to be a gendered, sexed or class subject. To that end any distinction between sex and gender on the grounds of what is biological and what is socially constructed is not invoked here. Both are social phenomena and where a distinction between sex and gender exists is with respects to how they contribute to subjectivity. This will be explained in my discussion of metonymy and metaphor in Althusser's thought.

Althusser's understanding of subjectivity is clearly a non-essentialist subject in the sense that I have already established in my introduction. The self cannot be understood in isolation of the society within which the subject is constituted. Before proceeding to emphasising *how* subjectivity comes to be – that is to say, to outline the specific mechanism of subjectification Althusser develops – it is necessary that I explain *Trager* subjectivity and overdetermination (*Trager* or *Träger* hereafter). If we recall the quotation above, Smith (1984) claimed Althusser situates the subject as the effect of historical changes in social relations rather than its cause. As the culmination of social relations and their contradictions, society changes throughout history, begetting changes in social, political and economic relations and activities. Given that the subject as a conscious being cannot be disassociated from the societal norms and ideas that belong to that society, Althusser wants to avoid any notion of agency which portrays the subject as anything other than the derivate of that society. We act in a way that reflects society, its contradictions and struggles, a concept perfectly captured in Althusser's use of *trager*. Althusser's concept of *trager* results from the desire to situate the subject as constituted by rather than constitutive of society. *Trager* finds its first and most developed appearance in *Reading Capital*, a text which resulted from a series of seminars led by Althusser during 1964-65 dedicated to re-reading Marx's *Capital* (Balibar, 2015: 2):¹⁴

¹⁴ The version of *Reading Capital* which was translated into foreign languages is the second abridged version. For the first time in 2015, the original version of *Reading Capital* was translated with contributions by three other authors who were removed, at Althusser's suggestion, in the second edition (Balibar, 2015: 6). The unabridged version, albeit important, does not fundamentally change any theoretical content utilised in my

Capital gives us the principles necessary for the posing of this problem [of the role of the individual in history]. It defines for the capitalist mode of production the different forms of individuality required and produced by that mode according to functions, of which the individuals are 'supports' (*Träger*), in the division of labour, in the different 'levels' of the structure (Althusser and Balibar, 1972: 112).

Althusser is insistent on avoiding any notion of the subject which could separate consciousness from the society that subject belongs. Concepts of social change and the agency of the subject influencing that change run the risk of re-centring the subject, rendering the subject constitutive rather than constituted. Althusser therefore presents the subject as *Träger*, as a support of the society to which they belong. We are constituted in a historically specific society with historically specific social, political and economic roles and activities. Althusser assumes, for now, that the norms and ideas of society correspond to or complement the roles and activities of society. Ideology corresponds to society's roles and activities. In other words, in keeping with the claim that the subject is derivative of society, the subject is solely a support of the synchronic demands of society at any given time. To take a crude example: a society organised around feudal politics and economics differentiates between lords and serfs with corresponding economic and political activities. The subject is formed by properties of class, race, sexuality and gender in accordance with the specific demands of society and, as such, the self emerges with a consciousness skewed to adhere to Feudal society's demands. Althusser assumes the subject is inherently reproductive insofar as they reproduce in their consciousness, through their subsequent actions, the synchronic demands of the society that constitute them. Subjects are always *Träger*.

Subjectivity and Structure

I have established that to be a *Träger* is to support the society that constitutes the subject in the first place. I also mentioned that to be a subject is to be a sexed, gendered, racial and a classed subject and, by extension, these multiple subjectivities support the society in which that subject is formed. The concept of overdetermination is born out of a discussion of what it is to describe an object of analysis as a structure, and the recognition that *Träger* comprises multiple subjectivities which shape (structure) it. To describe one's object of analysis as a structure is to argue that the object immediately perceived is an effect of a combination of causes, each worthy of analysis on their own. Assiter explains this with reference to a table (Assiter, 1984: 283): according to an Althusserian-

thesis. Given that it was the later abridged version where certain concepts like *Träger* emerged for the first time for English speaking readers, I will use this version in my explication of those concepts.

structural understanding of a table, a table is the effect of a particular combination of legs and a top. If these component parts change, this yields a change in the combination of causes, yielding an alteration in the table. If certain component parts of the table change drastically, this could cause a fundamental change rather than alteration in the table. This is what Althusser means in *Reading Capital* when he discusses the *index of efficacy*, the idea that we can identify and index each component part in terms of their relative importance to the structured totality we observe— for example, the table – at that given time (Althusser and Balibar, 1972: 99). Furthermore, in keeping with the idea that these composite parts of a structured totality warrant analysis of their own, Althusser claims these are structures or phenomena with their own histories (a table leg after all has its own molecular structure and process of production which formed it) (Althusser, 1969: 101).

Overdetermination is a central concept behind Althusser's elaboration of structural phenomenon, and can be applied to Althusser's concept of the subject when we recognise that the subject is shaped or constituted by various subjectivities (gender, race, sex, class). Multiple subjectivities constitute the subject as we are never just a classed or a gender, but class *and* gendered subjects simultaneously. Although Althusser did not initially describe the subject as structurally overdetermined, it is clear he envisaged this to be the case (Smith, 1984: 532). English speakers would have to wait until 2003 to gain explicit verification from Althusser that he conceived the subject to be an overdetermined structured object of analysis, with the translation of his 1966 lecture 'The Philosophical Conjuncture and Marxist Theoretical Research'. The first draft contextualises the structural analysis of society and frames the subject within that analysis:

[t]he person who is addressing you is, like all the rest of us, merely a particular structural effect of this conjuncture, an effect that, like each and every one of us has a proper name. The theoretical conjuncture that dominates us has produced an Althusser-effect, as it has produced a Rancière-effect, a Balibar-effect, a Macherey-effect, an Establet-effect, a Bettelheim-effect, and so on (Althusser, 1966c: 17).

The subject is a 'structural-effect' which we now know to be synonymous with overdetermination as a structure is always a structure of composite parts. Althusser is an Althusser-effect, a combination, a structure of different subjectivities from within which the subject is formed. Furthermore, in keeping with the concept of index of efficacy, clearly certain subjectivities are more important to the structure of the subject than others. For example my middle classness, is more important than my religion and less important than my gender in understanding myself. When conceptualised in the context of subjectivity – for example, race or gender – the idea that these are structures with their own histories is more obvious than in the case of the table with its composite legs and top. Gender,

religion, race are not static concepts but change over time. Their respective prominence (dominance) with respect to who we are (index of effectivity) changes as they develop. That, prior to capitalism, Althusser identified churches and their corresponding religious properties as the dominant component of the subject, implies that religious subjectivity was once dominant in the structure of the overdetermined self (Althusser, 2006: 103). This has obviously changed as western societies have become increasingly secular.

Perhaps the most sophisticated account of the overdetermined subject is outlined in *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*. In his discussion of 'Little Louis', found in the chapter 'On Ideology' which never made it in the original publication of *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, English speakers are given for the first time a definitive account of the overdetermined subject. Here Althusser describes the subject as a structure comprising various different subjectivities, all of which rest on the familial subject:

When religious ideology begins to function directly by interpellating the little child Louis as a subject, little Louis is already-subject- not yet religious-subject, but familial-subject. When legal ideology (later, let us suppose) begins to interpellate little Louis by talking to him about, not Mama and Papa now, or God and the little Lord Jesus, but Justice, he was already a subject, familial, religious, scholastic, and so on (Althusser, 2014: 193)

The specifically central position Althusser affords the familial subject, I believe, indicates the scope for introducing discussions of gender to the structure of the subject. I will argue later in this section that our various subjectivities all rest on top of the sense of self constituted within the family is an acknowledgment of gender's importance. It is after all the family ISA which genders us. Despite Althusser's focus on capitalism and its class orientated structure, it is obvious that his non-essentialist theory of the subject not only facilitates but encourages analysis of the subject through a structuralist framework, not least because he identifies gender (the familial subject) as a primary structure of subjectivity. I will return to the excerpt on Little Louis later in this section, but for now I have explained what Althusser means when he discusses the subject. I will now turn to *how* subjectivity is formed, paying attention to the importance Althusser invests in gender.

Interpellating Subjects

With Althusser's concept of the subject developed, I can now turn to explicate Althusser's understanding of the subject's constitution. This is particularly pertinent in a non-essentialist context where the subject is an effect of society, that is, the subject is constituted by the social rather than constitutive of the social. It is here we are introduced to the concept of interpellation, but before turning to *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* which famously introduced the concept, a thorough introduction begins with *Reading Capital* originally five years prior in 1965: Consider the discussion of the 'authorless theatre' introduced in *Reading Capital*:

the mode of the stage direction...of the theatre which is simultaneously its own stage, its own script, its own actors, the theatre whose spectators can, on occasion, be spectators only because they are first of all forced to be its actors, caught by the constraints of a script and parts whose authors they cannot be, since it is in essence an *authorless theatre* (Althusser and Balibar, 1972: 193. emphasis in the original).

This quotation introduces us to interpellation: the process of subjectification. The subject is an actor with a script but unlike the traditional theatre dynamic, this is no distinction between the actor and the script they perform. Rather, the subject is formed by a script they did not write, the performance of which constitutes their very existence. The actor is 'forced' to act out that script, 'caught' to the extent they are formed within the imperatives of the script. We are actors but the concept should not betray a distinction between the person and the role they perform at that time. That role is constitutive of the person performing it and our ability to spectate is made possible only by first being an actor of a script we did not write, 'whose authors [we] cannot be'.¹⁵ Althusser asks us to take the metaphor of machinery literally, with its connotations of what Macherey helpfully describes as automation or 'automatism', to illustrate the subject who is automatically an actor of a script they did not write (Macherey and Bundy, 2013: 17). We perform this script automatically and, through that performing of the script, we articulate in our actions the demands of the society to which we belong.¹⁶ Thus, our very terms of becoming subjects is automatically a case of being *Träger*. The contents of that script are, in-keeping with what has been said above, structured in dominance with

¹⁵ I will refer back to this point later as it underscores Althusser's non-essentialist theory of agency as agency from within the performance of a pre-existing script.

¹⁶ Indeed we have to perform what is proscribed in the script automatically for to say otherwise would imply a distinction between the subject who is not at the same time a subjected to the script which constitutes them. To reiterate a point I made in the introduction, non-essentialism believes the subject is always a subjected subject, subjected to that which constitutes them. Automation therefore captures Althusser's non-essentialist depiction of the subject and the script that is ideology.

certain subjectivities obtaining a more central position than others. For example, to say gender is dominant would be to say that in comparison to race and class, gender is the most important for understanding who we are and indeed may disproportionately affect change in how race and class informs our sense of self. Following the structure of the subject outlined in Althusser's description of 'Little Louis', I will argue that gender is a dominant dimension of subjectivity. Gender is a dominant theme in the script that makes us who we are insofar as Gender is the first and underlying theme constituting our sense of self, upon which all others rest. The question remains, however, how does the contents of the authorless script form the subject? How does the script, containing within it myriad dictates, norms and demands, come to constitute the subject? Althusser would not answer this publicly until 1970 with the original publication of *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*.

Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses explains the connection between the authorless script and the subject formed by stating that the script 'interpellates' individuals into subjects. Althusser begins his introduction of interpellation in the context of a discussion about ideology, writing that:

In order to grasp what follows, it is essential to realize that both he who is writing these lines and the reader who reads them are themselves subjects, and therefore ideological subjects (a tautological proposition), i.e. that the author and the reader of these lines both live 'spontaneously' or 'naturally' in ideology (Althusser, 2006: 116).

Drawing on the tones of automatism found in *Reading Capital*, Althusser suggests that to be a subject is to be an 'ideological subject' to the extent that the phrase is tautological or automatic. We are subjects and by extension socially constructed subjects directed towards the demands of society. It is those ideas about the self and their subsequent demands, found within the script which are encapsulated in the concept 'ideology'. Ideology, far from a set of false ideas, is a set of ideas constitutive of the subject: '*all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects, by the functioning of the category of the subject*' (ibid: 117, emphasis in original). It would be incorrect to say that this authorless script is communicated to the subject as this presumes a subject prior to the communication. Rather, the subject is formed in the very act of interpellation. In the same text, Althusser exemplifies interpellation in the example of a policeman hailing an individual on a sidewalk:

I shall then suggest that ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called interpellation or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there!' (Althusser, 2006: 118)

Interpellation as depicted here is a verbal utterance between one individual, the policeman, and the individual that the policeman hails. The hailed individual gains their sense of self, their subjectivity from the hail of the policeman. In truth, this illustration is not perfect. Althusser admits as much immediately afterwards when he writes that the policeman example insinuates a sense of temporal causality which assumes the existence of an 'individual' on the sidewalk prior to the policeman's hail: 'in reality these things happen without any succession. The existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing' (Althusser, 2006: 118). The subject is always an interpellated subject which is another way of saying that the subject is always a subject constituted by society's demands, a subject constituted by ideology: the ideological subject.

Despite the potential confusion surrounding temporal succession (which could betray an essentialist subject), Althusser's policeman example is helpful for introducing the concept of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) and his theory of interpellation to which the ISAs belong. The authorless script does not form subjects through interpellation in a vacuum, but rather in identifiable sets of institutions and organisations called ISAs. In the same paper Althusser provides a list of these different ISAs: religious, educational, familial, legal, political, trade union, communications and cultural (ibid: 96). The policeman example is helpful firstly because it demonstrates to us a key component of the ISAs, namely, that ISAs contain Authoritative or Absolute subjects through whom the script interpellates the subject:

It is convenient to designate this new and remarkable Subject by writing Subject with a capital S to distinguish it from ordinary subjects, with a small s. It then emerges that the interpellation of individuals as subjects presupposes the 'existence' of a Unique and central Other Subject, in whose Name...ideology interpellates all individuals as subjects (ibid: 121).

Each ISA has within it an Authoritative or Absolute Subject (Authoritative hereafter), particular to the ISA in question: the priest in the religious ISA, cultural icons or celebrities in the cultural ISA, our parents in the familial ISA, to take just a few examples. That Althusser chooses to introduce interpellation with the example of the policeman illustrates two further points: firstly that the Authoritative Subject is historically and socially relative (a celebrity in one period may not be in a position to interpellate during a later period), and secondly that the subject constituted is in some sense subordinate to the Authoritative Subject. The subject is subjected to, or subordinate to the demands of the script articulated in the Authoritative Subject's hail, and in that subordination is the subject exists. The specific form of the Authoritative Subject varies and is specific to the ISA in question. In the final section of Althusser's paper on ISAs, he moves away from the policeman example to examine interpellation in the religious ISAs. Here, Althusser identifies the biblical

experience of Peter's interaction with God, the Authoritative Subject '*par excellence*' and the subsequent constitution of Peter within the demands of what it is to be a Christian (Althusser, 2006: 120-121. Emphasis in the original). Clearly the priest occupies God's position as an Authoritative Subject, but so too do the bible, the crucifix and the religious insignia decorating the church, contribute to the interpellation of the Christian subject. Following this observation, if we broaden the scope of what can be understood to be an Authoritative Subject, we widen for the purposes of analysis what counts as the constitutive hail (rather than merely the verbal utterance of the policeman). Afterall the deaf are still subjects formed within interpellative relations. Clearly then, the hail need not be audible but visual (or possibly tactile). Although I will draw specifically on the verbal, this is still a point which warrants recognition.

The policeman example is additionally helpful because it immediately broadens the scope of ISAs beyond the initial confines of institutions and organisations. The policeman interpellates the subject on the sidewalk and the sidewalk does not clearly belong to any particular ISA. By broadening the scope of the ISAs Althusser believes we are '*always-already subjects*' and, furthermore, the script of which we are all actors has no boundaries, or Althusser also writes '*ideology has no outside*' (Althusser, 2006: 119). The role of the policeman in this example is additionally helpful because it demonstrates the significant influence of Lacan on Althusser. Lacan equally believes the subject is constituted by something external to the subject formed, in his case exemplified in the child recognising themselves in the reflection of a mirror, or what he would describe as the mirror-Stage. (Lacan, 2006: 79). The child's sense of self is an effect of the mirror in the same way subjectivity is the effect of the policeman's hail. This is what Lacan means by the concept 'gestalt', an effect of the 'imago' originated from the mirror (ibid: 79). Additionally Lacan emphasises the non-essentialist implications of the mirror-stage when he describes the depiction of the 'ego' (consciousness) 'prior to its social determination' as a fiction (ibid: 79). By positing the ego as an effect of social determination, Lacan's early formulation of the subject is clearly employed by Althusser when he introduces interpellation.¹⁷

A final point that I want to raise is the materiality of the script or, as conceptualised in *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, the materiality of ideology. Althusser explains that this authorless script, what he would later conceptualise as ideology, has no existence independent from its material articulation. To suggest that ideology, as the set of norms and ideas which form the subject,

¹⁷ Lacan would later replace the mirror and gestalt for the 'Symbolic Law' and the 'Imaginary Subject' (Grosz, 2005: 47). They function the same way in that the Imaginary consciousness is the effect of the Symbolic norms and ideas defining social determination. Consciousness is always constituted from the Symbolic.

is independent from its material articulation in the various verbal utterances of the Authoritative Subject would be to commit a form of idealism (Althusser, 2006: 112). The script we enact does not exist independently from the interpellative relations between the subject subordinate (subjected) to the Authoritative Subject but rather exists solely in those relations. This is an important point because what this suggests is that the various subjectivities providing our sense of self are not facts about the world which we come to realise, but are dependent on the material composite of ISAs and their resident Authoritative Subjects. Our sense of self is inevitable only insofar as it is entirely dependent on the synchronic structure of ISAs and for that reason could be different under different synchronic conditions. The materiality of the script, of ideology as located in the materiality of the interpellative relations, will prove to be an important aspect of Althusser's theory of social change. That said, by virtue of emphasising the materiality of ideology in the same text which presents interpellation as a verbal phenomenon, I believe Althusser links discourse to the material in a way that Laclau and Mouffe's Discourse Theory (2014) and Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (2016) does not, and which has only recently been articulated in the contemporary works of Beetz and Schwab (2018).¹⁸

In Discourse Theory, introduced in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, (originally published 1985, 2014) Laclau and Mouffe subsume material reality into discursive reality, denying any notion of the material which is not already discursive (2014: 93). The material world outside the sphere of discourse, the sphere within which meaning is constructed, contested and communicated is rendered analytically unimportant. Language use, one of the predominant modes of discourse (in this case verbal but equally written) is prioritised and therefore Laclau and Mouffe would focus solely on the hail between the policeman and the subject formed.¹⁹ Fairclough's *Discourse and Social Change* (2016) is equally concerned with outlining the relationship between discourse and the material identified in Laclau and Mouffe. Fairclough insists on a division between discourse (again with its predominant manifestation in verbal language use) and 'material' 'preconstituted reality' (2016: 60). Here the opposite relation between discourse and the material obtains, where Fairclough

¹⁸ It is possible that the interplay between ideology and the material for which I am advocating situates my analysis within the 'new materialist' paradigm outlined by Howard, which seeks to 'give materiality its due' by alerting 'to the myriad ways in which matter is both self-constituting and invested with- and reconfigured by- intersubjective interventions that have their own quotient of materiality' (2013: 110). What is meant here is that new materialism seeks to identify and explain the multitude of ways changes in the material world around us affects change at the subjective level. To return to my discussion of the *camera obscura*, analysis needs to focus on the ways material changes in society affect the camera constituting the subject and their subjectivity, and not just focus on the camera itself.

¹⁹ As opposed to discourse manifest television (Morley, 1995), fashion (Behnke, 2017), mythology (Barthes, 2009).

insists on their analytical and conceptual differences and instead focuses on the degree to which they 'interact' and affect one another. In the case of the policeman, the hail and the policeman are separated from one another and have the capacity to change one another. Althusser, in contradistinction to both Laclau and Mouffe and Fairclough, theoretically merges the material and the discursive, in this case the verbal, into one without rendering either dimension analytically meaningless.

The policeman example situates the verbal utterance within a specific material ISA with a specific material Authoritative Subject.²⁰ The script/ideology (synonymous with discourse) is distinguishable from the interpellative relation insofar as we can say the content of that script contains certain notions of class, race and gender, but the contents of the script are bound up with the materiality of the Authoritative Subject and the ISA. The verbal utterance as the archetypal example of discourse forms the subject, but its existence is entirely dependent on the material. This contests the assumption of the material within the discursive witnessed in Discourse Theory and contests the separateness of discourse from the material in Critical Discourse Analysis. Althusser's analysis admits that the script exists, but determinacy is afforded to the material as it is only through the material that the script exists. Althusser's emphasis on materiality anticipates the contemporary calls to '[highlight] the materiality of discourse and the entanglement of matter and meaning' (Beetz and Schwab, 2018: xv), linking the content of the ideological/discursive utterance to the structural form of its articulation. In other words, analysis of what is spoken must assume primacy of the material conditions of that which is said.²¹

For the remainder of my thesis I will be treating ideology and discourse as synonyms despite a historical tendency to contrast the two concepts. For example Foucault treats ideology as an archaic

²⁰ One may wish to distinguish between the Authoritative Subject and the tools utilised by that Subject within the interpellative relation. The baton held by the policeman, the blackboard used by the teacher, and the painting in the church are key examples. Of course material developments in these instruments will have implications for the interpellative relation and the subjects constituted thereby. That said this line of enquiry will not be pursued here, but ought to attract analysis from those interested in the area.

²¹ The concept of articulation which developed in Stuart Hall's 1983 lectures are a helpful illustration of the kind of link between the material and the discursive/ideological. The ideological exists as a (structured) combination of different properties which will form the subject, but equally they exist in combination with particular material practices. Articulation is the synchronic combination of ideology and its material manifestation (Hall, 2016: 121). In his final lecture titled 'Culture, Resistance, and Struggle', Hall illustrates the articulatory model of discourse with the material in the context of soccer and rock (ibid: 195-197). Analysis of the properties which form the subject requires analysis of those properties structured with one another, but greater analysis needs to focus on the combination of those properties and their specifically material forms, in our case, the material form of the Authoritative Subject and the ISA to which they belong.

concept concerned with illusion *masking truth*, whereas discourse is concerned with the very *constitution of truth*:

The notion of ideology appears to me to be difficult to make us of... like it or not, it always stands in virtual opposition to something else which is supposed to count as truth. Now I believe that the problem does not consist in drawing the line between that in a discourse which falls under the category of scientificity or truth, and that which comes under some other category, but in seeing historically how effects of truth are produced within discourses which in themselves are neither true nor false (Foucault, 1977: 60).

Here Foucault makes a clear distinction between ideology and discourse, a distinction which appears to inform Butler, as the concept of ideology is missing from her analysis of gender. Clearly however this distinction fails to appreciate the reconceptualization of the concept 'ideology' consistent throughout most of Althusser's oeuvre. Althusser employs the concept of ideology in the constructive manner Foucault uses discourse, where the truth explicitly in question is 'who am I?' The noteworthy difference is that for Althusser, in contrast to Foucault, the construction of truth in the form of ideology is inseparable from the material relations and institutions through which that truth is told.²²

Clearly the script and its material form are separate even if their closeness and the subsequent primacy afforded to the material throws that separateness into question. At the same time we need to recognise that Althusser would not want to deny the conscious attempts of people to re-signify the same material practices which formerly gave them their sense of self. Hall's own focus on the conscious attempts of fascist movements in Britain to re-signify the formerly left-wing working class football culture is a testament to this point (Hall, 2016: 195). What we can say, however, is that change in the ideology, in the content of the script, is ultimately dependent on material changes in the forms of material articulation – for Althusser, in the material structure of particular ISAs and their resident Authoritative Subjects. Re-signification of material practices, it could be argued, will require change over time in those material practices in order to render the new subjectivities possible. To give an example, Foucault explains the emergence and dominance of discourses which constitute subjects according to sexed dichotomies (Foucault, 1998: 83). These discourses are thus constituted by the temporally relative dominance of dichotomous sex distinction. Foucault also identifies contestation at the level of those discourses, but he does not examine how their content is

²² Indeed Foucault endorses the belief that the material world is reducible to discourse (Foucault, 1978: 237). Althusser may want to emphasise that the material and the ideological are inseparable but are still distinct, whereas Foucault appears to question such a distinction.

equally if not more influenced by contestation and change in their material articulation, in the material form of those who speak those discourses. Foucault focuses on the content of the policeman's hail, the discourse communicated, failing to see the importance of the policeman and the ISA to which he belongs. To focus on the content would be to risk committing an idealism that Althusser forecloses by emphasising the materiality of ideology, and therefore assessment of changes and contestation in ideology needs to examine its material articulation, the material interpellative relations.

On the Reproduction of Capitalism and Social Reproduction

I will return to a discussion of social change in the following section, but for now, having outlined how Althusser understands the subject and the process by which the subject is formed – subjectification – I can now turn to the specific contributions of *On the Reproduction of Capitalism* to Althusserian thought. This will draw me back to the chronological distinction I made above between Althusser-before-Lacan and Althusser-after-Lacan. In the context of this thesis there are two relevant and interrelated contributions made by the translation of *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*: the emphasis on social reproduction and the introduction of the concept 'State Ideology'. To begin with the emphasis on social reproduction, Janik's review of the manuscripts (2015) emphasises that an analysis of ideology is, for Althusser, always contextualised within an analysis of social reproduction (2015: 3). This is no surprise, given that Althusser begins his original paper on ideology with the claim '[a]s Marx said, every child knows that a social formation which did not reproduce the conditions of production at the same time as it produced would not last a year. The ultimate condition of production is therefore the reproduction of the conditions of production', returning us to a focus on an authorless script constituting us as *Träger* (Althusser, 2006: 85). An examination of ideology and the subject formed is an examination of how society continues to exist; although, social reproduction does not necessarily mean social stasis.

Social reproduction does not necessarily mean reproduction of society *as it is*. Indeed, Althusser explains from the outset that there was always supposed to be a second volume dedicated to class struggle (Althusser, 2014: 1). This second volume, which was never written, would have been concerned with social change precipitated by class struggle. Furthermore, Althusser writes at the beginning of the manuscripts a testament to the notion that analysis of social reproduction is not an analysis of structural social permanence:

We are entering an age that will see the triumph of socialism across the globe. We need only take note of the irresistible course of popular struggles in order to conclude that in a relatively near future, despite all the possible twists and turns, the very serious crisis of the international communist movement included, *the revolution is already on the agenda* (Althusser, 2014: 6, emphasis in the original).

This quotation admits an explicit belief that society can (and for Althusser did) change. What is clear is that an analysis of social reproduction and subjectivity (and ideology) in this context need not be a focus on why society remains the same, otherwise it would not make sense to start his manuscripts with such vivid optimism. Rather, social reproduction is re-contextualised within an analysis of society and the subject's role in that society, whether that society is enjoying a period of stability or entering structural change. In 1968, a year prior to Althusser writing his manuscripts *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, he wrote *Marx's Relation to Hegel*. In this short text he outlines his uniquely double-sided nature of dialectical analysis, describing dialectical analysis as both 'critical and revolutionary' (Althusser, 1968: 175), which I understand to later become his analysis of social reproduction. In the first instance, dialectical analysis is about society as it currently exists, its 'critical' dimension. This is reproduction as stasis, reproduction of existing forms of domination. In the second instance, dialectical analysis is about how society changes.²³ Both stasis and change are incorporated into the same concept of dialectic, which is later conceptualised as the concept social reproduction in *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*. Ideology which is situated within an analysis of social reproduction is thus an analysis of structural stasis but also an analysis of how ideology contributes to a society in structural instability and change. The script creates *Träger*, but when the society they support is itself undergoing structural changes, the subject supports those changes in their actions or, rather, their subjectivity reflects those changes. I will return to this in the following section but it is necessary to outline this contribution provided by the translation of these manuscripts.

In keeping with the theme of social reproduction, the second significant contribution provided by the manuscripts is the introduction and development of the concept 'State Ideology'. State ideology as a concept brings the various different ISAs that interpellate the subject together, demonstrating the degree to which the subject formed after their various interpellative moments coheres to the demands of society:

²³ We see Althusser repeat this twofold nature of dialectical analysis in manuscripts written between 1982-3 translated and published into English for the first time in 2017 under the title *How to be a Marxist in Philosophy* (2017b: 117)

Suffice it to say, for the moment, that the State Ideology brings together a certain number of major themes, borrowed from various ideological 'regions' (religious, legal, moral, political, and so on), in a system that sums up the essential 'values' which the domination of the class holding state power needs in order to make the exploited and the agents of exploitation and repression, as well as the agents of ideologization, 'go' (Althusser, 2014: 138).

State ideology as a concept serves as Althusser's most explicit description of the authorless script as a set of 'themes', which in the context of subjectivity structures our sense of self. Althusser gives an example of these subjectivities under capitalism: 'Nationalism', 'Liberalism', 'Economism' and, finally, 'Humanism' (Althusser, 2014: 138-139). According to Althusser, each of these entail particular subjectivities forming the subject whose subsequent conscious acts adheres to the demands of capitalism. The benefit of this contribution is that it enables us to examine the similarities in the content of different hails pertaining to different interpellative relations, with the aim to try to identify the structure of the authorless script which forms us. Once a consolidated picture of the primary subjectivities forming subjects has been identified, this might enable us to construct strategies of contestation. Remembering that (state) ideology cannot have an existence independent from its material articulation, we are reminded that the particular structure of state ideology, with dominance afforded to certain subjectivities over others, is contingent on particular material practices. To identify the state ideology would then enable us to identify which material practices create or affirm those components of our sense of self we find troubling. If, as I will argue, gender is a foundational subjectivity in comparison to race and class under patriarchal society, it will be affirmed by various different material interpellative relations in various different ISAs. This would theoretically enable us to identify which material practices found in common affirm and re-affirm gendered subjectivity.²⁴

Gender, Metaphor and Metonymy

Having outlined the contributions to Althusser's thought which emerge from *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, I want to now turn to the question of what an Althusserian theory of gender looks like. I believe gender occupies a unique place in Althusser's deliberations on subjectivity. Gender is not only a dominant subjectivity in the structure of the subject. To be a man or a woman affects people's

²⁴ As will become clear state ideology as a concept demands we examine contestation between those relations interpellating subjects. That contestation and its materialisation in the actions of subjects need not be reduced to changes in the economic, but strictly focused on for example how interpellation in the scholastic ISA effects changes in the familial ISA. This point will become pertinent in my examination of Simpson's case study below.

religious, racial and class subjectivity differently. Gender is also dominant under patriarchy insofar as it bleeds into these other subjectivities with significant implications, but at the same time gender occupies a unique space compared to these other subjectivities because gender is the first subjectivity through which consciousness is constituted. We are gendered before we recognise ourselves as belonging to particular classes, races or religions.²⁵ Gender, therefore, is present at the inauguration of consciousness; gender is the first conscious event in patriarchal society.

In developing this point, it is important I briefly clarify what Althusser would mean were he to explicitly discuss gender rather than merely engage with it on the implicit level we witness in some of his works. In certain strands of feminist thought, gender is distinguished from sex, where the latter denotes one's biological features surrounding the absence or presence of specific genitals, the former denotes the social norms imposed on the body thereafter (Cameron, 2018: 67-8). This distinction is supposed to have emancipatory implications as contestation with the current dictates of gender could be based on how they limit or conflict with abilities inherent to our sex. Concerns of authoritarianism consistent with essentialist thought outlined in the introduction re-emerge here, as we consider what is it that characterises a *true* female or male. The dictates of gender may conflict with sex but we should be wary of judging people by what it means to be female or male for fear of reproducing hierarchies between those who faithfully and unfaithfully adhere to the supposed dictates of their sex. Retaining a non-essentialist position requires we deny the fixity of a pre-social sex and instead identify sex and gender as both socially constructed. This is not a trivial point, as models of gender which distinguish the social from the anatomical, as is consistent in gender socialization, assume a sexed essence or existence prior to the social. An obvious example is Renzetti and Curran's theory of gender espoused in *Sex-Role Socialization* (1989; 1999).

Sex and gender are concepts of the self which are materially articulated in interpellative relations. I believe Althusser would go further and attempt to link sex and gender into one interpellative relation which constructs gendered subjects. To be a gendered subject is simultaneously to be a sexed subject. It is for this reason that I will capitalise Gendered Subject, when the concept denotes a subject structured by both sex and gender. Indeed to be a Gendered Subject is to simultaneously be sexed and adhere to gender norms. Gender roles, responsibilities and behavioural expectations determining our consciousness are clearly distinguished from but simultaneously organised

²⁵ I accept the claim that we recognise we are Gendered Subjects prior to being racial subjects is contentious, and perhaps betrays the white privilege of the author where race does not have such obviously negative effects. I do not want to enter into that debate but rather simply emphasise that such a claim of the centrality of gender in comparison to, say, race necessitates an acknowledgement on my part of the reflexive concerns with such a statement. If this is not true for everyone, it is at least true for the author of this thesis.

according to an assumed sex. The intimacy between the two is therefore difficult to pull apart.²⁶ I believe Althusser addresses this in *Freud and Lacan*, originally published in 1964, during an early period of his thought I have called Althusser-after-Lacan. Althusser merges sex and gender into one interpellative relation between parents as the Authoritative Subjects and the newly constituted subjugated subject that is the child:

That in the Oedipus complex the gendered child becomes a sexual human child (man, woman) by putting his imaginary phantasms to the test of the Symbolic and ends up, if everything “goes right,” by becoming or accepting himself or herself for what he or she is: a little boy or girl among adults, having his or her child’s rights in this world of adults and possessing, like every child, full *right* to one day become “like daddy,” that is, a masculine human being having a wife (and no longer merely a mother), or “like mommy,” that is, a feminine human being having a husband (and not merely a father) - that is but the end of the long forced march towards human childhood (Althusser, 1964: 27).²⁷

This almost incomprehensible quotation anticipates concepts undeveloped until 1970 after his deliberations on ideology and, when taken apart, can be seen to clarify Althusser’s theory of gender. Childhood entails early subjectivity in the sense of a basic sense of self. This early childhood is constituted by basic notions of what it means to be a man or woman, masculine or feminine. These are tested against the standards of the Symbolic, a concept used to typically denote the combination of ideas through which the subject is formed (the authorless script). Althusser admittedly confuses gender with sex, by claiming the ‘sexual’ (what I take here to be the sexed) denotes masculine or feminine rather than male and female, but I think that this confusion was intentional, indicating that gender is always in reference to a more basic delineation of people according to sex. The conflation is an attempt to merge gender and sex as two components in the same subject that is the human child. Finally he claims all of this occurs in the Oedipus complex. What is the Oedipus complex but the site later developed as the family ISA, hence the explicit discussion of the familial ISA’s Authoritative Subjects, the parents? Indeed the Oedipus complex is entirely about constituting

²⁶ A situation could arise in which an individual’s gender norms and sex differ. In that case the individual is still a Gendered Subject in the capitalised sense, but a qualitatively different one to the Gendered Subjects typically interpellated. Conflicts at the level of the subject will occupy my discussion below.

²⁷ That Althusser describes this as ‘the end’ should not lead the reader to assume there is something missing in the description about what comes before. Althusser is still very much talking terms of structural (metonymic causality), where ‘the end’ could equally be substituted for ‘structurally constituted effect’.

subjectivity out of specific dynamics of familial relations and for that reason is a clear forerunner of the family ISA.²⁸

I also want to claim that, in light of the foundational position Althusser attributes to gender in his example of Little Louis, gender interpellation entails two elements in the same interpellative relation between a child and their parents. Using terminology drawn from Laclau and Mouffe, and from the discussion on the materiality of ideology above, the hail between parents and the child that they interpellate consists of constituting subjects structured according to sexed and gendered elements. For Laclau and Mouffe, a discourse is the effect of a particular articulation of disparate 'elements' (Laclau and Mouffe, 2014: 79). In this context, discourses are Althusser's script or ideology, and the event of articulation occurs at the point of the material parent's hail. Gendered Subjectivity is the effect of a script combining particular sexed elements and prescriptive gender elements.

Additionally, given the foundational space occupied by Gendered Subjectivity, the different elements occupy different roles. I suggest that the sexed element, the element which differentiates us according to a sex dichotomy, occupies a metaphorical role, whereas gender as norm occupies a metonymic role.

I understand these two different roles, the metaphorical and the metonymic, in the same way one of Althusser's students Michel Pêcheux understands the distinction. In *Language, Semantics and Ideology* (originally published in 1975, 5 years after Althusser's ISA paper), Pêcheux's use of the metaphorical and the metonymic presents the subject in a T-shaped structure. For Pêcheux, metaphor denotes the individual's subjectivity constituted from nothingness (Pêcheux, 1982: 188). Here, the child's consciousness emerges but is underdeveloped in content; this is the vertical line of the T. Metonymy denotes the occasion where the newly formed subject is situated in relation to others, 'as part of a whole' (ibid: 116); this is the horizontal line of the T, connecting one subject in relation to others to create a chain of Ts (TTT).²⁹ In one interpellative relation, in one hail, two different elements functioning in two separate yet complementary ways occurs in constituting

²⁸ Noticeably desire is absent in Althusser's discussion here, despite employing the Oedipus Complex which is partly based on desire. As will become clear desire is an important part of subjectivity insofar as our desires contribute to how we understand ourselves. It will also become clear that desire plays a larger role in Butler's thinking but by no means does this suggest Althusser cannot adequately account for it. Such an account will be developed in the subsequent discussion.

²⁹ Helshoot and Hak clarify my interpretation of the metaphorical and metonymic as it appears in Pêcheux's thought, writing that: '[according to Pêcheux the] ideological process must be understood as a combination of the semantic effect and the syntactic effect. The first effect produces the reality of the signified, whereas the second assigns its proper place between all other things that can be present in discourse in the given ideological conjuncture... Pêcheux uses the term "metaphor" for the semantic production of reality, and he calls the syntactic relations between signifiers "metonymical"' (Helshoot and Hak, 2008: 169).

Gendered Subjectivity. The first element is sex, which, in serving a metaphorical function, constitutes the subject from nothing into a sexed subject. Metaphor is inherently basic and on its own bears no relation to others. It is not clear what the implications are of possessing a penis or vagina, in relation to those who possess the same or the alternative genitalia. What is the appropriate relationship between two males, or two females, or between a female and a male? If genitals signify anything, it is simply that the subject exists. Genitals in this context merely indicate that there is someone to whom they are attached. Herein lies the metonymic function of gender as an element articulated in the familial interpellative relation.

Given that genitalia are exceptionally limited in terms of what they signify, meaningful relations between people in light of possessing particular genitalia occur with the articulation of gender dichotomies in combination with sexed dichotomies. Gender in this context is at the same time both prescriptive and restrictive. Certain actions are required of us whilst others are vehemently prohibited. This does not sound particularly different from what second wave feminists have argued since the 1960s, with a distinction between sex and gender. What is unique to this analysis is partly the emphasis on the constitutive nature of gender as an element that is articulated simultaneously with sexed elements. Where second wave feminists would argue the pre-existence of sex, Althusser would argue that sex is interpellated in combination with gender as behavioural norms, roles and responsibilities to create Gendered Subjectivity. Their relation is one of combination rather than one of gender acting on sex, for fear of treating sex as pre-given or pre-social.

Still in keeping with Althusser's earlier discussion of subjectivity, in *Freud and Lacan* he continues to write that 'in this ultimate drama all is played out in the matter of a previously formed language, in the Oedipal phase, is entirely centred on and structured around the signifier *phallus*' (Althusser, 1964: 27, emphasis in original). The concept that Althusser employs is the 'phallus', opposed to the anatomical penis which is socially meaningless.³⁰ This is no mistake but precisely an emphasis on the combination of the sexed and gendered elements articulated in one moment. The formation of the subject in the Oedipal phase structured around the phallus in 1964 is the same as saying in 1970 that the subject is formed according to a script within the familial ISA which interpellates Gendered Subjects. The phallus is invoked precisely because it denotes the anatomical penis but also goes beyond the penis to denote social roles, responsibilities and behavioural norms associated with being masculine. To cite the phallus is to cite the importance of a dichotomy based on genitals, the

³⁰ By phallus Althusser clearly had in mind Lacan's belief that 'the phallus is a signifier... that is destined to designate meaning effects as a whole' (Lacan, 2006: 579). The phallus is a concept with the capacity to organise subjects in relation to having or not having the phallus.

connotations surrounding where one is positioned in that dichotomy and the kind of subjects formed from it. This is why gendered and sexed elements are combined here, as the dichotomy grounded on genitals goes far beyond that mere anatomical distinction. We are defined by the combination of the sexed and gendered elements, the particular combination of each currently manifest in the concept phallus with the correlative association of power and dominance for those who possess it, and passivity and subordination defined by its absence.

The phallus in *Freud and Lacan* (1964) is the authorless script in *Reading Capital* (1965), ideology in *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (1970) and eventually conceptualised as state ideology in the 1969-1970 manuscripts *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*. The phallus is a primary component of state ideology constituting our consciousness, our subjectivity. What we have is the quiet evolution of a concept from the phallus to ideology. In his 1963-1964 lecture 'Psychoanalysis and Psychology', Althusser anticipates the interpellative relation which constitutes subjects according to ideology when he stated that '[the little child becomes] human, that is, through the defiles of the signifier, that is through the defiles of culture itself' (Althusser, 2016: 50). Althusser's later deliberations on ideology situate his earlier concerns of subjectivity within a framework which seeks to analyse the mechanisms of social reproduction, encapsulated in his later description of interpellation within the family:

Before its birth, the child is therefore always-already a subject, appointed as a subject in and by the specific familial ideological configuration in which it is 'expected' once it has been conceived. I hardly need add that this familial ideological configuration is, in its uniqueness, highly structured, and that it is in this implacable and more or less 'pathological'... structure that the former subject-to-be will have to 'find' 'its' place... (Althusser, 2006: 119).

In this quotation, Althusser compounds his previous deliberations on subjectivity and ideology into a description of the familial interpellative relation between parents and children, and situates Gendered Subjectivity within that relation. The familial interpellative relation is, after all, concerned with the constitution of boys and girls, the distinction being equally sexed and social. Althusser emphasises a 'uniqueness' of the familial interpellative relation and the type of subjectivity formed from it. This uniqueness is exemplified in the example of Little Louis found in *On the Reproduction of Capitalism* above, clearly denoting the foundational role Gendered Subjectivity occupies in the overdetermined subject. All other subjectivities are built on top of the subjectivity formed in the familial ISA, and the familial ISA is concerned with constituting little boys and girls. Additionally, the hypothesis that we are always-already sexed further emphasises the unique nature of Gendered Subjectivity. As said above, Gendered Subjectivity consists of two historically relative elements: a

sexed and a gendered element. The sexed element is the metaphorical element, a basic element forming subjectivity from nothing. We are always-already subjects because the sexed element provides a basic but still nonetheless interpellated subjectivity, determined by 'the rituals that surrounds the expectation of a 'birth', that 'event.' Everyone knows how much and in what way an unborn child is expected' (Althusser, 2006: 119). The anticipation and preparation surrounding the birth of a child is organised around its anatomical features, ensuring the categorisation of the child in accordance to its genitals, which are articulated in combination with gendered elements. The metaphorical occurs at the same time as the metonymic, rendering the distinction difficult but functions at the same time separately.³¹

The use of the concepts metaphor and metonymy as I have described them above is not unique in this thesis, but informs contemporary feminist thought. A clear example is the way Sara Ahmed employs metaphor and metonymy in her analysis of the emotional constitution of subjectivity developed in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2014). Consider for example her discussion of the word 'terrorism':

The work done by metonymy means that it can remake links- it can stick words like 'terrorist' and 'Islam' together- even when arguments are made that seem to unmake those links... The sliding between signs also involves 'sticking' signs to bodies: the bodies who 'could be terrorists' are the ones who might 'look Muslim' (Ahmed, 2014: 76).

In the different but comparable context of who is and is not designated a 'terrorist', metonymy functions by constituting similarity and association between some people, and incommensurability between others. Ahmed uses the concept metonymy in the same way I use it, as the horizontal line of the T drawing links of association and disassociation between subjects, thus defining the subject by those links. The 'terrorist' and the 'Muslim' are metonymically constituted as the same thus the sign of one 'slides' and 'sticks' to the sign of the other. In the same way what it is to be a 'woman' or a 'man' is metonymically constituted by the organisation of 'woman' and 'man' with 'passivity' and 'activity' respectively. What of the concept metaphor? In the same discussion of terrorism Ahmed writes the following:

³¹ Of course people go about identifying the sex of their baby differently. Some identify the baby's sex before the birth, others prefer to find out after. Whatever the order, the metaphorical is used to define that baby by its genitals, whilst gendered norms are simultaneously employed to further define that child in light of their specific genitalia. The metaphorical and the metonymic still occur together.

[T]he declaration of a crisis *reads* the fact/figure/event and transforms it into a fetish object that then acquires a life of its own, in other words, that can become the grounds for declarations of war against that which is read as the source of a threat (Ahmed, 2014: 77)

Metaphor functions specifically here to render something, something at all. Here, in the context of what constitutes a crisis, metaphor linguistically renders an event something to talk about. By transforming something into a 'fetish object that acquires a life of its own', metaphor renders an otherwise material fact into something with meaning and it is the function of metonymy to make that something meaningful. The presence of genitals is one such fact, linguistically constituted as a 'fetish object', something which can have a 'life of its own', for example that the penis connotes activity, aggression, dominance. It is metonymy which defines that life of its own in the form of gender norms. Additionally, Ahmed is helpful here insofar as she explains the simultaneous nature of the metaphorical and metonymic:

Through designating something as already under threat in the present that very thing becomes installed as that which we must fight for in the future... In other words, to announce a crisis is to produce a moral and political justification for maintaining 'what is' (taken for granted or granted) in the name of future survival (ibid: 77)

In naming a material event or fact as a 'crisis', the name simultaneously brings what is being named into being, whilst giving what is being named a life of its own. That an event connotes an existential crisis occurs at the same time the event is linguistically constituted as something, a 'fetish object'.

The simultaneous articulation of the metaphorical and metonymic elements of Gendered Subjectivity in combination with one another occurs in the archetypal scene where parents name their child. The phenomenon of naming seems to be important for Althusser. Using a biblical example, Althusser writes 'And the Lord cried to Moses, "Moses!" And Moses replied, "It is (really) I! I am Moses thy servant, speak and I shall listen!"' (ibid: 121). Two years prior to his ISA paper, Althusser makes an interesting side note writing that 'philosophers, even if they are not watch-dogs, are like you and me: for them to come, they must at least be called *by their names*' (Althusser, 1968: 177).³² Naming obviously occurs in the familial ISA where parents name their child. Far from a banal

³² Ted Stolze's focus on structural relations betrayed in the biblical figure 'Simon Peter' reflects the importance of naming in Althusserian thought. Stolze claims that 'Simon' simply denotes the 'concrete individual', that the man existed (but only that he existed) (Stolze, 2015: 208). His existence as a Christian figure is further developed with the name 'Peter' (stone) following immediately after. 'Simon', as I understand Stolze, is the metaphorical element, what sex is in the sex-gender relationship. 'Peter' is the metonymic element which further signifies Simon as a *Christian* subject with corresponding roles, responsibilities and expectation as a

act, I think naming epitomises the simultaneous material articulation of sexed and gendered elements. Consider calling one's child 'Craig' or 'Nicole'. To the reader, the former denotes a male and the latter a female. There is nothing intrinsic to these names which automatically links the signifier 'Craig' or 'Nicole' to its signified sex, nor the signified roles, responsibilities and behavioural expectations associated with those names. 'Sheridan' exemplifies this point. Consider two pen-pals who have never met and, while getting acquainted, one of the pen-pals explains they have a child. Without indicating the sex or gender of their child by use of a specific pronoun (his/her name is) they write 'my child is called Sheridan'. Sheridan can be used to denote both boys and girls and exemplifies that a name need not automatically denote a specific sex and gender. Given the fundamentally arbitrary nature of the name, and yet the fact that they *do* typically indicate sex and gender, this is a material interpellative relation constituting Gendered Subjectivity, articulating a specific combination of sexed and gendered elements in one event: the naming of one's child.

To name is the archetypal event of interpellation and that name, grounded in the authority of those who give it (the Authoritative Subject) and on the occasion it is invoked, appeals to a particular combination of sexed and gendered elements. In its arbitrariness, naming demonstrates what Laclau and Mouffe describe as the moment of 'suturing', the metaphor to sew up:

Hegemonic practices are suturing insofar as their field of operation is determined by the openness of the social, by the ultimately unfixed character of every signifier. This original lack is precisely what the hegemonic practices try to fill in (Laclau and Mouffe, 214: 184).

The subject is constituted, sutured, or sewn together by a historically relative combination of sexed and gender elements, but given the arbitrariness of the signifier's relation to the signified (exemplified in the fundamentally arbitrary nature of names themselves), they could have been otherwise. It is only the specific material articulation of the name by the parents as Authoritative Subjects which creates Craig or Nicole and defines within the hail, the demands and expectations of the subjects constituted. Laclau and Mouffe fail to explain *why* that specific articulation of elements occurs. Althusser, on the other hand, emphasises the materiality of ideology, the materiality of the authorless script bound to a temporally relative Authoritative Subject in whose authority that particular combination is made. The phallus as a specific combination combining the female sex with subordination and passivity and the male sex with domination and activity is a historically temporal combination of two elements.

leading disciple. The effect of this combination is the historical figure Simon Peter whose name betrays more explicitly the very combination of which he is the structured effect.

The phallus is the problematic authorless script whose content defines the female sex (metaphor) as synonymous with subordination (metonymy) to others.³³ To be defined as a particular sex is not inherently problematic, but its combination with specific gender norms renders Gendered Subjectivity asymmetrical. Furthermore, the combination is only possible because of the material articulation of sex and gender as it manifests in contemporary material interpellative relations. The problem is thus not so much the script, because to identify the script (and its content) as our problem would be to commit idealism. It would be to forget that the script does not exist independently from the material. The problem is the material means with which the script takes form and subsequently constitutes subjects. The familial ISA is structured to combine sex and gender in such a way as to constitute a foundational subjectivity characterised by domination and subservience. How the familial ISA actively combines these elements is not so much my concern, as that kind of minute analysis develops from the more general claims featured in this thesis. The aim of outlining Althusser's theory of gender is to recognise Gendered Subjectivity as the result of an authorless script, whose current *content* (epitomised in the concept phallus) constructs the subject in subordination and domination, and is dependent on the *form* of its material articulation. A more in-depth analysis is only made possible once the link between the content of Gendered Subjectivity, the specific combination of sex and gendered elements, and its dependence on the form of its material articulation in the interpellative relation has been established.

Before turning to the second section of this chapter, I would like to briefly return to the concept of *Trager* to ensure that the overall theme of social reproduction is not lost in the discussion of subjectivity above. Furthermore, it is important to evaluate the implications that the explanation of Gender Subjectivity has for our analysis of social reproduction. *Trager* claims that the subject formed adheres to the economic, social and political demands of the society in which they exist. The specific combination of elements articulated in material interpellative relations constituting the subject is thus functionally explained by the degree to which that specific combination forms subjects who will, in their actions, adhere to the structural demands of society. In this statement there appears to be a division between the society in which people exist *and* the ISAs in which subjects are constituted. Society is, Althusser reminds us, a structured totality comprising predominantly three spheres: the ideological, the economic and the political (Althusser, 1969: 117-128). Changes in either of these precipitate a change in the combination of spheres resulting in a change in society. Given

³³ It is the metonymic role of the phallus as an organising signifier which creates similarity and difference at the same time it creates relations of domination and oppression, which makes Lacan's analysis of the phallus interesting to feminist scholars in the first place (Fuss, 1989: 11-2; Grosz, 2005: 71, Mitchell, 1971: 167).

the entirely functional role Althusser attributes to ISAs, institutions belonging to the ideological sphere, it is clear to me that changes in society must materialise in changes in the ISAs. To give an example: changes in economic processes demand new subjects which requires changes in the material interpellative relations (ISAs), themselves precipitated by changes in the society that the ISAs make possible. This is an entirely cyclical relation, which, for reasons to be engaged with in the next section, can be understood to violate the criteria of explaining social change, agency and avoiding 'twiddling thumbs'. The cycle does not obviously explain social change given changes in the spheres of society are made possible by the very phenomenon, changes in the material ISAs, which society causes in the first place. Nor in this cycle is consciousness adequately accounted for, legitimising a quietism or inaction, about which Finn warned us in my introduction.

I will address these concerns in the following section but what the above demonstrates is the central role played by the material interpellative relations with respect to society. Changes in any spheres of society are only possible because the subjects formed reflect already existing changes but also adhere to those changes. A new focus has to be directed towards the materiality of the script forming subjects as its material form determines its content, the content constituting subjectivity. The material form of ISAs is not therefore a derivative variable in analysis of social reproduction but a central independent variable, as changes in those ISAs are necessary for greater structural changes in society to obtain. Mitchell's depiction of the family is pertinent to my emphasis on material interpellative relations. For Mitchell, patriarchy is a society, the effect of a synchronic combination of several spheres; these include 'Production', 'Reproduction', 'Sex' and 'Socialisation of Children' (Mitchell, 1984: 26; Mitchell, 1971: 101). Were any of these to change, that would precipitate a change in the relations between people, potentially contesting patriarchy. The family in Mitchell's analysis is unique because three of the four spheres exist within it. Changes in the norms socialised into children are only possible because of material changes in the family (Mitchell, 1971: 119), whilst at the same time variation in the kind of norms into which children are socialised would make possible changes in the material structures of families. Norms may develop contesting the delineation of roles according to the nuclear family model but the development of those roles may be dependent on material changes in the family in the first place. The same cyclical relation obtains in Mitchell as it does in this thesis. The role of the family is the same as that played by ISAs, though how they specifically function varies with Althusser's model, which applies a constitutive role to the family, whereas Mitchell understands the different spheres to reside within in the family.

It is this depiction of a circular relation between the ISAs and the society they support which brings me to my second section of this chapter. The circularity between the ISAs and society can be

deemed problematic when considering the desirability of an Althusserian theory of gender in the context of feminist critique of patriarchy. This question of the degree to which such a theory of gender is a sufficient one will occupy the following section with special reference to already existing critiques of Althusserian thought where relevant.

2.2 Althusser's Theory of Gender, Social Change and the place of Agency

Social Stasis and Social Change

A tension exists in Althusser's thought in the form of a circular relation between material changes in the ISAs affecting developments in society and developments in society which affect change in the ISAs. Throughout Althusser's life, he was simultaneously concerned with social stasis, the mechanisms by which systems of hierarchy and domination between people persist, and the ways in which those relations between people change. It is fair to say that Althusser's focus is at times monopolised by only one of these concerns. For example, his paper *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* is dedicated solely to examining the mechanisms inducing social stasis. On other occasions, in particular his early work *Montesquieu: Politics and History* (originally published 1959) and *Machiavelli and Us* (originating from a course delivered in 1962 but re-written as a set of manuscripts in 1971-72), Althusser's focus is monopolised by a concern with social change manifest in the concept 'encounter' (Althusser, 2017b: 101). I do not think Althusser is of two minds, but that both concerns form one coherent theory of 'social reproduction' where both social stasis and social change converge. In other words, where I distinguished above between an Althusser-before and after-Lacan, these two Althusser's separate concerns come together in the concept 'social reproduction'. An examination of social reproduction as the convergence of social stasis and change is exactly the recognition that structural social change is possible once the mechanisms of social stasis have been thoroughly catalogued and understood. To endorse the circularity between the ISAs and society is not to accept that change is simply impossible, but that change is embedded in the very processes of social stasis. This section will explain how Althusser's theory of social reproduction satisfies the criteria for an adequate theory of gender.

I want to begin by turning first to British socialist historian E.P. Thompson's *The Poverty of Theory* (1978, 2013). Two of Thompson's primary criticisms pose a threat to the adequacy of Althusser's theory of gender, as Thompson articulates a concern that Althusserian thought provides no space for

agency, nor does it account for the possibility of social change. These concerns are manifest in his criticism that Althusser is a) too materially determinist and b) fails to account for class. Starting with the criticism that Althusser is too idealist, Thompson writes that:

The absurdity of Althusser consists in the idealist mode of his theoretical constructions. His thought is the child of economic determinism ravished by theoreticist idealism. It posits (but does not attempt to 'prove' or 'guarantee') the existence of material reality: we will accept this point. It posits also the existence of a material ('external') world of social reality, whose determinate organisation is always in the last instance 'economic' (Thompson, 2013: 16).

The objection that Althusser is too materially determinist pertains to his discussion of Theoretical Practice developed in *Reading Capital*. I understand Theoretical Practice to denote theoretical (as opposed to the material) changes manifest in but not exclusive to the development of knowledge in the academy (Althusser, 1972: 41-43). What is important is that Althusser emphasises a stark distinction between consciousness as knowledge (relating to perception of the world) and consciousness as subjectivity (relating to perceptions of ourselves as raced, gendered, classed and the subsequent relations to the world around us). In his text 'Piccolo Teatro' in *For Marx*, Althusser explains that Brecht's Mother Courage becomes conscious of the world around her. At the level of knowledge (Theoretical Practice), Mother Courage understands her society in a way that is antithetical to the synchronic demands of the society in which she exists. She sees the world for what it really is, characterised in relations of structural dominance. Despite this otherwise revolutionary knowledge, Mother Courage repeats the very actions she came to truly comprehend. That Mother Courage fails to act as a 'hero' in light of her realisation is a denial of the notion that developments in ideas, in Theoretical Practice are necessary and sufficient for material changes, what Althusser describes as a 'false dialectic' (Althusser, 1969: 147). Taken in conjunction with the criticism of material determinism above, in the case of Mother Courage what Thompson is saying that there is fundamentally no room for agency in Althusser's deliberations of the subject. The distinction and subsequent independence of knowledge (Theoretical Practice) from that of the material world ultimately means, for Thompson, that the agent has no means of critically engaging with their society. Mother Courage's knowledge fails to translate into a critical engagement with her society, as she continues to be *Trager* despite her newly gained understanding of the society in which she lives.

If our gender is attributed to our subjective consciousness, a consciousness which is always a gendered consciousness emerging from a specific articulation of sexed and gendered elements, then no amount of knowledge concerning the internal dynamics of patriarchal society will cause the

subject to contest that society. To suggest consciousness as knowledge is fundamentally distinct from subjectivity is, for Thompson, the denial of agency. Thompson's depiction of Althusserian thought as espousing a material determinism, consistent with a form of idealism which separates the sphere of ideas (knowledge) from the material world (which moves of its own accord) is an outright denial of agency on the part of the subject and denial of the ability of the subject to critically engage with the material world. Thompson's first criticism would have us believe that Althusser's theory of gender is such that, as a primary component of our subjectivity, it renders us incapable of intentionally acting on our knowledge to contest society and therefore does not satisfy the agency criteria constituting an adequate theory of gender.

Turning to the second criticism, Thompson claims that Althusser's denial of class struggle results in a complete inability to account for social change:

It is true that the effectivity of class experience and conflict will be differently expressed in different activities and institutions, and that we may, by an act of analytic isolation, write distinct 'histories' of these. But at least some part of what is expressed... will be the same unitary experience or determining pressure, eventuating in the same historical time, and moving to the same rhythm... This integral process is the ultimate object of historical knowledge, and it is this which Althusser offers to disintegrate (Thompson, 2013: 131-132).

Thompson's claim here is that Althusser's depiction of society as a structural, overdetermined entity is such that Althusser fails to explain history as a process at all. By identifying historical variations of society as the result of contradictions between respective spheres, Althusser completely fails to account for class struggle. Class struggle, with its various manifestations serves as an explanatory concept explaining why societies change over time. Variations in that struggle would explain (partly, at least) variations in the make-up of society. Particular relations between people and corresponding relations of social hierarchy and domination can in part be explained by how struggles between classes unfold. In the absence of any motor of history in the form of an explanatory concept laden with antagonism, it is not clear why developments within different levels of society emerge and why they precipitate historical social change; the 'integral process' that is history 'disintegrate[s]' under the weight of structural depictions of society. This problem is exacerbated when we consider the circular relation between ISAs and the overdetermined society they support. Both the ISAs and the overdetermined society with its various levels require changes in the other in order to explain changes in themselves. In the absence of a third party concept with the explanatory role of inaugurating change in either the ISAs or overdetermined society, it is not clear at all that Althusser provides the means of explaining societal change. As already explained, feminism is both a

theoretical and practical project, with aims surrounding the theoretical explication and practical contestation of a society characterised by domination revolving around gender dynamics. The absence of an explanatory concept concerning social change may for that reason render Althusser unsuitable for feminism.

The authorless script articulates metaphorical sexed elements and metonymic gendered elements in the interpellative relation, and such a specific combination is determined by the material form of that combination's articulation. Gendered Subjectivity is constituted by specific familial relations which reproduce patriarchal society, the problem being that change in either familial relations or society is rendered possible by change in the other with no obvious explanation for why change occurs at all. Variations in Gender Subjectivity would remain the same, with the same Gendered Subjects reproducing the same society.

This latter problem, that Althusser fails to explain social change (by reference to historical processes), is also suggested by Hobsbawm. Discussing Althusser's structural depiction of society, he writes:

Yet one might object to this, as to the not dissimilar Lévi-Straussian view, that by itself it does not explain how and why one socio-economic formation changes into another but merely establishes the limits outside which it is senseless to speak of historical development (Hobsbawm, 1994: 7)

Repeating Thompson's concern, Hobsbawm highlights the issues surrounding the absence of any concept in Althusser's thought which would explain and account for social change. The structural view similar to that held by Lévi-Strauss focuses on the synchronic at the expense of the diachronic, focusing on the specific character of society as it is and the material forms of ISAs particular to it, rather than accounting for the reasons why those material forms change over time. It is precisely the emphasis on the synchronic at the expense of the diachronic which is why Hobsbawm concludes that Althusser's structural Marxism is not really a variant of Marxism at all (ibid: 8). In keeping with this criticism is the very theoretical quietism consistent with the problem of twiddling thumbs. Returning to Finn's criticism of 'political quietism', this is made possible because of the 'abdication of politics in the name of impossibility', where politics is the field of active contestation, Althusser's structuralism appears to leave no space for such contestation (Finn, 1996: 71). The circularity between the ISAs and the greater social formation is such that no space is afforded to political action and contestation. This circularity is not only antithetical to any meaningful notion of agency as discussed above, where what occurs is entirely independent from intention or will, but also antithetical to any meaningful notion of change. Political quietism and thus twiddling thumbs occurs

because we either have no ability to consciously engage with history, or if we could, change is rendered impossible anyway. Ultimately we are left unsatisfied with the belief that our philosophical enquiries are the closest we can come to social contestation.

I am now going to turn to defend Althusser's contribution to a theory of gender and patriarchy. I will do so by outlining the overall idea that society is already in a perpetual state of contestation, drawing on his *Montesquieu: Politics and History* and *Machiavelli and Us*. I will then directly confront the problems of agency and social change, demonstrating that Althusser provides an adequate account of both but within a non-essentialist framework. I explained above that the concept 'social reproduction' is such that, for Althusser, it brings together both the mechanisms of social stasis and social change. This is because mechanisms which produce social stasis are the same as those which produce social contestation, namely, the interpellation of subjects. The criticisms directed at Althusser are that, despite incorporating social change into his analysis, Althusser himself simply does not follow through with this in his later works. These criticisms are valid and pose a real problem to the appropriateness of Althusserian thought in the context of feminist analysis of gender and patriarchy.

Beginning with *Montesquieu: Politics and History*, Althusser's early discussion of Montesquieu demonstrates for us from the outset that no social formation is a stable one. Consider the following excerpt:

Even in the history of Rome, which is for him truly the most perfect experimental subject, a kind of 'pure substance' of historical experimentation, the ideal purity only had one moment, at the beginning, for all the rest of the time Rome lived in political impurity (Althusser, 2007: 49).

The dichotomy of pure and impure in this early text simply denotes the degree to which there is internal coherence or dissonance in a structure, of which society is an example. The Roman Empire, the archetypal social formation which spans hundreds of years, was a social formation characterised by social contestation. Althusser's claim that at the very outset the Roman Empire enjoyed complete internal coherence is a confusing one. It is clear in the following quotation that he does not endorse this point but instead assumes social formations are always formations of contradiction and contestation:

Is [to describe any social formation as pure] not to relapse into a theory of essences and into the ideal trap which was precisely what was to be avoided? Whereas one must, *as a historian*, necessarily explain *a certain* very imperfect republic or monarchy, not a *pure* republic or monarchy? If the totality is only valid for the purity, what use is the totality in history, which is impurity itself? Or, and this is

the same aporia, how can one ever think history in a category attached in essence to pure atemporal models (ibid: 48. Emphasis in the original)

Althusser is making the explicit point that all history of social formations is the history of the contradictions which constitute them. Indeed, Althusser claims that, 'as a historian', this 'necessarily' entails an exploration into impurity, his early conceptual equivalent of contradictions. From the outset, Althusser denies the claim that social formations are unified and stable totalities. The Roman Empire was not a coherent totality and at no point are all slave, feudal or capitalist social formations ever entirely slave, feudal or capitalist, as dimensions of society may exhibit traits of a formation passed or yet to come. This sentiment of perpetual contradiction is emphasised in *On the Reproduction of Capitalism* where he claims, in reference to France at the time of writing, that:

The fact that the capitalist mode of production is dominant in this social formation means that there still exists elements of one or more earlier modes of production in France, which is to say, in the case to hand, 'sectors' in which decomposition products of the feudal mode of production, the mode of production based on serfdom, still endure (Althusser, 2014: 29)

Be it France in the 20th Century or Rome during antiquity, no social formation is characterised by complete coherence and unity. In keeping with the theory of overdetermination, a social formation as a structure develops unevenly and is not one expressive totality but a combination of elements, in the same way the overdetermined subject is a combination of elements articulated in the material hail. The problem of circularity, and by extension the problem of social change consistent with Thompson's (and Hobsbawm's) second critique, simply does not apply to Althusser. The social formation is a formation of contradictions, a structured totality already engaged in contestation. To describe a social formation as capitalist is not to say that capitalism accurately describes all the elements of that society, just its dominant ones (for example, the economic). Thompson's problem of the absence of social change is not applicable to Althusser because any analysis of social structures assumes that these are uneven structures of contestation from outset.³⁴ Althusser's analysis is one which assumes from the outset an already existing disjunction between (at least some) ISAs and the social formation for which they construct subjects. To assume complete circularity between the two is to assume a coherence antithetical to history.

In the context of a patriarchal social formation, an Althusserian analysis does not condemn such a formation to structural stasis. Althusser does not assume that patriarchal relations of hierarchy and

³⁴ In other words, Althusser's concerns before his engagement with Lacan frame his analysis of society after that engagement.

domination are inevitable, nor that Gendered Subjectivity is necessarily interpellated in such a way as to continue patriarchal relations. Patriarchy may be the dominant characteristic of the social formation to which we belong, but it is not the only characteristic. An Althusserian perspective of patriarchy starts with the assumption that it is 'impure', constituted by contradiction. What Althusser achieves, then, is a synchronic analysis, a snapshot of the social formation at that given point, with underlying assumptions about a diachronic process of contradiction. The circularity between the familial ISA and the gendered *Träger* it creates for patriarchy is a circularity embedded in already existing conditions of contradiction and subsequent change. The point is that change occurs from within this circularity, from within the relationship between the social formations and the familial ISA, and not outside that relationship. Insofar as the concept 'social reproduction' is about the mechanisms of social stasis, it is also simultaneously about conditions of social change, and fundamentally about reproduction of those conditions of contestation. The very same processes which induce social stasis, the interpellations of *Träger* is the very same process of change in the social formation. Gendered subjectivity is not inevitably the way it is: its articulation can vary with material changes in the ISAs, themselves made possible by a social formation already in contestation.

On the Reproduction of Capitalism is so important because, as a text, it is a manual for social contestation within the circular relationship between the ISAs and the greater social formation. In the manuscripts, Althusser explains that to 'play' the system – that is, to induce social change – 'rests on the possibility of *circumventing* the law *even while respecting it*', which is not only respect for legality, but a recognition that contestation emerges from the very mechanism of stasis (Althusser, 2014: 112, emphasis in original). The manuscripts dedicate time to analysing this circular relationship between the ISAs and the social formation because it is within that very relationship that history develops. It is a history which is always already ongoing. It is undoubtedly a misfortune that in his first definitive account of ideology Althusser chose to publish a version significantly abridged from the original manuscripts. Failing to contextualise his analysis of ideology within a simultaneous concern for social stasis and social change, Althusser's paper appears to endorse the kind of functionalism which would deny history as he formerly defined it. A study of a social formation as in the case of capitalism, or in my context patriarchy, is, for Althusser, a study of an impure social formation from the outset. Althusser's study of the social formation always assumes that said social formation is prone to contestation and change (Althusser, 2014: 151).

With the criticism that Althusser fails to take into account, or provide, the theoretical space for social change addressed, I want to now turn to the discussion of agency. It is clear from the outset that

agency in Althusser's thought is going to be radically different from typical ideas surrounding the agent which afford the agent freedom of choice and intentionality. After all, Althusser describes history as a 'process without a subject' and, in his *Reply to John Lewis*, dating between 1972-73, situates his theory of ideology in contradistinction to such notions of agency:

That human, i.e. social individuals are *active* in history – as *agents* of the different social practices of the historical process of production and reproduction – that is a fact. But, considered as *agents* human individuals are 'free' and 'constitutive' subjects in the philosophical sense of these terms. They work in and through the determinations of the *forms of historical existence* of the social relations... These agents can only be agents *if they are subjects*. This I think I showed in my article 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses'... No human, i.e. social individual can be the agent of a practice if he does not have the *form of a subject* (Althusser, 1973: 134. Emphasis in original)

Althusser still employs the concept of agency, but this is a qualitatively different type of agency to one characterised by the ability of the individual to consciously engage out of their own free will and intention. Althusser's agent is an agent subsumed under the apparently larger concept of 'subject'. An agent is always a subject and, as we saw in the previous section, a subject is always an ideological subject formed by material interpellative relations within ISAs: 'These agents can only be agents if *they are subjects*' (ibid: 134). This clearly avoids returning to a space afforded to consciousness beyond the social inherent to an essentialist understanding of subjectivity.³⁵ Agency, or rather, consciousness exists but always within the confines that which constitutes us, interpellates us, here the metaphorically sexed and metonymically gendered elements articulated between parents and infants in the familial ISA. But noticeably Althusser does not drop agency for the concept of the subject. He insists on using it and thus subsumes rather than assimilates agency within subjectivity, avoiding rendering the former meaningless. This is not a mistake. Althusser is attempting to produce a qualitatively different understanding of agency from within a non-essentialist framework, distinct from dominant notions of the agent. In order to outline this non-essentialist theory of agency, I will return to *Montesquieu: Politics and History*.

In *Montesquieu*, Althusser provides a thorough explanation of the characteristics of an 'impure' social formation, of which all formations are an example. I believe Althusser claims, in language relative to the early time of writing, that an impure social formation is one where a contradiction exists between the ideological formation of subjects and the social formation. Discussing the 'nature-principle' unity, where 'nature' denotes the social formation and 'principle' the specific

³⁵ To repeat a point in my introduction, to be conscious of the world independent from the *camera obscura*.

articulated ideology interpellating (gendered) subjects, he explains that social change is dependent on this unity becoming a contradiction:

If this relationship [between nature and principle] is a *non-contradictory* one, i.e. if the republican form [social formation] finds virtue in the men it governs, the republic will survive. But if this republican form is now only imposed on men who have abdicated all virtue and relapsed into private interests and passions, etc., then the relation will be a contradictory one. But it is precisely *this contradiction in the relation, i.e. the existing contradictory relation*, that decides the fate of the republic: it will perish (Althusser, 2007: 49, emphasis in original)

When this unity between the subjects formed and the subjects' social formation emerges, this characterises the moment of social contestation. The unity between nature and principle is the circular relationship between the social formation and the ISAs, and given that social formations are always impure, this unity is always a unity of contradiction. Importantly, this 'contradiction in the relation, i.e. the existing contradictory relation' not only decides the fate of the social formation but is the space of agency. The degree to which we can actively partake in the processes of social contestation and change is determined by this pre-existing contradiction, the very contradiction within which the subject is constituted. Althusser's concept of the 'militant subjects' introduced in *Notes on ISA*, written in 1976 and published in French in 1995, is pertinent to my point here. Here, Althusser writes: 'In the communist party as well, this [proletariat] ideology 'interpellates individuals as subjects' – to be very precise, as militant-subjects' (Althusser, 2014: 227). This is, to my knowledge, the only text in which Althusser discusses the notion of a militant subject and for obvious reasons: the notion of a militant subject is *prima facie* antithetical to the notion that all subjects are *Träger*. I do not however believe that these two concepts of the militant subject and *Träger* are incompatible. Clearly, a militant subject is a subject who contests the dominant characteristics of the social formation, but this is only possible because the subject has been constituted, or rather interpellated, by material interpellative relations (ISAs) themselves dependent on that social formation. That material developments in particular ISAs have emerged to constitute subjects whose behaviour contradicts the dominant characteristics of the social formation is only because of other developments at the level of the social formation. To that end, the militant subject does not arise from just anywhere, transcending the social, but emerges *because of* the social. The social formation is a structure of contradiction and the militant subject embodies that contradiction. Consider the specific context of a patriarchal social formation. An Althusserian analysis of patriarchy automatically assumes that patriarchy is an impure social formation, that relations of hierarchy and dominance between men and women are the dominant characteristic of that social formation but

do not characterise every dimension of that social structure. As such, dimensions of the social formation may conflict with that dominant characteristic, causing material changes in certain ISAs and thereby causing changes in the specific articulation of elements which form subjects. The contents of gender as a metonymic element may change as it is articulated differently, interpellating subjects whose Gendered Subjectivity conflicts with others. To take an example, consider Walby's analysis of capitalism's demand for an abundant labour force. This is a structural demand at the level of the social formation which has the potential to conflict with the demands of patriarchy for women, formerly defined as financially dependent upon men (Walby, 1992: 1978). This could precipitate physical changes in the familial ISA, potentiating the interpellation of new Gendered Subjects. The 'militant' subjects formed will then act out that existing contradiction with the possibility of exacerbating them, with more women entering the workforce as their subjectivity causes more segments of the social formation to contest the dominant patriarchal characteristics of society. More women entering into labour could at least feasibly encourage greater structural changes elsewhere, for example, with growing demands on the political level of society. As Laclau and Mouffe remind us: '[t]he moment of the 'final' suture never arrives' (2014: 76). The social formation is never entirely sewn together in a unified totality, and where contradiction exists, this can lead to a tear in the predominantly sutured society characterised by patriarchal relations between people. The militant subject formed may not now fundamentally contest patriarchy, but in their acts they may encourage change in other levels of the social formation, forming more militant subjects to the point that the 'impurity' of the social formation becomes unsustainable.

The picture above still fails to account for agency in any meaningful way, but it is certainly an accurate explanation of the implications that the development of the concept of 'militant subjects' poses for Althusserian thought. Indeed, agency is afforded no meaningful role in the above description and, were we to leave the discussion here, we would assimilate the concept of agency into subjectivity which Althusser, in his *Reply to John Lewis*, clearly wants to avoid (Althusser, 1973: 134). In what way can we meaningfully situate a notion of agency into the description of the militant subject above? Herein lies the role of Machiavelli in Althusser's personal deliberations and the emergence of what is increasingly called 'aleatory materialism' (Lahtinen, 2011: xviii, 11-17; Pippa, 2019: 189. To start, consider the role that Balibar, one of Althusser's primary students and co-author of *Reading Capital*, attributes to Machiavelli in Althusser's thought:

Althusser was continually returning with more or less sympathetic feelings to Gramsci's attempt to "translate" Machiavelli into the language of a revolutionary strategy... what is at stake is conservative versus disruptive uses of the imaginary, or collective figurations of ideology (Balibar, 2015: 19)

This discussion is about what Balibar describes as a 'politics of ideology', the 'play with interpellation and the limits of interpellation' (ibid: 19), which I understand means the degree to which the subject *as agent* engages with the material ISAs constituting subjects from an already interpellated position. Even with contradictions at the level of the social formation between the dominant and subversive elements, there is no guarantee the subject formed in this contradiction acts against the dominant tendencies of that social formation. It is certain, however, that the possibility of militancy is dependent on material changes in the ISAs articulating different combinations of elements. A subject may be interpellated by a new combination of elements, with other elements serving a metaphorical and metonymic function or, indeed, the same elements differently defined serving those same functions. Agency or intention occupies the very limited space between the new articulation of elements and the actions that emerge, but is only possible because of that articulation. That there is no guarantee that the subject acts in a 'conservative' or 'disruptive' fashion emphasises the necessity to appreciate agency from within the confines of what is possible, hence Balibar expresses the 'play' or, rather, engagement of the agent to occur within 'the limits of interpellation' but never beyond (Balibar, 2015: 18).³⁶ Machiavelli's depiction of the Prince embodies Althusser's description of agency *within* the limits of subjectivity, the limits of the material changes at the level of the ISAs which form subjects.

Althusser's interest in Machiavelli is situated during a period I describe as Althusser-before-Lacan and is traceable as far back as 1962. This was when Althusser was concerned with outlining social the nature of social change. That said Althusser would continue to give lectures on Machiavelli in 1972 and 1977 after the publication of his paper on ISAs and firmly within the period I have called Althusser-after-Lacan, a period marked by a focus on social stasis. Machiavelli's depiction of the Prince therefore clearly traverses Althusser's thought as it developed from a concern with social change, to an analysis of subjectivity and social stasis, to finally a concern of subjectivity and its role in society. Machiavelli's depiction of the Prince is of a figure who engages with the structured formation to which they belong and, as Balibar describes it, 'plays' within the formation to induce change. This particularly clear in the case of the 'New Prince', as Althusser writes:

To be a New Prince is at one and the same time to know how to fashion these instruments of state power (the army) or seize hold of them (religion), and to utilize them to realize a popular politics. It is because these three instruments feature in the state, and in particular because these forces do not

³⁶ Recall Althusser himself decides to use the term 'play' in the same way in *On the Reproduction of Capitalism* (2014: 112).

figure there alone but combine with laws and popular consent, that the state is the converse of a tyranny, and hence can be popular (Althusser, 2000: 82)

Where state power denotes the specific ensemble of ISAs and other institutions whose role it is to ensure adherence to the demands of the social formation, the 'New' Prince actively engages with those very institutions to create a radically new social formation. To play with interpellation, the ISAs, is what Althusser describes as the Prince's engagement with 'the crucible of the people's political and ideological unity, the training school of the people, the becoming-people of the people' (ibid: 102). The new Prince must actively engage with the same mechanisms which produce structural stasis. The same apparatus (the ISAs) can potentially be 'the converse of a tyranny, and hence can be popular'. Machiavelli's Prince acts from within the social formation rather than from without, thus remains non-essentialist by precluding appeals to an agential space beyond the social.

In addition, we should recognise that the Prince is still *a prince* by which I mean the Prince is still interpellated as a subject, as a prince with a certain self-understanding, a certain subjectivity. The person contesting the social formation is a product of the social formation they contest, or rather a product of the material contradictions within the social formation, reflected in material changes in the ISAs which form the new Prince. 'New' here denotes the constitution of a new variant of that subjectivity, a necessary but not sufficient condition for subversion. Agency is made possible because of that new subjectivity and bridges the gap between militant subjects – of which the new Prince is an example – and social change. Agency is subsumed rather than assimilated into subjectivity. When we consider this point, we see how recent attempts to understand agency in Althusserian thought have proven inaccurate in the sense that they commit an essentialism antithetical to Althusser's purposes. This is particularly the case with de Ípola (2018) who develops the notion 'subjectivity without a subject', which I understand to be agency or consciousness independent from interpellation (de Ípola, 2018: 101). In other words de Ípola is describing the possibility of consciousness independent from the social relations (interpellative relations) constituting our sense of self. Recall in my introduction above that a non-essentialist conceptualisation of subjectivity makes no distinction between our consciousness and our sense of self, as consciousness is always a positioned consciousness. In other words when we observe, interpret and engage with the world around us, we do so already with a vivid sense of self.³⁷ There is

³⁷ It is, to repeat a point made in my introduction, to remove the important role played by subjection, or subordination from our understanding of the subject.

no consciousness which is not already marked by that sense of self, a point I believe de Ípola strays from in his own analysis. As Balibar explains:

De Ípola speaks of “subjectivity without a subject,” an oxymoron that marks the necessity of twisting traditional philosophical perspectives in order to analyse the forms and stages of political action (or agency, or organization) [...]The encounter [with the social formation] is the *crystallization of collective units* (themselves contextual, aleatory, contradictory, but not at all indeterminate as a pure “multitude” would be) that *cause situations to deviate* from their internal instability, or from “counter-tendencies” inherent in their tendencies (Balibar, 2018: xxii-iii).³⁸

I believe Balibar’s understanding of the notion of subjectivity without a subject espoused by de Ípola is inherently non-Althusserian despite the above citation’s claim to the contrary. Balibar is right that agency is located at the level of an already existing ‘internal instability’ at the level of the social formation. At the same time agency *cannot* occur in the absence of the subject, as to suggest agency or consciousness can exist in the absence of the subject is to suggest that consciousness is not formed within the confines of ideology and by extension outside of the social formation. All subjectivity is subjected to the social, and the capacity to contest the social formation arises from already existing contradictions in that formation. This is clearly relevant when discussing Gendered Subjects in a patriarchal social formation and their capacity to subvert that formation. Not only is the agent not indeterminate, a necessary condition for its contestation is the constitution of the militant subject. Subjectivity without a subject suggests precisely the kind of essentialism that Althusser wants to avoid and one which differs from Althusser’s interpretation of the New Prince. Subjectivity is always subjected to an Authoritative Subject in whose hail subjectivity is the effect.

Before returning to the question of agency specifically in the context of Althusser’s theory of gender, a problem remains: what about Mother Courage? In what way does Mother Courage feature in our analysis, given the depiction of agency above? Althusser claims that Brecht’s Mother Courage emphasises the distinction between theoretical and material practice, and that recognising the world for what it is does not mean that Mother Courage actively participates in contesting the dynamics to which she has hitherto been subjected. In other words, Theoretical Practice is not a sufficient condition for social change. As I understand it, when we contextualise Mother Courage (and Brecht’s work in general) within the analysis of agency above, Mother Courage serves as an

³⁸ The notion ‘Aleatory Materialism’ that has subsequently arisen has developed from this discussion of the ‘New Prince’, whose understanding of the dynamics of the social formation make possible subversive strategies (Lahtinen, 2011). Although relevant, it is my purposes here to simply clarify the role of agency in Althusser’s thought and its specifically non-essentialist definition in Althusser’s understanding of the Prince.

illustration of the role of philosophy (Theoretical Practice) in Althusser's theorising of agency.³⁹

When the militant subject is formed, there is no guarantee that the newly formed subject will know how to contest that social formation. The role of *critical* philosophy, as Althusser understands it (the philosophy which depicts society as a structural formation), is to achieve precisely this epistemic threshold for successful subversion.⁴⁰

Mother Courage is the other half of the story. Material changes in the ISAs are necessary but not sufficient for a theory of agency in the same way that theoretical or philosophical developments are necessary but not sufficient for agency. Mother Courage demonstrates to us what happens when this latter condition obtains. She is able to see the world around her but her subjectivity has not fundamentally changed. The interpellative relations constituting her have not altered to yield a militant subject because the overall material dynamics constituting the structured society to which she belongs have not sufficiently changed. Mother Courage shows us that Theoretical Practice (philosophical development) and material changes in the ISA are both necessary for agency to obtain, and only in those joint conditions can the subject actively contest their social formation. In the case of Mother Courage, those conditions did not jointly obtain, and thus she continued to act as she had before. Mother Courage would continue to contribute to the world of war, the very world that took her family from her.

The Place of Agency

If we return specifically to the question of agency in the context of an Althusserian theory of gender, agency still retains an important role for Althusser albeit conceptualised differently to how it has traditionally been understood. Gendered Subjectivity is the effect of a specific combination of sexed and gendered (normative) elements organising us in relation to one another. Equally patriarchy, like any social formation, is haunted by structural contradictions. Economic, political or social demands

³⁹ Montag clearly agrees with my understanding here insofar as he assimilates Althusser's understanding of Brecht's Art as part of a critical philosophical endeavour to understand and engage with the dynamics of society, writing that '[t]he greatest form of theatre is, then, the critic-realist form, which Althusser in the subtitle to the essay on Bertolazzi and Brecht gives its real name: it is a "materialist theatre" the practice of which insofar as it is distinct from ideology disappears into the practice of materialist philosophy (or the materialist practice of philosophy)' (Montag, 2003: 37). Materialist (structural or critical) philosophy is one practice parallel to but distinct from the material practices of interpellation, of which both are necessary for agency to obtain.

⁴⁰ The obvious question that immediately stands out is what the relationship between the ISAs and critical philosophy? Althusser never explains this, instead as I will demonstrate he treats critical philosophy as distinct from ISAs and for that reason I will do so too. That said it is my intention to pursue the enquiry on future occasions.

may conflict with the specifically hierarchical order of dominance between men and women and, at the level of the familial ISA, this could cause changes in the family's material form. Such changes in the familial ISA would result in deviations from the dominant 'script' articulated in the interpellative moment between parents and their child. The specific content of either the sexed or gendered elements may vary as the form of its material articulation alters. What it is to be sexed or gendered may be antithetical to the economic, social or political demands of a society orientated around a hierarchical structure of dominance and subordination between men and women.

I do not mean to suggest that all families change at the same time. Nor do I want to claim that the familial ISA is the only ISA which articulates sexed and gendered elements, constituting Gendered Subjectivity. The subject is overdetermined in the sense that gender is one (albeit a dominant) way of understanding ourselves. At the same time, Gendered Subjectivity is itself overdetermined in the sense that various ISAs interpellate us. The family is the predominant ISA constructing Gendered Subjectivity, but clearly other ISAs can do so. Schools as institutions part of the scholastic ISA also articulate a script containing a specific combination of sexed and gendered elements. Teachers occupy the space of the Authoritative Subject whose hail consolidates (or amends) the Gendered Subject constituted in the familial ISA; from school uniforms to behavioural expectations, sexed and gendered elements are articulated in the interpellating relation between teachers and their students. Given the overdetermined nature of subjectivity, in the same vein that Laclau and Mouffe described the impossibility of the suture for society (2014: 76), variation in Gendered Subjectivity is possible, as Gendered Subjectivity is never entirely sutured. Material changes in the social formation may precipitate the constitution of militant subjects in one specific ISA as opposed to others.

Feminist philosophy which seeks to identify and engage with the internal dynamics of patriarchal social formations is by extension instrumentally important for the militant subject who is separately constituted by material changes in the ISAs. Assuming the analysis is such that it identifies the primary institutions constituting Gendered Subjectivity, such philosophy serves as a stratagem for contesting and altering the mechanisms of social stasis in the service of social change. The Gendered Subject who attempts to structurally change the material form of their own family is only possible because that subject was already interpellated according to a militant script *and* is able to make use of contemporary critical philosophical developments which identify the family as a primary interpellative relation. Intentionality is possible according to an Althusserian theory of gender as long as we recognise that this 'play' is itself predicated on already existing contradictions between the social formation and the ISAs to the point that the subject manifests those contradictions in their actions. The subject simply exacerbates the tensions in an impossibly sutured society, a society sewn

together but which is perpetually destabilised by contradictions (Barrett, 1991: 66, Howard, 2013: 183).⁴¹

Agency emerges then from within the social formation. At the same time, this conception of agency in no way endorses the political quietism attributed to the determinism associated with Althusserian thought. Althusser's *On the Reproduction of Capitalism* is, after all, an exercise of Theoretical Practice, aiming to identify those internal structures in the social formation where contestation and struggle should focus. Agency does not arise from a vacuum or the asocial intentions of individuals, but it is still central to the process of social change. Althusser's project is partly dedicated to the practice of theory, ensuring the conditions which allow Mother Courage to see the social formation for what it is to obtain, in the hope that other material conditions will form the necessary militant subjects. Indeed, why engage in Theoretical Practice at all if social change is entirely independent from the subject, or if the subject as *Trager* can only serve social stasis?⁴²

In concluding this section, I will outline what has been said above with reference to two different works which I believe illustrate the cyclical relation between the social formation and the ISAs. The first work is Jacques Donzelot's *The Policing of Families* (originally published in French in 1977 and translated into English in 1979). As a student of Foucault, Donzelot focused his text on the relation between structural changes in society and the implications these have for subjectivity. Donzelot's analysis thus examines one half of the cycle, namely, the half focused on the ways in which changes in the social formation effect changes in how we understand ourselves (via effecting changes in the institutions which interpellate subjects). The second text I will examine will be Alyson Simpson's 'It's A Game!': The Construction of Gendered Subjectivity' (1997). Simpson's analysis focusing on the discursive construction of Gendered Subjectivity and the ability of the agent to critically engage with the constitution of subjectivity. By extension Simpson's analysis is an example the 'play' with interpellation that is characteristic of agency in Althusser's thought. Simpson therefore illustrates the second half of the cyclical relation, the ISA's effect on the social formation and the role of Theoretical Practice.

⁴¹ In other words, to act freely is always to act under prior interpellative conditions rather than any notion of freedom which espouses the ability to act independently from those conditions.

⁴² I can already hear the Althusserians reciting the phrase 'history without a subject!' My response to this is threefold. Firstly, an interpretation of this phrase which assimilates agency into subjectivity forecloses the possibility of Althusser providing an adequate theory of gender according to the criteria set in my introduction. Secondly, such an interpretation fails to appreciate the conceptual distinction Althusser draws between agency and subjectivity. Finally, a theory of agency within the non-essentialist framework outlined above is entirely consistent with the phrase 'history without a subject'.

Donzelot's *The Policing of Families* engages in a diachronic examination of the material form of the family, the changes in discourse which follow and the different subjectivities which emerge from the newly formed discourse. To take a clear example, Donzelot explains that the developing philanthropy in the form of social services during the 20th Century demonstrates a growing concern on the part of public institutions with the family and the subjects formed within it. This would result in greater intervention on the part of the social services (and the state in general) with respect to the family and greater focus on the family's material form (Donzelot, 1997: 163). A significant example was that of housing developments emerging from 1850 where 'granting housing [was] based on conditions of eligibility that guaranteed the morality of the occupants under penalty of repossession' (ibid: 42). The emergence of social housing in the 19th and 20th Centuries are a specific case in point. Here, changes at the level of the social formation manifested in policies dedicated to the material form of the familial ISA, ensuring that subjects formed would continue to adhere to the increasingly complicated economic demands of society. We should remember that Donzelot contextualises material changes in the form of the family within material changes in the social formation, exemplified in the demand for an increase of women in the labour force which illustrates development at the economic level of the social formation (Donzelot, 1997: 36-39).

Donzelot's entire analysis is fundamentally an analysis of one half of the circularity epitomising Althusser's understanding of social change, namely, developments at the social formation effecting change at the level of the ISAs. I would go further and argue that Donzelot's theory of the 'Tutinary Complex' only makes sense when we recognise the structural context at the level of the social formation rendering the Tutinary Complex necessary. The Tutinary Complex denotes the overall movement by public institutions to focus and intervene in the family in the pursuit of compliant subjects (Donzelot, 1997: 89-90). Admittedly Donzelot's text never goes into detail about explaining the material changes in society which account for the Tutinary Complex's emergence, but they are always assumed. Donzelot's focus is aimed at the constitution of new subjects explained by (albeit non-specific) changes in the social formation.

Donzelot exemplifies one half of the circularity epitomising Althusser's theory of social change insofar as Donzelot engages in a diachronic examination of the familial form *as a result of* changes in the social formation effecting changes in the familial form. Agency, however, finds its expression in the second half of the circle, namely, the ISA's effect on the social formation through the constitution of subjects. It is here that meaningful engagement with the social formation, or at least with the ISAs which form subjects, unfolds. It is here that intentionality is made possible and limited by the process of subjectification, where agency is manifest in the form of a 'play' with interpellation

or, rather, with the interpellative relations which constitute us. In illustrating this I will now briefly turn to a case study provided by Alyson Simpson.

The case study that Simpson provides takes the shape of an analysis of her recording her own family playing snakes and ladders. The analysis revolves around the interactions between her husband Guy (G), their six-year-old daughter Heather (H) and four-year-old son Toby (T). Simpson's analysis concerns the subject positionalities that emerge and are contested in the context of the game being played. The case study is interesting because it illustrates the intersection of several different ISAs on one occasion and the constitution of subjectivity and the potential for agency that arises because of that intersection:

It is clear that the variety of possible subject positions in any game will present continual opportunities for changing relationships of power. It must also be remembered that, at the same time that each player is positioned within the games, there are other sites within which they are always already positioned, for example, within the site of family as sibling [and daughter]. Layered over these sites are other socially defined relationships such as gender and age. Because of the ongoing negotiation of subjectivity, a simultaneous investment in any number of the subject positions constructed in these sites and social relations will bring about a potential conflict of interests (Simpson, 1997: 208).

What unfolds on this occasion of 'layered' sites or rather interpellative relations illustrates precisely the 'play' with interpellation that is agency in the Althusserian non-essentialist sense. Two points of interest within the transcripts of the recordings emerge. The first is the moment when Simpson's daughter Heather loses the game. Here, Heather attempts to deny she is the 'loser', a positionality resulting from participation in the game. The first point to note is that Heather's ability to refuse the subject positionality of 'loser' is not the result of some pre-existing agency independent from the interpellative relations she is part of, but results from those very relations, specifically the explicit parity demanded by the rules of the game (Simpson, 1997: 214).⁴³ The parity hailed by the rules of the game (here occupying the space of Authoritative Subject) is such that it contests the metonymic gendered elements of the script articulated in the familiar ISA, organising people according to asymmetrical gendered behavioural norms and expectations. In the context of the game, the importance of the specifically gendered metonymic elements are contested, with the game instead

⁴³ That subjects are interpellated as equals in the interpellative relation that is the game provides a subversive backdrop for the subject insofar as the 'imposition of a different social structure [specific to the game] creates the possibility of new power relationships as, unlike the family, with its inbuilt age, generational and gender distinctions, the construction of the power relations in the games hierarchy depends on the progression of the game, not its initial organization' (ibid: 24)

interpellating equal subject positionalities. This refusal does not last long, emphasising the point that agency occurs within the limits of interpellation; just as the new Prince is still interpellated as a prince, a foundational component of Heather's subjectivity is still her Gendered Subjectivity (with its specific structure of sexed and gendered elements). As such, the familial ISA is still dominant in the constitution of Heather as a subject, constituting the limits of the 'play' that Heather engages in. As Simpson explains, 'the subject positions of both games and families are employed to discipline her: she is no longer 'obedient daughter' or 'fair player'' (ibid: 215). What we witness on the part of Alyson is the use of command statements which outright consolidate the parent's positionality as Authoritative Subject to ensure Heather plays by the rules (ibid: 219). The interpellative drama within the game is firmly situated within a greater, more foundational interpellative drama between parents and children as witnessed by the parent's invocation of their positionality, constituting the limits of play.

Turning to the second moment of interest, we have an example of agency on the part of Heather which turns out to be more subversive than the moment described above. Here, a deviation in the material form of the family explicitly constitutes a militant subject who actively 'plays' within the confines of interpellation. This occurs when Guy loses the game but claims to have won irrespective. In keeping with the already existing relations of domination and subordination between the genders and their manifestation between a father and a daughter, Heather accepts her father has won. What happens next is exceptionally important. Simpson in her role as mother encourages her daughter to make fun of her father through the use of a rhyme, claiming that, in intervening 'she [Heather] is reminded of the possibility of resistance to patriarchal discourse' (ibid: 221). Simpson later remarks that:

When I deliberately reminded H of the rhyme she knew from school, I created a position of solidarity with her: it was no longer her against the rest of us, but the two of us working in tandem to remove from G the power he had assumed (ibid: 222)

Heather is encouraged to contest her father's authoritative position, to 'play' and contest in the form of a rhyme. At no point, however, is Heather's choice to subvert entirely her own. The choice is determined by Alyson in light of the authority afforded to her as Heather's mother and made possible because of a conflict between the hail of familial and scholastic ISAs (where the rhyme was originally heard). Subversion is the result of the interpellation of a militant subject in the form of Alyson's hail and the interplay between different ISAs. Alyson's hail articulates sexed and gendered elements, the latter of which vary to the point that they contest the inherently hierarchical combination I identified as patriarchal state ideology or, rather, the patriarchal authorless script.

Admittedly, Heather does not experience her Mother Courage moment in the sense that, although she has been interpellated in a more militant fashion, she does not have the critical theoretical tools to engage sufficiently with patriarchal society. This is not so much a critique insofar as my intentions with Simpson's case study are limited. I will return to militant subjectivity in my final chapter where I will illustrate Althusser's theory of agency by reference to Herculine Barbin.

What I believe Simpson's example shows is that despite the contemporaneous nature of the metaphorical and metonymic, there are still strategic reasons for insisting upon their conceptual distinction. Alyson challenges the metonymic organisation of gender according to the dictates of patriarchal state ideology, the phallus, by hailing Heather as something different. Alyson appeals to other ISAs in rendering possible Heather's play with her father's authoritative position, a play which is only possible through interpellation altering the metonymic organisation of Heather's Gendered Subjectivity. This same interplay between overlapping ISAs and the potential for subversion developing from that overlap will feature in my analysis of Herculine Barbin in my final chapter.

I have made use of the separate analyses of Donzelot and Simpson to illustrate Althusser's theory of agency and social change. In this section, I have explained how Althusser's theory of social reproduction is fundamentally a theory of both social stasis and social change and, in the context of the latter, outlined the cyclical relation between the social formation and the ISAs. Where Donzelot encapsulates the first half of this circular relation – the affect the social formation has on the material form on the ISAs – Simpson's analysis epitomises the second half of this relation, the effect the ISAs have on the social formation and the role of agency in that circular relation. Together these two halves of the circular relation make the notion of synchronic inevitability plausible. When all the relevant facts pertinent to understanding the social formation and the ISAs have been accounted for, we can identify why social stasis or social change may ensue. In doing so, I have argued that those criticisms of Althusser's thought which would render him inappropriate for feminism are not accurate. Althusser does account for social change and provide a meaningful account of agency. By extension, Althusser's contribution to a theory of gender is not in the form of political quietism. Althusser's project has always been a project about the means of social contestation as exemplified in his early examination of Montesquieu. However, given that the means of social contestation are the same as social stasis (namely the interpellation of *Träger*), Althusser's later focus on the ways in which social stasis is induced has a tendency to drown out the context within which that focus occurs. Althusser focuses on the constitution of subjects who support the social formation because the social formation is already a formation in contestation and the subjects support, or rather, embody that contestation in their behaviour and actions. *On the Reproduction of Capitalism* is

important to those hoping to establish an Althusserian theory of gender and patriarchy because it reminds us all along that Althusser's concerns correspond with feminism, a school of thought which I have understood to be a political as well as a theoretical endeavour.

My thesis is about explicitly providing an Althusserian theory of gender and patriarchy, provision of what I understand to be an ideal Althusser, my interpretation of which differs from Anglo perceptions of Althusser's thought. Butler is the most sophisticated example of the Anglo perception of Althusser's thought. Her entire theory of gender shares the same aims Althusser's does above: the provision of a non-essentialist theory of gender which adequately accounts for social change and agency. Moreover, it is her engagement with Althusser from which her theory of performativity develops. Butler uses Althusser as a platform from which to develop her own theory of gender as performative. A preliminary glance of Butler's oeuvre shows the extent to which interpellation as Althusser developed the concept significantly informs Butler's thought whether or not Althusser is explicitly mentioned (Butler, 2011: xvii, 91, 123, 143; 1997a, 106-111; 1997b: 31-33; 2005: 10, 89). Her engagement with Althusser is, however, limited in ways that result in her committing the very essentialism she sought to avoid. Certain features of Althusserian thought which are missing from Butler's were the very features that were necessary if Butler were to avoid relapsing into essentialism. Interpellation is a key case in point, where despite the concept's repeated use, primary characteristics of the concept as Althusser understood it are missing or ignored. The limited engagement with Althusser is most relevant in the context of agency, a primary concept my thesis aims to engage and develop from a non-essentialist perspective. The purpose of the final section of this chapter is to outline Butler's engagement with Althusser and the degree to which she fails to adequately engage with Althusser's theory of subjectivity. This section will serve as a critical exposition of one of the most sophisticated engagements with Althusser's thought, whilst identifying the important mistakes in that account which go on to frame Butler's theory of performativity.

2.3 Butler's Engagement with Althusser

The purpose of this final section is to establish the degree to which Butler engaged with Althusserian thought. Butler clearly draws on Althusser as she develops her own theory of Gendered Subjectivity, but at the same time her understanding of his ideas fails to appreciate certain important tenets which constitute his non-essentialist theory of social change and agency. In other words, by utilising Althusser in part to develop her own theory of Gender, she simultaneously fails to recognise the role

played by the Authoritative Subject and the historically (and materially) relative ISAs, the focus of which raises Althusserian thought to the mantle of non-essentialism that Butler aspires. This remainder of this section will explore four occasions where Althusser features in Butler's deliberations: *Bodies that Matter* (1993, 2011), *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997a), *Excitable Speech* (1997b) and finally her chapter 'Theatrical Machine' found in an edited volume by Balibar entitled *Differences* (2015).⁴⁴

Althusser in Butler's Oeuvre

Beginning with *Bodies that Matter*, in this text Butler seeks to clarify her theory of Subjectivity by distancing it from Lacanian thought- in particular the Lacanian distinction between the Symbolic Law and the Imaginary subject. To avoid overcomplicating the discussion for now, we should consider the distinction between the Symbolic Law and the Imaginary subject as a distinction between the *cause* or *origin* of subjectivity, and the subject that is the *effect*. It is precisely in this discussion where Butler explicitly engages with Althusser's theory of Interpellation and the dynamics between the Authoritative Other and the constituted subject.

In her discussion of the play *Paris is Burning*, Butler explains that Subjectivity is not so much a case of domination or constitution, as the Lacanian dynamics between the Symbolic and the Imaginary would have us believe, but Subjectivity is ultimately about 'an appropriation that seeks to make over the terms of domination, a making over which is itself a kind of agency, a power in and as discourse, in and as performance, which repeats in order to remake – and sometimes succeeds' (Butler, 2011: 95). By framing subjectivity in terms of appropriation rather than subjection or domination, the role of the subject is involved in own social constitution. Agency is thus that 'making' of subjectivity, something which occurs 'in and as discourse, in and as performance' rather than something imposed by discourse, by the performance. Returning then to the Symbolic and the Imaginary, Butler wants to deny this distinction between cause and effect and claim there is only the Imaginary subject whose repeated performance creates and recreates itself. In other words the cause is assumed by the effect. It is on this point that Butler's explicit engagement with Althusser in *Bodies that Matter* begins.

⁴⁴ For the purposes of clarity, I should point out that Butler discusses Althusser in her early paper 'Desire, Rhetoric, and Recognition in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*' (1987a: 46-47), but his inclusion is only used in the context of understanding Hegelian ideas about social totality and is therefore not relevant for the purposes of my thesis.

To begin with consider the following excerpt from the beginning of the text whereby Butler discusses 'medical interpellation':

Consider the medical interpellation which ... shifts an infant from an "it" to a "she" or a "he," and in that naming, the girl is "girled," brought into the domain of language and kinship through interpellation of gender. But that "girling" of the girl does not end there; on the contrary, that founding interpellation is reiterated by various authorities and throughout various intervals of time to reinforce or contest this naturalized effect (Butler 2011: xvii).

Butler's description of interpellation here initially reiterates the asymmetrical dynamics between cause and effect illustrated between the Authoritative and constituted Subject (or between the Lacanian Symbolic and Imaginary). Gendered Subjectivity is the effect of 'various authorities' who interpellate the subject as either a girl or a boy. In fact, Butler initially appears to suggest that the longevity of Gendered Subjectivity is explained precisely by the various authoritative relations which either 'reinforce or contest this naturalized effect'. Far then from contesting the relations between cause and effect commonly found in Lacanian and Althusserian thought, Butler appears to show her endorsement.

As I said however, *Bodies that Matter* is about contesting the distinction between the Symbolic Law, in this case Althusser's Authoritative Subject, and the Imaginary subject formed in the language of that Law (constituted in the hail). It is at this point Butler drops any further recognition of the 'various authorities' for the concept of discourse:

Such attributions or interpellations contribute to that field of discourse and power that orchestrates, delimits, and sustains that which qualifies as "the human." We see this most clearly in the examples of those abjected beings who do not appear properly gendered; it is their very humanness that comes into question. Indeed, the construction of gender operates through *exclusionary* means... (Butler, 2011: xvii).

That this discussion on the exclusionary nature of discourse comes immediately after a fleeting mention of the 'authorities' who interpellate is itself telling. Butler's analysis focuses solely on discourse (Althusser's authorless script in *Reading Capital*, later state ideology in *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*) at the expense of the material form of that discourse's articulation. Butler's focus on the forms of exclusion, what Gendered Subjectivity entails and forecloses, is such that she solely focuses on the gendered elements articulated (what is proscribed and prohibited) without recognising the material form of that articulation, namely the Authoritative Subject. Butler's attempt to contest the distance between the Other (Symbolic Law) and the subject

(Imaginary) is such that she eventually denies the very presence of the Other, the external referent through which discourse is articulated. *Bodies that Matter* presents discourse, in this case the spoken word, as something without material origin, without a speaker, all the while focusing solely on the role played by discourse as that which constitutes and delimits the subject.

The result of this absence of the Authoritative Other is that contestation and social change is the effect of the constituted subject rather the effect of the constitution *of the* subject. This is exemplified best in Butler's discussion of the French feminist Irigaray, where emphasis is placed on the subversive acts of Irigaray as if they were the result of her own volition:

Through miming, Irigaray transgresses the prohibition against resemblance at the same time she refuses the notion of resemblance as a copy. She cites Plato again and again, but the citations expose precisely what is excluded from them, and seek to show and to reintroduce the excluded into the system itself. In this sense, she performs a repetition and displacement of the phallic economy... Her miming has the effect of repeating the origin only to displace that origin *as* an origin (Butler, 2011: 18, emphasis in original).

Butler presents Irigaray as someone who is able to intentionally act completely of her own accord as if her capacity to do so existed in a vacuum. As Butler presents above, Irigaray through repeats the very discourses which condition her, in such a way as to disrupt those very discourses. Through repeating gender discourses in perhaps a hyperbolic or ironic manner, Irigaray contests through repetition formerly naturalised discourses on gender. What Butler is doing is solely focusing on social change at the level of the constituted subject – in this case Irigaray – rather than asking the question as to why Irigaray was able to repeat those discourses in a subversive fashion to begin with. Butler's depiction of Irigaray is thus one of a sole focus on the developments in discourse rather than the material changes which explain those developments. If Interpellation is all about the constitution of subjects through discourse (or ideology), Butler's is an interpellation *without* the Authoritative Subject.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Please see Table 2 in the Appendix. *Bodies that Matter* was originally published in 1993, whereas *On the Reproduction of Capital* was published for the first time (in French) in 1995. As such Althusser's concept of the 'militant subject', with the explicit assimilation of social contestation arising from asymmetrical interpellative relations, would not have been apparent to Butler at the time.

There is no recourse to an external referent to explain why Irigaray is able to repeat the discourses in a subversive manner.⁴⁶ This point is perhaps made clearest in Butler's later discussion on Althusser and interpellation:

Althusser conjectures this "hailing" or "interpellation" as a unilateral act as the power and force of the law to compel fear at the same time that it offers recognition at an expense. In the reprimand the subject not only receives recognition, but attains as well a certain order of social existence, in being transferred from an outer region of indifferent, questionable, or impossible being to the discursive or social domain of the subject (Butler, 2011: 82).

The description of interpellation provided here is alien to my own interpretation of Althusser and is simply not born out of his writings. There is no notion of punishment or the prospect of being reprimanded in interpellation because this assumes behaviour *beyond* the limits of interpellation. Although there is a 'play' with interpellation of the type that is disruptive, Balibar reminds us that this always occurs within the limits of interpellation in the first place (Balibar, 2015: 19). There is nothing beyond or unexpected in terms of interpellation which warrants punishment. The very subject who acts, acts from within the confines of the interpellative relations which have interpellated them. That one's actions and behaviour may subvert predominant expectations is only because of the interpellative relations which have constituted that subject and, to that extent, are the manifestation of already existing contradictions in society. Butler goes on to write about interpellation and disobedience in such a way which reiterates my belief that her specific interpretation of Althusser does not acknowledge the role of the Authoritative Subject:

Although he [Althusser] refers to the possibility of "bad subjects," he does not consider the range of *disobedience* that such an interpellating law might produce. The law might not only be refused, but it might also be ruptured, forced into a rearticulation that calls into question the monotheistic force of its own unilateral operation (Butler, 2011: 82. Emphasis in the original)

Althusser does not consider disobedience precisely because it assumes a degree of independence between the subject and the Authoritative Subjects constituting the subject. That Butler assumes the subject's ability for 'rupture' and 'rearticulation' is only made possible because of the absence of the Althusserian focus on the Authoritative Subject. Her analysis assumes the possibility of the subject contesting and changing society, but ultimately does not account for the conditions present

⁴⁶ In the case of Simpson discussed in the previous section, her decision to encourage her daughter to contest her father's authoritative position has not come entirely from Simpson's own volition, but is conditioned by certain contradictions at the level of interpellation constituting Simpson's own subject positionality.

or absent which explain why some people's performance correspond to, or contest with patriarchal phallic discourse.⁴⁷

It is clear that Butler discusses Althusser's theory of interpellation without the centrally non-essentialist concept of the Authoritative Subject. That she fails to recognise the fundamental role played by the Authoritative Subject in Althusserian thought brings to question her understanding of Althusser. I will now turn to Butler's analysis of the act of naming in *Bodies that Matter* as this further demonstrates my point.

The act of naming emerges several times in *Bodies that Matter* with its most definitive statement occurring in the introduction where Butler writes 'naming is at once the setting of a boundary, and also the repeated inculcation of a [gendered] norm' (2011: xvii), but there are two cases I want to draw on. The first case is where naming emerges in her chapter 'Arguing with the Real' which serves as a critical engagement with Žižek's development of the Lacanian concepts the Symbolic and the Real. What is important for me in this chapter is her specific description of naming, in agreement with Žižek's understanding of the act:

The implication of this [Žižek's] anti-descriptive view of naming entails both the effectivity *and* the radical contingency of naming as an identity-constituting performance. As a consequence, the name mobilizes an identity at the same time that it confirms its fundamental alterability. The name orders and institutes a variety of free-floating signifiers into an "identity"; the name effectively "sutures" the object (Butler, 2011: 157).

Butler's description of naming conforms to Althusser's depiction of interpellating gender described in the previous section insofar as it is a moment in which subjectivity is constituted. The act of the name organises 'free-floating signifiers' to the extent that they constitute Gendered Subjects structured around a particular combination of sexed and gendered elements, both of which are, after all, examples of free-floating signifiers. 'Nicole' is a name which organises a particular combination of female sex and woman-gendered elements, yielding Gendered Subjectivity as the 'sutured' effect. Naming is clearly an archetypal example of interpellating gender, and the name itself is structured around 'alterability' – in other words, it need not inevitably yield the Gendered Subjectivity that it does. That said, it is on this point that we need to ask: why does the act of naming

⁴⁷ I want to be clear here that I am not convinced this is a 'failing' of Butler's. *Machiavelli and Us* for example (please see table 2) was only published in French for the first time in 1995, again two years after *Bodies that Matter*. As explained above, this text is significant because it shows us that Althusser always framed his analysis of social stasis within a greater context of social change and contestation. It is perfectly understandable then that Butler did not (for she could not) see in Althusser's description of Ideology and interpellation the space of subversive behaviour.

an infant 'Nicole' interpellate a Gendered Subject, the effect of which is a female woman?⁴⁸ If we accept that there is nothing inevitable in the name 'Nicole' and the particular structure of elements (signifiers) that it organises, why does the act of naming a child 'Nicole' currently have the same effect? Butler, we will see, claims that this is explained by simple recourse to repetition, but this point is simultaneously in conflict with her claim that repetitions of acts are citations of authorities never thoroughly defined (Butler, 2011: xxi). The fact is that naming is predicated on an authority who, to use Hall's parlance 'encodes' (Hall, 1977), or articulates the name with a specific understanding of who a 'Nicole' is. Names may 'suture' subjectivity, but they require an Authoritative Subject whose consistent material form articulates the same combination of sexed and gendered elements. The act of naming presupposes of the person who names in the first place. 'Nicole' does not suddenly become 'Craig' simply because Nicole is accidentally mistaken as such, as the one who makes the mistake is not in an authoritative position to interpellate Nicole differently to how her parents interpellate her.⁴⁹ Butler's disregard for the one who names is symptomatic of her overall disregard for the Authoritative Subject in interpellation.

It is precisely this problem of explaining the consistency of the name without recourse to an Authoritative Subject which turns my focus to the second significant point in which naming emerges in in Butler's quotation above. In her final chapter 'Critically Queer', Butler introduces methods of subverting gender in the same way that she does in her final chapters of *Gender Trouble*. Butler returns to the act of naming in a way which epitomises her failure to appreciate the role of the external referent that is the Authoritative Subject in Althusserian thought:⁵⁰

Performative acts are forms of authoritative speech: most performatives, for instance, are statements that, in the uttering, also perform a certain action and exercise a binding power. *Implicated in a network of authorization* and punishment, performatives tend to include legal sentences, baptisms, inaugurations, declarations of ownership, statements which not only perform an action, but confer a binding power on the action performed. If the power of discourse to produce that which it names is

⁴⁸ There is of course the problem that babies are not necessarily named at birth but are gendered. The fact remains however that naming is a clear example of interpellation, and in a sense the baby is 'named' a 'boy' or 'girl' insofar as they are hailed as such.

⁴⁹ Interestingly even if one's parents mistake their child they are not immediately interpellated or constituted as a new subject. This is undoubtedly where the onus of repetition consistent with Butler's thought is important, where repeated interpellations 'suture' or sew us subjectivity, and mistakes fall short of undoing what has been sewn.

⁵⁰ I cannot emphasise enough the importance of the fact that I am writing this from the perspective of someone who has access to *On the Reproduction of Capital*, translated in 2014, and the assimilation of the Authoritative Subject and social contestation it offers.

linked with the question of performativity, then the performative is one domain in which power acts *as* discourse (Butler, 2011: 171, emphasis added)

So far, Butler describes performativity as embedded in authoritative networks, which appears similar to Althusser's emphasis on the position afforded to the Authoritative Subject. Baptisms require the authority of the religious Subject, the priest to interpellate the infant as baptised.⁵¹ Similarly, legal sentences and declarations of ownership only obtain in the presence of authoritative agent whose position affords them the ability to lay down legal judgements. My choice to emphasise the phrase 'implicated in a network of authorization' is the acknowledgement that to name is predicated on the presence of one whose authoritative position affords them the very ability to name in the first place. Immediately after this quotation, Butler drops any further acknowledgment of these authoritative networks supposedly assumed as the background condition for performativity:

Importantly, however, there is no power, construed as a subject, that acts, but only, to repeat an earlier phrase, a reiterated acting that *is* power in its persistence and instability. This is less an "act," singular and deliberate, than a nexus of power and discourse that repeats or mimes the discursive gestures of power (Butler, 2011: 171).

By reference to an example of a Judge, an archetypal Authoritative Subject, Butler explains that the Judge's ability to judge on legal matters is only made possible by the 'citation', through repetition, of already existing discourses about what a Judge is (rather than the authoritative position afforded to the Judge). But is not the presentation of discourse independent from its material articulation in an Authoritative Subject precisely to commit a form of idealism which fails to recognise the material nature of discourse, the material nature of the authorless script to which the judge appeals? The Judge for Butler merely repeats or reiterates discourse in their actions, but this story forgets that we can identify the specific moment the Judge became a Judge, the moment they were interpellated as such by specific people in a position to do so. A necessary and sufficient condition of the Judge being a Judge the hail from an Authoritative Subject, in whose hail interpellates one to be a Judge. Butler goes on to write:

Where there is an "I" who utters or speaks and thereby produces an effect in discourse, there is first a discourse which precede and enables that "I" and forms in language the constraining trajectory of its will. Thus there is no "I" who stands *behind* discourse and executes its volition or will. On the contrary, the "I" only comes into being through being called, named, interpellated, to use the

⁵¹ Although baptism is not an event which imputes a name onto an individual, it does still a declarative act which names an individual a particular kind of subject, a Christian subject in this case.

Althusserian term, and this discursive constitution takes place prior to the “I”; it is the transitive invocation of the “I.” (Butler, 2011: 171)

Here Butler is attempting to achieve two separate goals. The first is the denial of an essentialist concept of agency by saying we cannot just engage with discourse out of our own volition, but that the ‘constraining trajectory [of our] will’ is the effect of the discourses within which we find ourselves. The second is the attempt to explicitly assimilate Althusser’s theory of interpellation within her own analysis of performativity. The point I want to make here is the following: her specific account of Althusser renders it inevitable that she *does* invoke a specifically essentialist conception of agency. By failing to see the role of the material form of discourse’s articulation, the articulation of state ideology in the ISAs, there is no explicit mechanism in place for explaining how the naming of the subject supposedly limits this subject’s trajectory of will. The Authoritative Subject is after all materially identifiable. Because the subject is constituted in the perpetual repetition of discourses so that it is named without a stable material entity articulating the name- the process of subject formation is not necessarily removed from the hands of the subject formed. Butler’s understanding of Althusser’s theory of interpellation is limited to the hail and the subject formed, failing to remember the other side of the story, the Authoritative Subject who hails and the ISA where the Authoritative Subject resides. The subject constituted in the hail is contextually explained by the material form of society, the link being the material form of the Authoritative Subject whose specific form determines the content of the hail. It is the materiality and centrality of the Authoritative Subject in interpellation which renders Althusser’s thought non-essentialist.

Butler’s ‘discursive constitution’ of the subject is inherently antithetical to Althusser’s theory of interpellation. Discourse’s content is not grounded in any way by the material dynamics of society, as discourse is treated independently from the material society, and by extension the subject formed is not materially grounded but explained by the repetition of a discourse. The subject now plays the sole role in determining discourse’s future content. Butler attempts to assimilate Althusser’s theory of interpellation into her theory of the ‘discursive constitution’ of subjectivity, but this is only made possible by holding an unfaithful understanding of Althusser’s theory of interpellation to begin with. For Althusser, interpellation cannot be meaningfully grasped independently from material changes in society, the materiality of the Authoritative Subject, whereas this is not the case in Butler’s conceptualisation of discourse. There is no volition or agency which is not contextualised within the greater social formation, which is not a play with and within the limitations of interpellation. Butler’s performativity by contrast is a focus on the subject without

context. Performativity presents gender without the interpellative relations which contextualise the subject formed in the greater social formation within which the subject exists

I do not want to draw any further on the essentialist underpinnings of Butler's theory of performativity as this will occupy a thorough explication of performativity in the next chapter. What is clear, however, is that such essentialist underpinnings result from her limited engagement with Althusser. For the remainder of this section I will turn to Althusser as he emerges in *Excitable Speech*, *The Psychic Life of Power* and her recent chapter 'Theatrical Machines'. I have decided to examine these texts in conjunction as I believe they simply rearticulate the limited engagement with Althusser identified in *Bodies that Matter*.

Beginning with Butler's engagement with Althusser in *Excitable Speech*, she does so first by discussing interpellation in the context of injurious speech acts:

The insult, however, assumes its specific proportion in time. To be called a name is one of the first forms of linguistic injury that one learns. But not all name-calling is injurious. Being called a name is also one of the conditions by which a subject is constituted in language; indeed, it is one of the examples Althusser supplies for an understanding of "interpellation" (Butler, 1997a: 2)

Butler introduces Althusser in the context of naming, but her specific object of analysis is name-calling, as in the case of imposing pejorative terms on people. Althusser's focus on naming is concerned with naming as an act of subject formation. What Butler claims next is that the act of naming introduced as interpellation is equally the act of naming in a more pejorative sense:

In being called an injurious name, one is derogated and demeaned. But the name holds out another possibility as well: by being called a name, one is also, paradoxically, given a certain possibility for social existence, initiated into a temporal life of language that exceeds the prior purposes that animate that call. Thus the injurious address may appear to fix or paralyze the one it hails, but it may also produce an unexpected and enabling response (ibid: 2)

Butler's account of the verbal constitution of the subject is similar to the one I have described in the previous section. Specifically, in the context of the familial ISA, to name an infant is to interpellate that infant with a particular sex and gender. The specifically metonymic nature of the gendered elements articulated in the name determine what the subject can and cannot do, and defines the subject by those parameters. In this sense, the constitution of the subject is the constitution of a subject formed by limitations. Butler explains that the act of name calling functions in the same way we are named in general. Both are moments of constituting 'social existence' which enables at the same time it limits. I would describe the subject as an always already injured subject but the concept

‘injured’ betrays a sense that subject is distinct from that injury denoting the limitations imposed by the metonymic element that is gender. Who we are is indistinguishable from what we are not, from what is prohibited. The subject is not injured but sutured, in the sense that Frankenstein’s Monster is indistinguishable from the scars without which he would not exist. At the same time, and leading me to the second noteworthy point of this text, at no point is an account of the Authoritative Subject given due consideration. In the same chapter from which emerges this description of interpellation in the context of injurious speech, Butler does not acknowledge the role played by the Authoritative Subject in the same way we witness in *Bodies that Matter*. Indeed, at an important moment in Butler’s description of interpellation, she attributes the content of ideology to ritualised practices, missing the role of the Authoritative Subject altogether whose material form explains the content of ideology:

Just as for Austin the convention governing the institution of promise-making is verbally honoured even in the case of a promise that no one intends to fulfil, so for Althusser one is entered into a “ritual” of ideology regardless of whether there is a prior and authenticating belief in that ideology (Butler, 1997a: 24) .

I am sure there are clear parallels between Austin’s illocutionary speech and Althusser’s hail. That said, it should be noted that Austin is not an accurate comparison with Althusser insofar as Austin makes no mention of the material basis for language use, whereas Althusser firmly situates the verbal hail within the material form of its articulation, the material form of the Authoritative Subject. To suggest that ideology exists because of repetition is a failure to acknowledge that such repetition is entirely dependent on the material form of the Authoritative Subject, itself determined by the material form of society. In the absence of an Authoritative Subject whose form explains the content of the ideology constituting the subject, an obvious question remains: why does the repetition of performances stop or alter? This question persists in the next chapter but it should at least be noted here that difficulty in understanding changes in Gendered Subjectivity is born out of the absence of a link between subjectivity and the wider social formation within which it exists.

The final point I want to draw on emerges in *Excitable Speech* but is developed in *The Psychic Life of Power*. Here we have a rare moment where Butler actively criticises Althusser, suggesting that his portrayal of interpellation (which I have claimed she fails to fully understand) is such that it betrays the belief in the pre-social self. Consider the first quotation from *Excitable Speech* and the second from *The Psychic Life of Power*:

Within the terms of Althusser's examples, however, this naming cannot be accomplished without a certain readiness or anticipatory desire on the part of the one addressed. To the extent that naming is an address, there is already an addressee, prior to the address... In this sense, as a prior and essential condition of the formation of the subject, there is a certain readiness to be compelled by the authoritative interpellation, a readiness that suggests that one is, as it were, already in a binding relation to the divine voice before one succumbs to its call (Butler, 1997a: 32).

In this sense, as a prior and essential condition of the formation of the subject, there is a certain readiness to be compelled by the authoritative interpellation, a readiness which suggests that one is, as it were, already in relation to the voice before the response, already implicated in the terms of animating misrecognition by an authority to which one subsequently yields (Butler, 1996b: 111)

Both quotations articulate Butler's concern that Althusser's theory of interpellation necessarily presupposes a subject who hears the address which forms them. In other words, Althusser's theory assumes a pre-social self or conscience which recognises the hail for them, subsequently being situated into a particular subject positionality. When we consider the policeman example of interpellation that Althusser provides, both quotations are referring to the subject on the sidewalk prior to the policeman's hail and who must exist prior to that hail in order to respond. The address assumes an addressee, a consciousness which is not already determined by the Authoritative Subject's hail.

First and foremost, this is not a problem for Althusser. He acknowledges in his paper that the example is purely pedagogical and is limited, thus the provision of the concept 'always-already' interpellated (Althusser, 2006: 119).⁵² In addition, I assume that Gendered Subjectivity is the founding moment of subjectivity: that first constitutive relation which forms the subject from nothing, demonstrated in the metaphorical function of the sexed element in the parent's hail. The subject is, after all, already a subject by the time any other interpellative relations obtain, as exemplified in the case of 'little Louis', which attributes a foundational-base role to Gendered Subjectivity constituted in the familial ISA.

Importantly, this discussion of Althusser as it develops in *The Psychic Life of Power* yields precisely the consequences Butler criticises Althusser for, namely the adherence to essentialism through the

⁵²Admittedly Althusser's claim of the 'always-already' ideological subjects was available to English readers as early as 1971, and French speakers in 1970. Butler's insistence of a temporal distinction between the Subject and the ISAs is simply one Butler and myself both have the same text and read differently. Even so, I cannot however trivialise the fact that I am reading Althusser at a time *after* the translation of *On the Reproduction of Capital* in 2014, giving rise to an renewed interest in Althusser (see Table 2 in the appendix). When I read such statements by Althusser that the subject is 'always-already' ideologically constituted, I am reading this through the lens made possible by the renewed interest of Althusser as a theorist of social contestation.

subtle assumption of a pre-social self. By utilising Althusser's decision to use Christian examples to further explicate his theory of interpellation, Butler develops, albeit briefly, the belief in the pre-social guilty subject, writing that '[t]o become a "subject" is thus to have been presumed guilty, then tried and declared innocent... Yet because this guilt conditions the subject, it constitutes the prehistory of the subjection to the law by which the subject is produced' (Butler, 1996b: 118). Any notion of a pre-history of the subject which is not already constituted by the society in which they exist commits a form of essentialism, an *a priori* condition of consciousness independent from society. Even in Althusserian terms, the pre-history of the subject, identified as the social formation which interpellates the subject, is such that it exists *at the same time* as the subjects so constituted. Indeed, structural causality insists on a cyclical relation between the social formation, the ISAs and the subjects formed rather than a clear temporal line of succession in the same order.

I will now turn to Butler's text 'Theatrical Machines'. The entire chapter is dedicated to Althusser but particular points stand out given the context of my thesis. In particular, one notes Butler's discussion of disidentification and the assumption of a particular notion of agency that Butler suggests is consistent with Althusser's deliberations on interpellation. In terms of disidentification consider the following:

When forms of recognition are decomposed, and can never be recomposed, an emancipatory trajectory follows, and breaks from, the time and the scene of ideological conviction... in this situation one is not called by an ideology (in the usual sense of interpellation), but *called out of* an ideology, extracted, if not ejected. Significantly, the rupture with ideology happens within, and for, the first-person and so at the level of subjectivation. In my view, the point is not simply shift from one identification to another, since if any identification is understood as commensurate with identity, then it effectively forecloses what Althusser understood as the "alterity" at the heart of all subject-constitution, so the question is, rather, what kind of mobilization can work with disidentification, that is, with a "critical" consciousness that may well be moved by characters and ideals without precisely being captured or lured by the promise of new revolutionary identities (Butler, 2015: 31, emphasis in original).

What Butler is saying Althusser believes and what he actually believes are clearly distinct. Butler claims Althusser endorses the argument that a "'critical" consciousness' makes possible an independence from the dictates of ideology to the point that we can be '*called out of* an ideology'. In other words, if philosophical practice is such that people can consciously engage with the social formation in a subversive manner, we can meaningfully attribute a degree of agency to the individual *outside* ideology. This interpretation of Althusser is clearly shared by de Ípola (2018) and,

as I said when critically outlining de Ípola earlier, I believe this reading to be wrong. Althusser could not be more explicit when he claims that we are always-already subjects, nor does he ever appeal to any notion of alterity of the sort that Butler mentions above.⁵³ Butler claims Althusser endorses a belief in subversion which is 'not simply a shift from one identification to another', but if we assume identity here means subjectivity, what is the notion of militant subjectivity if not precisely the claim that subversion of one's social formation is predicated on a change in subjectivity?⁵⁴ Recall the space that Althusser assigns to Theoretical Practice, as a necessary but not sufficient condition for subverting one's social formation. The very 'play' with interpellation that Balibar sets out in the beginning of the same edited volume to which this quotation belongs, forecloses precisely the alterity outside of ideology which Butler attributes to Althusser and subsequently endorses.⁵⁵ Althusser's agency is firmly situated within the context of one's subjectivity determined by their social formation, thus exemplifying his non-essentialist theory of agency. The appeal to alterity and consciousness as in some way entirely independent of ideology proves problematic where non-essentialism is concerned. On closer inspection, disidentification proves antithetical to an accurate understanding of Althusser's contribution to a theory of the subject and society.

In keeping with this notion of agency, however, agency as in some way independent from the Authoritative Subject is reiterated later when she writes:

Every interpellation has to travel through an identificatory process of some kind that leads the one hailed to come forth, turn around, and affirm that "Yes, the one you call is me. I am that name!" or even "No: do not call me that name. That is not how I'm to be addressed. I refuse to respond when you hail me in that way." And yet, between the yes and the no both conditioned by a firm sense of identification, is there a critical alternative that focuses less on what you call me than on what calls when you call me?... If you and I become bogged down in struggles over how to be addressed, which name to be used, what will make me feel recognized, then perhaps we have engaged in an ideological deflection of the structure of interpellating power (Butler, 2015: 33-34)

This is a telling excerpt as it outlines the type of agency Butler has in mind. Butler suggests that agency emerges as the intentional critical engagement with interpellation, a contestation with the hail. She suggests this is an 'ideological deflection', as if the subject were able to manipulate

⁵³ Note however that it is not clear whether Butler means a rupture from a particular ideology, or ideology tout court. The case of the latter is clearly antithetical to Althusser's understanding of ideology, as all consciousness is already ingratiated within an ideologically constituted subject.

⁵⁴ Curiously it is this appeal to alterity, the beyond the forces constituting the subject which Butler opposes in *Gender Trouble*. I will return to this in the next section

⁵⁵ To 'play' with interpellation is therefore to play with *a particular ideology*, but this falls short of rupturing with ideology tout court. The latter is inconceivable within an Althusserian model of subjectivity.

ideology (or discourse), originating from a completely independent will. I believe Butler does not account for the non-essentialist notion that contestation with an address *is not* the result of our own free and independent will, but the result of an already existing and stable address. To claim “that is not how I’m supposed to be addressed” is to simultaneously say “this is how I am to be addressed”, presupposing the statement “this is how I already am addressed *by Others*”. The subject does not contest the hail in a vacuum but from a position already hailed, from an already addressed position, and thus the degree to which we contest subsequent hails is determined by the degree to which those hails deviate from hails which have already constituted the subject. Indeed in the quotation above Butler creates a dissonance between ‘me’, the conscious subject and that which ‘will make me feel recognized’ precipitating the very ‘ideological deflection’ to begin with. This distinction between consciousness and ideology conceals essentialism insofar as it assumes a conscious subject that is not already recognized, that is to say defined and constituted by ideology. Furthermore it entails an inherent desire for recognition as distinct from the mechanisms of that very recognition, a desire we can equally identify in comments made by Cohen in my introduction, ‘[Marx] failed to do justice to the self’s irreducible interest in a definition of itself, and to the social manifestations of that interest’ (Cohen, 2000: 347). Cohen’s description of the desire or ‘interest’ for a ‘definition of itself’ (in what is ultimately recognition) as ‘irreducible’ is precisely the idea that we have this essential consciousness which is irreducible to the social. Cohen’s essentialism here is simply a more explicit manifestation of that concealed by Butler in the dissonance she establishes between the ‘me’ and the feeling of being recognised, where there is still ‘me’ conceptually distinct from the mechanisms of recognition in the first place.

Butler uses Althusser to develop her own theory of performativity and I believe this has been demonstrated. I have also attempted to demonstrate, preliminarily speaking, the degree to which that her specific understanding of Althusser fosters essentialism in her own work. The next chapter is precisely a critical exploration of performativity, drawing on and developing explicitly the essentialist underpinnings of her own theory of gender. In the following discussion I will demonstrate that the Althusserian theory of gender provided above serves as the first non-essentialist theory of gender to date, whilst it also adheres to the requirements and criteria characterising an adequate theory of gender and patriarchy outlined in my introduction.

On a final note before moving on to the next chapter, it is important that I contextualise the claim I have made in this final section. I have claimed that Butler’s interpretation of Althusser different from my own. I would be remiss if I did not emphasise the fact that Butler is not the only one to have made such substantial errors in understanding Althusser. The primary case in point is the account of

Althusser provided by Assiter in *Althusser and Feminism*, published in 1990, the same year as the first edition of *Gender Trouble*, Butler's magnum opus and the text which will occupy my discussion in the next chapter. I have already discussed Assiter above with respect to structural causality, as her article serves as the clearest explication on the topic. This later text however demonstrates a fundamentally time bound understanding of what makes Althusser's theory of gender Althusserian, namely the non-essentialist and constituted nature of the subject it portrays.⁵⁶ Given the remit of my thesis as an intervention in Butler's engagement and encounter with Althusser, it is not necessary for me to engage with Assiter in too great a detail. That said, Assiter does provide the most explicit attempt to utilise Althusserian theory for the purposes of feminism. Even so, Assiter fails to appreciate the constitutive nature of ideology in Althusserian theory, using concepts like 'internalisation' to describe the role of ideology which betray the presence of a pre-existing subject who has ideology imposed on them (Assiter, 1990: 128). Such reading of Althusser persists throughout the book and warrants at least acknowledgement, given that it attempts to use Althusser for the purposes of creating a theory of gender, a task shared by the earlier sections of this chapter.

Despite its *prima facie* importance, Assiter's text does not benefit from Althusser's oeuvre available to me. Assiter's text applies attributes and qualities to Althusser's theory of ideology which are simply inapplicable given the discussion in previous chapter, failing to see the interpellative role of ideology in constituting subjects. Earlier I suggested that ideology as conceived by Althusser is comparable to discourse and power conceived by Foucault, Laclau and Mouffe and Butler. This is because ideology for Althusser constitutes rather than deludes subjects as Assiter believes. Assiter in other words would render ideology incommensurable to power or discourse, stripping everything that makes Althusser's theory of ideology Althusser's. With this in mind, I will now move on to my next chapter where I will explicitly outline Butler's theory of performativity, her attempts to create a non-essentialist theory of gender and the degree to which she undermines that very pursuit.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Please see Table 2 in the appendix

⁵⁷ As an early explicit investigation of Althusser and his contribution to feminism, Assiter, like Butler is not in any way 'mistaken' in her understanding of Althusser. I have not seen any evidence that Assiter can speak French and by extension nine of the Althusser's texts I have referenced here were not available to Assiter at the time of her writing. Many of these, including *Freud and Lacan* (first translated and published in 1996) and *Psychoanalysis and the Human Sciences* (first translated as late as 2016), were not available to Assiter and yet they are both significant in distancing Althusser from the belief that Ideology is internalised as opposed to constitutive

Chapter 3 Butler's Theory of Gender

The purpose of this chapter is to outline Judith Butler's theory of performativity and the degree to which she commits the very essentialism she hoped to avoid. In the final section of the previous chapter, I outlined what I understand to be the primary areas where Butler draws from Althusser in the development of her own theory of gender. At the same time, I identified the degree to which Butler misconstrues Althusser's thought, failing to identify the very tenets of his thought which characterise his thinking as non-essentialist. My purpose in this chapter is to outline the theory of performativity which developed out of the context of that specific understanding. As explained in the previous section Butler's theory of performativity, with its onus on repetition, does not conceptualise agency within a non-essentialist framework in the way Althusser achieves. This chapter will therefore be divided into two sections. In the first section titled, 'Butler and Performativity', I will outline the performative theory of gender and the non-essentialism which inspires the development of the theory in the first place. In the second section, titled 'Performativity and Essentialism', I outline explicitly how Butler's theory of performativity undermines the non-essentialist motivations which inspired her provision of a theory of gender in the first place. I should add that I am not saying Butler provides an inadequate account of gender. On the contrary, I believe Butler's theory of performativity satisfies the three criteria I outlined in my introduction which need to be met for a theory of gender to be an adequate contribution to feminism. What I am claiming is simply that, in the absence of an accurate engagement with Althusser, Butler does not provide an adequate *non-essentialist* theory of gender.

3.1 Butler's Theory of Performativity

In order to detail Butler's theory of performativity, I will be drawing on performativity as it emerges in *Gender Trouble* (2006), *Bodies that Matter* (2011) and *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997a).⁵⁸ Before exploring these texts however, I will firstly establish the non-essentialist impetus which motivated the development of a theory of performativity. This impetus is clearly visible in a series of articles prior to the publication of *Gender Trouble*, and articulates primary themes developed in *Gender*

⁵⁸ This is not to suggest that these three texts exhaust Butler's development of a performative theory of gender. To take an example, in *Undoing Gender* (2004), Butler succinctly articulates the regulatory nature of gender as a norm as 'the reinstituted effect of those very practices' that it governs and regulates (2004: 48). That said contributions like these repeat or develop ideas which find their most prominent and significant articulation in the texts I have chosen to analyse.

Trouble. These include 'The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva' (1989), 'Foucault and the Paradox of Bodily Inscriptions' (1989b), and 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory' (1988). This same impetus motivates certain problems that Butler identifies in Lacanian and Žižekian thought in *Bodies that Matter*.

Butlers' Aspirations to Non-Essentialism

Turning to Butler at the time immediately before the original publication of *Gender Trouble* in 1990, her earlier papers communicate a clear concern with essentialist thought in feminist analysis of gender. In 'The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva' (1989), for example, Butler brings to light the essentialist undertones of Kristeva's concept of the 'Semiotic', the parts of language which perpetually destabilise or subvert the hegemonic-phallocentric linguistic system she calls the 'Symbolic' (Kristeva, 1984: 95). Indeed, Butler writes in anticipation of *Gender Trouble* that:

[s]ignificantly, the figuration of the maternal body and the teleology of its instincts as a self-identical and insistent metaphysical principle – an archaism of a collective, sex-specific biological constitution – bases itself on a univocal conception of the female sex... But is female generatively truly an uncaused cause (Butler, 1989a: 115).

Butler is not disputing the problematic nature of language in accounting for women's experience, or that language constructs binaries predicated on asymmetry. Her problem is with the notion of a perpetual maternal figure which exists *outside* of the hegemonic-phallocentric Symbolic language. To locate this subversive force in a 'univocal conception of the female sex', in the form of the maternal which is never truly under the domination of the Symbolic, is to attempt to locate agency originating outside mechanisms potentiating agency in the first place. Kristeva commits an essentialism by presenting the female as 'truly an uncaused cause' in the form of the Semiotic.

Again immediately preceding *Gender Trouble*, and in the same year that Butler published her criticism of essentialism in Kristeva's thought, Butler identifies a contradiction in Foucault's description of the body in 'Foucault and the Paradox of Bodily Inscriptions' (1989b). She claims that on occasion Foucault, in a non-essentialist fashion, presents the body as produced simultaneously with the moment it is constrained and shaped by discourse (Butler, 1989b: 602). The body emerges at the same time as the body is repressed. On other occasions, however, Butler claims Foucault suggests the body precedes the discourses which repress it, presenting the body as a pre-given sight of possible subversion:

I shall argue in the following that, whereas Foucault wants to argue – and does claim – that bodies are constituted within the specific nexus of culture or discourse/power regimes, and that there is no materiality or ontological independence of the body outside of any one of those specific regimes, his theory nevertheless relies on a notion of genealogy, appropriated from Nietzsche, which conceives the body as a surface and a set of subterranean "forces" that are, indeed, repressed and transmuted by a mechanism of cultural construction external to that body (ibid: 602).

Butler is saying here that Foucault is inconsistent in his presentation of the body. He wants to depict the body, the domain of agency (for without the body, the concept of agency is idealist) as constructed by discourses at any given time. Nevertheless, Butler cites moments where Foucault depicts discourse's interaction with the body as one of 'inscription', which is a problematic metaphor given that inscription assumes something that is the recipient of the ideas or norms that are being inscribed (Butler, 1989b: 603). For discourse and its content to be inscribed (in Butler's sense of the word) on the body is to presume the body is a blank slate and, as Butler notes, makes possible the conceptualisation of agency and subversion from *without* or *outside* discourse.⁵⁹ Much like the Semiotic, the body as the *pregiven* is the potential source for subversion and by extension commits a form of essentialism. Butler directs the same critique at Monique Wittig in 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory' (1988) where Butler criticises Wittig and others for lacking the 'the critical resources for thinking radically about the historical sedimentation of sexuality and sex-related constructs if they do not delimit and describe the mundane manner in which these constructs are produced, reproduced, and maintained within the field of body' (Butler, 1988: 525). I understand 'critical resources' to be the non-essentialist understanding of the body as the effect of discourse (or ideology) rather than effected *by* discourse, where the latter assumes the body to precede gender norms imposed upon it.

Prior to the publication of *Gender Trouble*, Butler identifies essentialist undertones in French thought that precedes her own work, in particular the case of what is loosely described as 'French feminism', a school predicated on precisely moving away from the essentialism which formerly dominated feminist analysis of gender and patriarchy:

Poststructuralist theorists of sex and gender are unhappy with the way the 1960s understanding of sex and gender accounts for personal identity and the body. They consider, much as I do, that the 1960s understanding of sex easily turns sex into an ahistorical and curiously disembodied entity

⁵⁹ 'That history is "inscribed" or "imprinted" onto a body that is not history suggests not only that the body constitutes the material surface preconditional to history, but that the deregulation and subversion of given regimes of power are effected by the body's resistance against the workings of history itself' (Butler, 1989b: 607).

divorced from concrete historical social meanings. Their critique of the sex/gender distinction has two major objectives (1) to avoid biological determinism; and (2) to develop a fully historical and non-essentialist understanding of sex or the body (Moi, 2010: 30-31).

Butler's early contention is that such thinkers fail in this project, or are at least inconsistent in their contribution to this project (as in the case of Foucault, which provides the context for *Gender Trouble*).⁶⁰ Inasmuch as *Gender Trouble* is about outlining a performative theory of gender, it is equally about identifying essentialism at it permeates feminist analysis. For this reason, Butler develops on the criticisms originating in her earlier publications. Here, Kristeva's Semiotic is conceptualised as the 'prediscursive libidinal economy [which] becomes a locus of cultural subversion' (Butler, 2006: 109). By this, Butler means that Kristeva assumes a space outside of gender discourses which, by virtue being *outside* those discourses, pose a continuous threat to those discourses. As explained earlier, to conceptualise such a space as the 'prediscursive', which Kristeva's Semiotic occupies, is to assume that there is subjectivity without a subject, or rather, subjectivity which is not subjected to the constitutive discourses.

Continuing her analysis of Foucault in papers preceding *Gender Trouble*, Butler outlines the degree to which Foucault betrays subtle essentialist assumptions in his analysis, specifically in Foucault's analysis of Herculine Barbin's memoirs. As explained in my introduction, I will conduct an Althusserian reading of these memoirs in the next chapter, but for now focusing on Foucault, Butler claims that his optimistic reading of Herculine's experiences as a 19th Century French hermaphrodite commits an essentialism antithetical to his overall approach to subjectivity. Butler begins by juxtaposing the Foucault of the first volume of *History of Sexuality* (1979, 1998) and the Foucault who analyses Herculine's memoirs (1980). The former presents a theory of subjectivity indistinguishable from the discourses constituting subjectivity, or rather, where discourses form a subject who is simultaneously limited or restrained by the dictates of those discourses (Foucault, 1998: 90). There is thus no agent who is not already constituted by discourses of sex and gender. In the case of Herculine, however, Foucault seem to contradict this by presenting Herculine's intersexed anatomy as a fundamental point of antagonism and subversion for discourses of binary sex. Foucault suggests that Herculine's intersexed anatomy is one of emancipation, where 'grins

⁶⁰ I should hasten to add that Butler is not alone in criticising French feminism for committing essentialism. Poovey's analysis of French feminist thought provides a similar criticism to Butler at the same time that Butler was concerned with these issues. Indeed, it could have been Butler who wrote that 'French feminists open the door to the idea of some "natural" language that "accurately" articulates the human subject and especially the human body. That this body is biologically female and therefore "multiple" instead of male and "singular" does not mitigate the essentialism that deconstruction targets as a ruse of metaphysics' (Poovey, 1988: 56-7).

hung about without the cat' (Foucault, 1980: xiii). It is here that Butler outlines the contradiction in Foucault's analysis developed in her earlier paper:

On the one hand, Foucault wants to argue what there is no "sex" in itself which is not produced by complex interactions of discourse and power, and yet there does seem to be a "multiplicity of pleasures" *in itself* which is not the effect of any specific discourse/power exchange. In other words, Foucault invokes a trope of prediscursive libidinal multiplicity that effectively presupposes a sexuality "before the law," indeed, a sexuality waiting for emancipation from the shackles of "sex." (Butler, 2006: 131)

Foucault presents Herculine to be in a position completely external or separate from hegemonic discourses of binary sex. I am not preoccupied here with whether or not Foucault is right in this description of Herculine's position, but I am preoccupied with understanding what Butler believes Foucault is doing when he suggests Herculine is grinning like the Cheshire Cat. Foucault is committing the very essentialism antithetical to his analysis of subjectivity in the first volume of *History of Sexuality* by attributing Herculine's intersexed anatomy to the same prediscursive space that Kristeva attributed to the Semiotic. The body is, as Foucault portrays it in the case of Herculine, in conflict with binary sexed discourses (Foucault, 1980: xiii). Yet such a conflict assumes the body is distinct from that discourse and, as agency occurs from the body, Foucault's attributes to agency capacities and intentions that are independent from the very discourses which in other contexts he describes as constitutive. The body is essentially there irrespective of discourse.

A further example is Monique Wittig who Butler previously criticised for not having adequate 'critical resources' for radically analysing gender, the criticism that the analysis betrays essentialism continues. Wittig emphasises the problematic nature of heterosexuality and by extension draws on the inherently subversive nature of homosexuality or, rather, the emancipatory nature of female homosexuality. In *Gender Trouble*, it is the portrayal of lesbianism in Wittig's works which is essentialist (and problematic):

For power to be withdrawn, power itself would have to be understood as the retractable operation of volition; indeed, the heterosexual contract would be understood to be sustained through a series of choices, just as the social contract in Locke or Rousseau is understood to presuppose the rational choice or deliberate will of those it is said to govern... Wittig calls for a position beyond sex that returns her theory to a problematic humanism based in a problematic metaphysics of presence (Butler, 2006: 168-169).

The 'problematic metaphysics of presence' manifest in a 'problematic humanism'. This is what I understand as the essentialist perspective of subjectivity, which attributes to intention, to will and to

agency a separate existence from the discourses which constitute the subject. The notion that one chooses to engage in heterosexual relations, that these are the product of a continued choice entirely the result of volition, assumes that the subject is a conscious subject independent from the relations into which one enters. Consciousness is essential, pre-existing what a non-essentialist would describe as the conditions of consciousness.

Where *Gender Trouble* deviates from the earlier papers is in Butler's critical analysis of Irigaray, consolidating the belief that Butler situates her own contribution to feminist theory in opposition to French feminists' failure to provide a non-essentialist theory of gender. The problem with Irigaray is the same as for those above. The form of her theory of gender replicates the essentialist underpinnings of those above, albeit the content of her theory looks different. Here, Irigaray is concerned with male-orientated language which negates the female experience and renders the woman a mere extension of the man (Irigaray, 1982: 166). In other words, men are linguistically rendered the universal standard and women a mere deviation from that standard (Irigaray and Carlston, 1989; Irigaray and Guynn, 1995). As in the case of the thinkers discussed above, Irigaray commits a form of essentialism insofar as she appeals to an alternative 'women's language', something completely other than and irreconcilable with the hegemonic male-dominated language which currently situates our subjectivity (Nye, 1986: 50). This subversive alternating, as distinct from the dominant (gendered) discourse, is consistent throughout all the thinkers Butler discussed above, with the added focus on Irigaray in *Gender Trouble*. This same context of identifying and criticising essentialism as it permeates in what was formerly understood as non-essentialist thought continues in *Bodies that Matter*, emphasising that this is the theoretical context to which performativity emerges in opposition.

I understand *Bodies that Matter* to be more critical than *Gender Trouble* insofar as *Bodies that Matter* aims to re-affirm the theory of performativity as a non-essentialist theory of gender. The degree to which it succeeds in this endeavour will constitute my analysis in the following section. That said, what is clear is that Butler continues to attribute theoretical importance to the claim that performativity is *not essentialist*. Unlike *Gender Trouble*, she turns her analysis from the French feminists (and Foucault) and instead her object of critique is the concept of the 'lack' as it emerges in Lacanian and Žižekian thought. Beginning with Laclau and Mouffe, the concept of the 'lack' emerges as the perpetual instability of the signifier to signify that to which it supposedly refers.⁶¹ Coinciding with the concept of 'suture' already discussed, the lack denotes the perpetual impossibility of a fully

⁶¹ I say 'supposedly' because the signifier (or discourse at large) brings into being that which it appears to merely refer.

sutured social formation, where meaning is stable and universally uncontested (Laclau and Mouffe, 2014: 184). This lack, however, is *not* for Laclau and Mouffe the result of a perpetual force of dissatisfaction imposed from without discourse, it is, rather, made possible by the very multiplicity of discourses constituting the 'discursive formation':

But the discursive formation can also be seen from the perspective of the *regularity* in dispersion, and be thought, in that sense, as an ensemble of differential positions. This ensemble is not the expression of any underlying principle external to itself – it cannot, for instance, be apprehended either by a hermeneutic reading or by a structuralist combinatory – but it constitutes a configuration, which in certain contexts of exteriority can be *signified* as a totality (Laclau and Mouffe, 2014: 92, emphasis in original).

What Laclau and Mouffe are saying here is that the discursive formation is the totality of different discourses, the totality of which renders life socially meaningful. The discursive formation is a 'regularity' insofar as it is the continued repetition of discourses in conjunction with one another which yields the totality we experience.⁶² Given the nature of discursive formations as necessarily contingent, clearly any discursive formation is at the same time constituted by an ensemble of discourses. These individual discourses are conceptualised as 'chains of equivalence', otherwise disparate and unrelated signifiers unified 'in reference to something external' (Laclau and Mouffe, 2014: 114). This external is thus the excluded. Consider the following example: to suggest a group of people belong to the same group despite their differences, as in the case of saying that the group of people were women, is to create a chain of equivalence negating the differences between the group by emphasising what they all commonly not or do not have, namely, they are not men, who characterised the presence of the penis. The discourse of what it is to be a woman is thus predicated on the exclusion of men (and vice versa) and thereby a discursive formation where such a discourse is salient is predicated on an ensemble of chains, each with their own respected excluded referent. Importantly, there is no outside the discursive from which antagonisms emerge, but the constant instability at the level of the discursive formation, as every repetition to some extent threatens meaning as it is currently understood and makes possible new chains to emerge. The continued exclusion of the referent is not rejected and expelled to a space beyond the discursive formation as a constitutive *outside*, but exists firmly within it although it is treated qualitatively differently:

⁶² This clearly draws on Foucault's concept of discourse 'regimes' (Foucault, 1977: 73), a point Laclau and Mouffe explicitly acknowledge (Laclau and Mouffe, 2014: 91).

Our analysis rejects the distinction between discursive and non-discursive practices. It affirms: a) that every object is constituted as an object of discourse, insofar as no object is given outside every discursive condition of emergence (ibid: 93).

This situation of the lack as a condition of discourse is, as Butler identifies, different from the lack as it emerges in Lacanian and Žižekian thought. Where Laclau and Mouffe treat the concept of lack (and the related 'excluded' referent) as part of discourse, Žižek's adaptation of Lacan is such that the lack is juxtaposed to the discursive. Indeed, Butler's exploration of Žižek in the latter chapters of *Bodies that Matter* is an exploration of how a theory which initially appears to anticipate her own performative theory of subjectivity and its non-essentialist tenets falls short of precisely that endeavour. Like everyone she discusses in this context, they do not know that they commit essentialism but they do it anyway. In Žižek's case, this is manifest in the presentation of a perpetual resistance to signification, a resistance to conforming to discourse originating from Lacan's 'Real', which I (and clearly Butler) understand to denote a pre-discursive space which continuously destabilises discourses from ever fully suturing:⁶³

[As Žižek argues] the real can never be symbolized, this impossibility constitutes the permanent pathos of symbolization. This is not to claim that there is no real, but, rather, that the real cannot be signified, that it stands, as it were, as the resistance of all signification... As resistance to symbolization, the "real" functions in an exterior relation to language, as the inverse of mimetic representationalism, that is, as the site where all efforts to represent must founder... To freeze the real as the impossible "outside" to discourse is to institute a permanently unsatisfiable desire for an ever elusive referent: the sublime object of ideology (Butler, 2011: 156).

Butler is saying here that the relation established between the lack (here the 'Real') and the discursive formation is fundamentally different to the relation established by Laclau and Mouffe. In the case of Žižek, the content of the subversive lack which occupies the space *beyond* or *outside* the constitutive relations of subjectivity (ideology or discourse) may be different from the French thinkers discussed above, but like those thinkers, the form of the relation between the lack and those constitutive relations remains the same. This lack in all the cases that Butler criticises is manifest in what she describes as a "'lack" with no historicity, the consequence of a transhistorical 'law' (ibid: 167). It is this transhistorical portrayal of the lack which renders it essential, atemporal and non-contingent. It is an essence which is there irrespective of the particular structure of the

⁶³ See how Žižek situates the 'real' as somewhere essentially opposite or outside of ideology '[t]he function of ideology is not to offer us a point of escape from our reality but to offer us the social reality itself an escape from some traumatic, real kernel' (Žižek, 2008: 45).

discursive formation, and in all the cases discussed above, be it the Semiotic, a feminine language, lesbianism, Herculine's body or the Lacanian 'real', the lack is independent of those relations which constitute subjectivity.

A problem arises for Butler here given the simultaneous desire to avoid essentialism whilst offering an adequate theory of gender which accounts for social change. If there is nothing beyond the social, no essential force perpetually haunting the social, what accounts for social change? This is clearly the problem that Žižek seeks to avoid, and precisely the reason he employs the Lacanian 'Real' in his theory of ideology:

In a first approach, the Real is a shock of a contingent encounter which disrupts the automatic circulation of the symbolic mechanism; a grain of sand preventing its smooth functioning; a traumatic encounter which ruins the balance of the symbolic universe of the subject (Žižek, 2008: 192).

In the absence of the 'Real', the symbolic mechanism (the discursive formation) functions automatically. Therefore, presumably a theory of gender which does not include this external threat to the discursive formation constituting gender cannot *prima facie* account for social change as it is not clear why the discursive formation experiences change in the first place. Butler's response is precisely along the lines of Laclau and Mouffe above and the line invoked by Althusser in my previous chapter. The discursive formation is constituted by the lack for Laclau and Mouffe, it is thereby constituted by antagonism. In the same way as I explained in my previous chapter, the concept of 'social reproduction' for Althusser assumes reproduction of a social already experiencing antagonisms and contestation. Non-essentialism does not necessarily entail social stasis. Instead, it requires we reconceptualise the paradigms of subversion and agency to occur from within the dictates of the social as it appears to us through synchronic analysis. This is opposed to the notion that we should appeal to an externality for which desire to subvert the social should turn, or from which that very desire to subvert and contest originates. It is precisely this context of identifying the essentialism within various thinkers, who otherwise present themselves as non-essentialist, that Butler's theory of performativity emerges. It is also the desire to explain social change without recourse to an external referent beyond those relations constituting subjectivity that motivates the development of a performative theory of gender which I will now explain.

A Performative Theory of Gender

Butler develops her performative theory of gender at the same time as she engages in a critique of the essentialism which permeates the ideas of those who are understood to be non-essentialist. This is true throughout *Gender Trouble* and before. The role of de Beauvoir in Butler's thinking is precisely to provide a non-essentialist framework for what she advocates, whereas all others she examines in one way, or another commit the very essentialism they seek to avoid. Two years prior to the publication of *Gender Trouble*, Butler introduces a performative theory of gender in the context of de Beauvoir's thought:

When Beauvoir claims that 'woman' is a historical idea and not a natural fact, she clearly underscores the distinction between sex, as biological facticity, and gender, as the cultural interpretation or signification of that facticity. To be female is, according to that distinction, a facticity which has no meaning, but to be a woman is to have become a woman, to compel the body to conform to an historical idea of 'woman,' to induce the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to an historically delimited possibility, and to do this as a sustained and repeated corporeal project (Butler, 1988: 522).

Situating her own theory of gender within de Beauvoir's own analysis of gender, Butler explains that gender ('woman') is not synonymous with sex, our biology. Furthermore, sex, far from potentiating a sense of essentialism, 'has no meaning' to the extent that it says nothing about who we are and what is prescribed for or foreclosed from us.⁶⁴ Rather, importance is attributed to gender, defined here as a 'historical idea' from which the body emerges as a material phenomenon defined by historically relative limits and possibilities. Indeed, by writing 'to materialize oneself in obedience to an historically delimited possibility', Butler is claiming in this early publication that the materiality of the body is constituted by those very historically delimited possibilities, the ideas surrounding what it is to be a man or a woman. Furthermore, she emphasises here that at no point does gender materialise the body on one occasion, that we in some sense obtain our gender once and for all. Gender is instead a 'repeated corporeal project', something that manifests in repetition and through that repetition continuously re-constitutes the body according that 'historically delimited possibility'. The lines demarcating what the body can and cannot do are not permanently fixed, but a project, something never really fully achieved but constantly re-inscribed. Butler goes on to emphasise how this depiction of gender is characterised by an opposition to essentialism:

⁶⁴ As I will explain momentarily Butler eventually removes sex as a meaningful concept and subsumes it within the performance of gender.

Because there is neither an 'essence' that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires; because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender creates the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis...The authors of gender become entranced by their own fictions whereby the construction compels one's belief in its necessity and naturalness (Butler, 1988: 522).

This is an important quotation because it is the description of a performative theory of gender as an attempted non-essentialist theory of Gendered Subjectivity. Beginning with the relation between 'essence' and gender, Butler explains that there is no essential pre-given or social self (or essence) which is expressed in regulatory norms 'man' or 'woman'- gender. Rather, the very repetition of those norms brings about their continued existence, giving the illusion that something pre-exists their otherwise contemporaneous manifestation. Depictions of an essential self are the result then of those very repeated acts which in their successful repetition give the impression of an essence. The second reason this quotation is important is because it also anticipates the role of agency Butler seeks to espouse as she goes on to later develop her performative theory of gender. She describes the notion that subjects are authors of gender as a 'fiction' resulting from the very gender we repeat in our actions. We are already constructs of a continuous process which 'conceals its genesis' by depicting the subject constituted by the gender they perform as the authors of the very acts which constitute them. Such construction of the subject encourages a belief in the 'necessity and naturalness' of the actions we repeat, even though their repetition precipitates the very sense of self conducting those actions.

Agency depicted above is situated in a precarious and apparently contradictory position. On the one hand, subjectivity is defined by the limits of what the body can and cannot do. What we are is simultaneously defined by what we are not. The subject is already constituted by gender, but on the other hand, gender does not exist out there in the world as a stable fact but is itself reconstituted in the actions of the very subject gender brings into being. Furthermore, we do not want to fully deny the subject's agency in contesting those very actions, as to do so would violate one of the conditions for a satisfactory theory of gender outlined in my introduction. It is also clear that the precarious position of agency preoccupied Butler even earlier on, writing in 1986 that:

When 'becoming' a gender is understood to be both choice and acculturation, then the usually oppositional relation between these terms is undermined. In keeping "become" ambiguous, Beauvoir formulates gender as a corporeal locus of cultural possibilities both received and innovated. Her theory of gender, then, entails a reinterpretation of the existential doctrine of choice whereby

'choosing' a gender is understood as the embodiment of possibilities within a network of deeply entrenched cultural norms (Butler, 1986: 37).

Butler's project in the context of providing a new theory of gender is to develop from this ambiguous position in which de Beauvoir renders the subject. Constituted by the very possibilities the subject constitutes, the role of the agency is complicated. Butler wants to emphasise that agency is 'deeply entrenched [in] cultural norms' but simultaneously wants to meaningfully attribute agency with the capability of 'choosing' a gender'. As I will make clear in the next section, this ambiguity makes possible the very essentialism she sought to avoid, as Butler strives to meaningfully suggest we can choose to engage and contest with gender. Before moving on to performativity as it emerges in *Gender Trouble*, *Bodies that Matter* and *The Psychic Life of Power*,⁶⁵ I wanted to summarise the unique role de Beauvoir played in the development of Butler's performative theory of gender. De Beauvoir, unlike any of the other theorists Butler analyses, provides a significant platform for a non-essentialist theory of gender. The 'becoming' of a woman and the connotations of repetition and corporeality that Butler attributes to de Beauvoir's theory of gender forms the framework for her own non-essentialist theory of gender. The ambiguity surrounding the position of agency provides the opportunity for a meaningful notion of choice and will to subvert and contest, without recourse to some essence of essentiality characteristic of the other thinkers she examines. With this in mind, I will now turn to performativity as it develops in her writings.

Beginning with *Gender Trouble*, Butler starts by explaining that gender is not *done* to an individual, inasmuch as it is not externally imposed on a person, but rather the individual is the *doer* of gender. That is to say, gender is the effect of the individual's actions: '[g]ender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeals over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being' (Butler, 2006: 45). In this sense, gender is very much an effect of one's actions continuously repeated. Following excerpts from previous publications, these come to appear as natural properties of the person in question. Furthermore, Butler is keen to point out the absence of a distinction between the *doer* and the *deed* (gender), but rather the *doer* is the subject formed as an effect of the *deed* (gender), writing that '[m]y argument is that there need not be a "doer behind the deed," but that the "doer" is variably constructed in and through the deed' (Butler, 2006: 195).

Butler's attempts to negate any distinction between the subject and the actions of that subject are in keeping with her prior appeal to Michel Haar's focus on Nietzsche, who thoroughly challenges the

⁶⁵ Published in 1990, 1993 and 1997 respectively.

distinction between 'Being' and 'Substance', concluding that '[t]he subject, the self, the individual, are just so many any false concepts, since they transform into substances fictitious unities having at the start only a linguistic reality' (Haar, 1977: 17-18). This 'linguistic reality' denotes the linguistic dimension of performativity, one of many dimensions in which gender is a performative phenomenon. This concerns how repeated language constitutes the body through its repetition, thereby creating the effect of a unified gendered being who *appears* as a substance, as a cause who is really just the effect of that repetition. In keeping with the notion that performativity entails the constitution of the body through repetition, in *Gender Trouble* Butler goes to some lengths to emphasise that sex is equally constituted by repeated performances (Butler, 2006: 30). In a discussion of thinkers already described above, Butler situates sex as a component performance of 'intelligible' Gendered Subjectivity. Intelligibility here denotes a coherent sexed, gendered and sexual performance (where gender here is specifically related to gendered behaviour) (ibid: 23) repeated in cohort. That is to say, to be a woman is the effect of continued performances of what it is to be female, of what it is to act, dress, behave in general as a female and to have sex and sexual desires of a female. When these repeated performances correspond to one another, they create an intelligible gendered (woman) subject, performances which accumulatively signify the body according to lines demarcating the prescribed from the foreclosed. Importantly, there is no essential substance, historically attributed to a concept like 'sex' or the 'body', as both are subsumed and constituted by repeated performances which bring about that which they assume, the very existence of a sexed body.

In the same way that Butler reduces sex to repetition, desire is rendered entirely contingent on the repeated performances of an intelligible Gendered Subjectivity. All perspectives of consciousness, including that which appears intrinsic and irreducible like our desires and sexuality, are framed within the boundaries of subjectivity, themselves drawn by repeated performances:

Gender can denote a *unity* of experience, of sex, gender, and desire, only when sex can be understood in some sense to necessitate gender – where gender is a psychic and/ or cultural designation of the self – and desire – where desire is heterosexual and therefore differentiates itself through an oppositional relation to that other gender it desires. The internal coherence or unity of either gender, man or woman, thereby requires both a stable and oppositional heterosexuality (Butler, 2006: 31).⁶⁶

⁶⁶ I will leave aside the problematic notion of the psyche. Althusser is far more reluctant to use the concept given the dualism it establishes between the body and the mind, potentially inviting a special metaphor of an essence independent from the processes constituting the body.

Heterosexuality, and indeed sexuality in general, is far from a fact external to the repetition of performances but instituted by those very performances which assume dichotomous sexual boundaries. Butler is, in other words, foreclosing the possibility of any space in which the consciousness can be located independently from consciousness of the constituted subject. Clearly then, *Gender Trouble* serves as the first (and most influential) attempt to provide a consolidated account of gender as performative. With this in mind, I will now turn to the contributions made to performativity in *Bodies that Matter* and *The Psychic Life of Power*.

Performativity and Citationality

I have already discussed *Bodies that Matter* as an attempt to emphasise the non-essentialist nature of her theory of performativity. The degree to which Butler commits a form of essentialism, and why *Bodies that Matter* fails in its project, will occupy my following section. In the context I wish to discuss the text now, in the development of a performative theory of gender, I believe *Bodies that Matter* contributes primarily by introducing the concept 'citationality'. Given the reduction of subjectivity to a series of repeatedly performed acts, an obvious question emerges: can one perform anything? If there is no body other than the constituted body situated by constraints (themselves dictated by the very acts repeated), surely one can perform to be anything at any time? Butler introduces the verb to 'cite' precisely to emphasise the limited and regulatory nature of her performative theory of gender. To describe repeated performances as a citation of norms, norms which only come into being by their repeated citation, is to limit the field of possible acts one can and cannot undertake:

To the extent that the "I" is secured by its sexed position, this "I" and its "position" can be secured only by being repeatedly assumed, whereby "assumption" is not a singular act or event, but, rather, an iterable practice. If to "assume" a sexed position is to seek recourse to a legislative norm... then "assumption" is a question of repeating that norm, citing or mining that norm (Butler, 2011: 71).

Subjectivity is not constituted by a completely arbitrary set of practices. They are citations, appeals to gender norms, the existence of which are bound to the very actions they proscribe. Indeed, when introducing the concept 'citation', and the 'law' which is cited, Butler explains that norms (or law) have no existence independent from the practices that invoke them, writing that 'but neither sex nor the law can be said to pre-exist their various embodyings and citings' (Butler, 2011: 71). She provides this caveat for precisely the reason that she does not want to risk committing the

essentialist claim that the norms constituting the subject are distinct from the subject. Failure to do so would be to tacitly depict the subject as transhistorical, consciously independent from gender norms and simultaneously to depict those norms as something imposed on the subject. The potential to commit the very essentialism she criticised in her predecessors is clear.

In the same chapter that Butler engages with Žižek's concept of the real (discussed above), Butler returns to the concept of citation and further develops the concept with reference to an example. In keeping with the idea that our performances are citations of norms, the repeated performance of which constitutes the norm in the first place, Butler explains the consistent performances depend on repeated citation:

Consider critically, this scene of baptism, which will retroactively become the model for all naming as rigid designation, is the fixing of a referent to a person through the interpellation of that person into a religious lineage, a "naming" that is at once an inculcation into a patrilineage that track back to, and reiterates, the original naming that God the father performs on Adam. The "fixing" of the referent is thus a "citation" of an original fixing, a reiteration of the divine process of naming, whereby naming inaugurates his existence within the divinely sanctioned community of man (Butler, 2011: 160).⁶⁷

Butler explains citationality in greater detail than before with reference to Christianity. Citationality is the positioning of the subject according to the dictates of certain other norms, here the patrilineage of Christianity. What it is to be a man or a woman, and in this case a *Christian man or woman*, is to situate the subject, to position them by reference to Christianity. Why is it that to be a man or woman is to be something rigid, demarcated along rigid lines rather than heterogeneity of performances? As Butler explains, this "'fixing" of the referent' (by which she means fixing meaning surrounding what is a man or a woman) is the result of a citation of norms which is ultimately nothing more than a 'reiteration', a repetition that brings into existence the norms that are cited. Our performance does not occur in a vacuum. Indeed, we are not born in a state of heterogeneity, where all actions and all subsequent subjectivities are possible. Performativity *without* citationality equates to heterogeneity, as without recourse to some externality existing in synchrony with the subject leads us back to the essential self. Performativity *with* citationality tries to provide a balanced approach to subjectivity, which avoids heterogeneity of possibility by emphasising an external referent or norms (that which is cited) whilst firmly situating the existence of those norms within their continued citation. Citation brings into existence that which it cites. Indeed, it is partly

⁶⁷ Leave aside the obvious invocation of Althusser, and the equally obvious point that all she is missing is the Authoritative Subject who names the subject according to the Christian patrilineage, which occupies the space of the script or State Ideology as Althusser would describe it.

the role of *Bodies that Matter* to reaffirm the non-essentialism of performativity by introducing citationality as a concept. Having introduced performativity and citationality, I will now turn to *The Psychic Life of Power* as it consolidates performativity and citationality into an analysis of the persistence of gender norms.

The Psychic Life of Power serves as a text exploring the links between psychoanalysis's object of analysis, the psyche, and her own theory of performativity. Certain themes like an inherent desire for social existence are introduced in this text, the reasons and implications for which I will return in the following section (Butler, 1997b: 19). Another contribution to the theory of performativity is the account of the melancholic subject which despite finding its first expression in *Gender Trouble*, finds its clearest expression here. Melancholia is best understood in distinction to mourning. As Butler explains, when we mourn, we internalise the one we lost, betraying a dualist typology of the subject problematic to non-essentialism. Mourning entails a sense of repression of desire which suggests that the desire repressed existed independent from the prohibition repressing it (ibid: 23). We have already seen how norms are firmly understood to exist in synchrony with their citation. Butler claims the same is true for desire and its prohibition. Melancholia is the qualitative non-essentialist approach to that which is prohibited, grounded in foreclosure rather than repression. Foreclosure entails 'the formula "I have never loved" someone of similar gender and "I have never lost" any such person [which] predicates the "I" on the "never-never" of that love and loss' (ibid: 23). By this, Butler means that the subject, the 'I', is not distinguished from that which is prohibited but rather constituted by prohibition. Subjectivity is therefore not predicated on the repression of a pre-existing state of heterogeneity but is constituted by foreclosure, the limiting of what is possible.⁶⁸ All subjectivity is therefore a melancholic subjectivity, predicated on foreclosure.

As well as providing the clearest explanation of the melancholic subject, *The Psychic Life of Power's* primary contribution (for my purposes at least) is the disaggregation of 3 stages of performativity, which accounts for the persistence of gender norms over time. In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler discusses the citation of norms the existence of which is dependent on their very citation, eventually dropping the concept 'norms' for 'power'. As far as I understand it, Butler uses 'norms' interchangeably with 'power' and 'discourse', and for that reason I do not draw any meaningful

⁶⁸ Recall the "'fixing" of the referent' Butler discussed above. Foreclosure is the moment of fixing the referent by stabilising it through prohibition, by demarcating what is and is not included in the referent. The subject is a fixed referent, constituted by foreclosure.

distinction between the three.⁶⁹ With this in mind, consider the three stages of performativity she outlines below:

Power not only *acts on* a subject but, in a transitive sense, *enacts* the subject into being. As a condition, power precedes the subject. Power loses its appearance of priority, however, when it is wielded by the subject, a situation that gives rise to the reverse perspective that power is the effect of the subject, and that power is what subjects effect... Power acts on the subject in two ways: first, as what makes the subject possible... and second, as what is taken up and reiterated in the subject's "own" acting (Butler, 1997b: 13-14).

This is an important quotation for reasons that are twofold: firstly, it illustrates the three stages of performativity which I will explain here; and secondly, because it conveniently introduces us to the role of agency in her theory of performativity, which will occupy my analysis in the following section. So far as the first is concerned, Butler explains here that power (or discourse), as that which is cited, in a sense precedes the subject insofar as the subject is constituted by power (stage 1). Power is what situates the subject as a social subject, bringing the 'subject into being' as, in our context, a Gendered Subject (stage 2). In keeping with theoretical associations drawn from citationality, however, power exists as 'the effect of the subject' – that is to say, although we may want to suggest power precedes the subject, this is not in any conventional temporal sense as power is equally dependent on the subject it brings into being. Once situated, this very power which brought the subject into being is subsequently 'wielded by the subject' and continues to exist in its current form to the extent that the subject's subsequent performance reiterates that very power which brought the subject into being (stage 3). The nature of performativity is such that we cannot easily identify which stage of this process is occurring at any given time, but nor does Butler want to make that the case. That power is said to precede the subject and yet simultaneously exists because of the subject, poses as a temporal conundrum designed specifically to avoid any risk of being misconstrued as essentialist. Neither the subject nor the conditions of the subject's existence can be meaningfully distinguished from each other except at the conceptual level as witnessed above.

That Gendered Subjectivity persists as a primary component of who we are is explained by the three stages outlined above. Subjectivity may very well be performative, and the continuation of gender may be dependent on the accumulation of repetitious acts. That said, this only occupies the final stage of performativity. The subject who performs is already constituted by the very gender they

⁶⁹ Indeed early in *Gender Trouble* Butler explicitly suggests the synonymous nature of power and discourse as concepts by writing discussing compulsory heterosexuality as a 'power/discourse' regime (ibid: xxxii), whilst also early in the text writing that 'normative frameworks' are invoked in the form of 'discourse' (ibid: 40).

subsequently wield and re-enact. That the subject 'wields' their gender is not an omission of voluntarism. Indeed, that which they yield is the very condition of their existence, a condition which has already constituted them through prohibition. Thus, the subject does not wield their gender as if they were wielding a sword insofar as the sword is not an aspect of the existential origin of the one wielding it. At the same time, the metaphor of the sword is not entirely alien to Butler's purposes. The object of the sword has obviously appropriate usages. Whilst certain actions are foreclosed by wielding the sword: it cannot be used to do certain things, it can at the same time be used in unconventional ways which may, through repetition, re-define the purposes of the sword. Gender functions in the same way. Certain actions are clearly foreclosed but others, when repeated over time, can subvert how gender is understood. Subsequently, the precise dictates of gender norms constituting future Gendered Subjects are not a foregone conclusion but predicated on the very actions reproducing them. The difference with gender as opposed to the analogy of the sword is that gender has a constitutive hold on the subject in question, otherwise the comparison is helpful to extrapolate what Butler means by 'wielding' and the (albeit limited) possibilities the verb to 'wield' affords the subject.

I have explained how Butler attempts to create a non-essentialist theory of gender. The invocation of gender as cited and preceding the subject, whilst emphasising that the subject brings into existence that which it cites. Furthermore, compared to Althusser, concept of citationality constructs a direct relation between the subject formed and the norms constituting them. Butler discusses the process of 'naming' throughout but renders this verb meaningless by leaving unoccupied the space of that which names. Butler prefers instead to establish a direct link between the subject and the norms which constitute them through the act of citation. This direct link, born out of an inaccurate engagement with Althusser, under close examination is central to my claim that Butler relapses into essentialism. The second reason the quotation by Butler above is important is because it introduces us to the role of agency in Butler's theory of performativity and what I will identify as the essentialist undertones of performativity, which undermine her attempts to establish a non-essentialist theory of gender.

3.2 Performativity and Essentialism

In this section, I will outline the degree to which Butler undermines her commitment to providing a non-essentialist theory of gender. By critically analysing the space provided for agency in her theory of performativity, it will become apparent that, despite her best efforts, Butler commits the very essentialism she criticised in those before her. The ability to provide an account of agency is imperative if the theory of gender being developed is sufficient for feminist purposes. I have explained how an Althusserian theory of gender situates agency within a non-essentialist framework, presenting agency and intention as a play within the confines of interpellation. The external referent in the form of the Authoritative Subject serves as an explanatory tool for why subjectivity may change and vary over time. Changes in the material form of the Authoritative Subject are precipitated by and precipitate changes in the subjugated subject. The scope for the subject to intentionally engage with those very relations is equally made possible by particular interpellative relations constituting them militant subjects, and the correct philosophical conditions necessary to identify and critically engage with those relations. The concept of agency in Althusser's theory of gender is not a recourse to some pre-social, pre-ideological (or pre-discursive) space but the effect of particular conditions which the subject's agency is subsequently able to engage with and contest. My claim is that Butler's understanding of agency falls within the essentialist paradigm she sought to avoid and indeed appears to have recourse back to some notion of the pre-discursive, the very same as that which she identified as antithetical to the non-essentialist project. In order to make this claim, I will outline the role of agency as it develops in *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter*, demonstrating the degree to which essentialism informs the presentation of agency throughout.

Butler's examination of agency in *Gender Trouble* is also an examination of the potential for gender subversion in the repetition of our acts: '[w]ithout an agent, it is argued, there can be no agency and hence no potential to initiate a transformation of relations of domination within society' (Butler, 2006: 34). One thing I want to make clear from the outset is that Butler is clearly aware of the potential essentialist interpretation of *Gender Trouble*, in particular her examination of drag performance. Her 1999 preface to *Gender Trouble* makes this point explicit, writing that '*Gender Trouble* sometimes reads as if gender is simply a self-invention' (ibid: xxvi). Despite this, we can identify a theory of agency as a theory of subversion facilitated by gender's material and temporally contingent existence of the repetition of gendered acts. Gendered Subjectivity is, we should recall from above, the repeated performance of sex, sexuality and gendered behaviour according to one

side of the dichotomous divide. In other words, gender is the repetition of acts establishing a female sex, a female sexuality and behavioural traits which together create what it means to be a woman. The ability to 'initiate a transformation of relation of domination within society' is born from the premise that these relations are the effect of corresponding performances repeated over time.

Firstly, what is clear is that repetition never wholly consolidates the subject formed. We saw this in my discussion of the concept of lack in the previous section. The point here is that we cannot analyse in the here and now as if gender was a stable performance. Gender performance is already unstable to the point that it is not uniform and as rigid as we may believe:

The productions [of gender] swerve from their original purposes and inadvertently mobilize possibilities of "subjects" that do not merely exceed the bounds of cultural intelligibility, but effectively expand the boundaries of what is, in fact, culturally intelligible (Butler, 2006: 40).

Like Althusser's theory of the social formation being a social formation *already in contestation*, Butler presents gender performance as already unstable, constituting new subjects who re-define the parameters of gender. Gender is depicted as fundamentally fluid, as a set of repeated performances already characterised by a degree of deviating and disconnected performances which challenge the regimented dichotomous performance of sex, sexuality and gendered behaviour.

So far, the conditions are similar to those of Althusser, and the space of the agent to critically engage with gender is made possible by the very fluid nature of gender performance in the first place. It is this disconnect, the deviating performance, which originates the agent's capacity to challenge and subvert dominant gender performances. A strategy of gender subversion must focus on the repetitious nature of gender, '[it must offer] the possibility of a repetition of the law which is not is consolidation, but its displacement' (ibid: 42), but which is fundamentally a play with the law itself and not an appeal *beyond* it. That said, Butler appears to move away from this point and identify agency independently from the fluid context she establishes early on.

As Butler's analysis of gender develops throughout the text, it is clear she wants to instil in the subject a greater capacity to challenge and contest gender than is afforded the subject by what has been described above. Her later analysis begins to portray the subject's capacity or, importantly, their will to subvert dominant gender norms independently from the underlying context of gender fluidity. This is clearest in the case of drag. Drag, Butler explains, creates a dissonance between one's sex and one's behavioural norms, a dissonance which 'reveals the distinctness of those aspects of gendered experience which are falsely naturalized as a unity through the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence' (Butler, 2006: 187). Drag accentuates the contingent nature of Gendered

Subjectivity as the corresponding performances of sex and gendered behaviour, insofar as men's sex appears incompatible with their performed behaviour (their speech, dress, body language). What is particularly telling is Butler's account of pleasure as something we gain, at least in part, from recognising the contingent nature of Gendered Subjectivity:

Indeed, part of the pleasure, the giddiness of the performance is in the recognition of a radical contingency in the relation between sex and gender in the face of cultural configurations of causal unities that are regularly assumed to be natural and necessary (Butler, 2006: 187).

Butler's brief presentation of pleasure as one's recognition of the contingent nature of Gendered Subjectivity is in opposition to her belief that the totality of the subject is the effect of repeated performances.⁷⁰ What is this pleasure then but the allusion to a space independent from the repetition of performances constituting the subject? In fact, this pleasure is an explanatory tool for why we may critically engage with dominant gender performances in the first place. Returning to the beginning of the text, Butler cites sexuality as an obvious performances which has the potential to challenge dominant conceptions of intelligible Gendered Subjectivity (ibid: 43). Homosexuality *at least prima facie* challenges performances of sexuality according to dichotomous heterosexuality. But the question is why would we engage in subversive performances? Simply because alternative performances are on offer, their reduction to the periphery of accepted performances and the social stigma which follows ought to foreclose the future repetition of those deviating performances. Pleasure here is actually a subtle underlying factor occupying a space independent from the repetition of performances constituting subjectivity and allowing the subject to voluntarily engage with those performances. It is the pleasure we get from the dissonance of performances between sex, sexuality and gendered behaviour which explains why we participate in those deviating performances *despite* the stigma attributed to them.

This is not a casual comment. Butler had said the same thing fourteen years earlier in *Undoing Gender* (2004). Here, Butler similarly describes pleasure as something emerging from the drag film *Paris is Burning*, as something which 'crosses cultural boundaries' (Butler, 2004: 216). Surely that which crosses cultural boundaries occupies a space beyond the rigid dictates of culture determined by the repetition of material performances. This is precisely the kind of essential consciousness which cannot be reduced to the social, a pleasure which is qualitatively different from that described

⁷⁰ This is demonstrated by her depiction of pleasure as inextricably connected to the melancholic subject or, as she explains, what counts as pleasure having been demarcated as such by what is permitted by foreclosure: '[p]leasures are in some sense determined by the melancholic structure of gender whereby some organs are deadened to pleasure, and others brought to life' (Butler, 2006: 95-96).

in earlier sections of *Gender Trouble*, where pleasure cannot be said to exist independently from the regulatory nature of the melancholic subject.⁷¹ This is a pleasure which I believe contextualises how Butler understands contestation in subject formation. The repetitious nature of the subject characterises the fundamental 'vulnerability and precariousness of bodies' (Schippers, 2016: 50). At the same time, Butler wants to emphasise the capacity of the subject to critically engage on an almost voluntary basis with their subjectivity and the pre-discursive space of pleasure described above offers precisely that opportunity. For Althusser, that the subject critically engages with the interpellative relations constituting the subject is not an act of will, but the effect of those relations in the first place. Structural conditions changing over time constitute militant subjects who consequently effect change. There is no recourse to an outside or beyond, but Butler here presents the pleasure of subversion as something beyond that which is being subverted, namely Gender Subjectivity. Drag is significant for Butler precisely because it illustrates an example of critically engaging with those performances which formerly constituted dichotomous gender subjectivity and re-signifies what counts as intelligible or not. A pre-discursive pleasure provides the backdrop for such critical engagement at the level of repetitious acts.

In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler acknowledges the potentially essentialist voluntarism depicted by the presentation of performativity in *Gender Trouble*, which I claim is explained by her subtle (and perhaps unintentional) endorsement of pre-discursive pleasure. This is a depiction of pleasure which exists parallel to discourse, like a perpetual destabilising force which finds expression in those moments when discourse fails to fully frame and account for bodily performances. Butler wants to avoid precisely the voluntarism which assumes independent agent who engages with the mechanisms of subject formation. For this reason, she wants to argue that the subject who engages with Gendered Subjectivity *is* a Gendered Subject, that they are already a Gendered Subject and thus act from within the constraints of their melancholic subjectivity. We do not exist in a space of heterogeneity, or countless possibilities, but our decisions are already constrained by what has or has not been foreclosed from us in prior performances. It is for this reason that Butler introduces the concept of citationality, described above, to explain the limited field of possible performances. When we perform, we cite norms and in the act of citing those norms we bring the norm into existence, to be sustained by repeating actions corresponding to those norms.

⁷¹ Indeed the link from a socially irreducible pleasure, to the subversive capacity of that irreducible pleasure is clear. Agency here as the ability to subvert is guaranteed not by social conditions, but an essential pleasure.

Citation and Essentialism

The concept of citation cradles its own problems for Butler's attempts to avoid essentialism. I mentioned above how Butler identifies a direct relation between the subject formed and the norm cited. The first problem that emerges is that 'citing' is a verb which assumes an active agent in the first place. That we are already gendered, and by extension cite norms which have already constituted us, avoids the problem of grammatically betraying a sense of essentialism, an agent independent from the norms they cite. Additionally, the relationship grounded in parity between the norm and the subject citing the norm leads to an additional problem. Remember, for Althusser, we cannot meaningfully distinguish the subject from their constitutive relations with an Authoritative Subject, who interpellates the subject according to State Ideology. The subject does not appeal to or cite ideology, the relation is both indirect and presented asymmetrically insofar as the subject is constituted by the Authoritative Subject. For Butler, the existence of the norm is determined by the norm's citation by the subject, who is equally determined by the norm they cite. Butler's citationality is certainly a theory of parity between gender norms and the subject constituted by those norms, but is for that reason problematic. This parity exhausts the problem of time as it emerges in Butler's theory of citation, betraying an (unintentional) belief in the essentialist subject yet again. Consider Butler's distinction between time of the subject and time of the norms the subject cites in *Giving an Account of Oneself*:

The norms by which I seek to make myself recognizable are not fully mine. They are not born with me; the temporality of their emergence does not coincide with the temporality of my own life. So, in living my life as a recognizable being, I live a vector of temporalities (Butler, 2005: 35).

In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler introduces the concept of citation to avoid the apparent essentialism found in *Gender Trouble*. But here we can see embedded in the concept of citation the temporal distinction between the time of the subject, the 'I' and the time of the norms that the subject cites in order to become recognizable. Althusser avoids such temporal distinction by establishing a linear relation between the subject formed and the interpellative Authoritative Subject. There is no time of the subject independent from the constitutive relations with the Authoritative Subject. Indeed, the subject's ability to play with interpellation is only because the subject has been interpellated as a militant subject, again emphasising none of this occurs *outside* of the interpellative relations. The subject still holds agency to a meaningful extent, but their agency is within a non-essentialist framework. With the distinction of times, Butler's subjectivity appears different from that of Althusser's. The difference in times facilitates the capacity for the subject to act back on that which

they cite, to partake in varying practices which disturb the consonance between sex, sexuality and gendered behaviour. As Brady and Schirato explain: '[t]he gap between habitus and field can be productive to the extent that their lack of synchronicity can be the basis for their unravelling' (Brady and Schirato, 2011: 28). The problem is, this very distinction of temporalities establishes an independence between the subject and the norms cited, undermining the very reason Butler introduced citationality in the first place. This temporal distinction demands we ask the question: who is the subject in that temporally distinct space, if not the essential subject independent from the social? Butler's agent is the very agent she sought to avoid, the essential agent whose consciousness and intention is fundamentally distinct from the norms one recognises themselves in through citation. In a sense, Butler never overcomes the ambiguous position of the agent she noted in de Beauvoir's work four years prior to the publication of *Gender Trouble* (Butler, 1986: 37). Butler is caught in a double bind, in one sense wanting to avoid essentialism but in the other sense wanting to provide a meaningful account of the agent's capacity to contest dominant Gendered Subjectivity. I believe the latter bind continuously wins out.

We can see how this latter bind, the desire to emphasise the agent's capacity to contest and subvert, wins out in Butler's treatment of Irigaray in *Bodies that Matter*. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler juxtaposes her own performative theory of gender and the subversion of gender with one espoused by Irigaray (and others) who in one way or another appeal to a pre-discursive space as the origin of gender alterity. In *Bodies that Matter* Butler revisits Irigaray, focusing on the form of Irigaray's philosophical practice rather than its content. In Irigaray's philosophical practice (rather than its actual content) Butler identifies a strategy of gender subversion which encapsulates performativity, avoiding any appeal to a pre-discursive space typically in the form of the unruly maternal (Butler, 2011: 18):

Irigaray merely mimes that very act of displacement, displacing the displacement, showing that origin to be an "effect" of a certain ruse of phallogocentric power. In line with this reading of Irigaray, then, the feminine as maternal does not offer itself as an alternative origin. For if the feminine is said to be anywhere or anything, it is that which is produced through displacement (ibid: 18-19).

By mimicking the phallogocentric discourse through alternative performances, by 'displacing the displacement' which I understand to denote the positioning of women as a lesser deviation from the standard masculine, Irigaray creates an alternative subversive feminine. Women are already positioned, displaced or situated and what Butler is saying here is that Irigaray is subverting this position by playing with the very discourses which situated women in positions of subordination in

the first place. This is not an appeal to something beyond or outside that phallogocentric discourse but precisely an engagement with it.⁷²

Irigaray, similar to drag performance, is an example of an agent actively engaging to subvert predominantly gender binary performances by mimicking those very performances. In avoiding the appeal to something beyond phallogocentric discourses, the example illustrates a non-essentialist approach to agency insofar as the subject subverts from within those discourses, not from without. This example is telling because, as far as I understand it, Butler is still admitting the type of voluntarism she wants to avoid which assumes consciousness independent from the norms that constitute subjectivity – a pre-given consciousness. In other words a consciousness distinct from positioned subjectivity. If we consider the concept of time that Butler advocates, Irigaray's time as a subject is different from the time of the phallogocentrism she cites and contests in her subsequent performances. Irigaray is able to mime these discourses through her actions precisely because she occupies a different time to that of the norms she is citing and subsequently her conscious decision to mime is independent from those norms. It is not obvious that Irigaray's decision to subvert phallogocentrism is predicated by those very norms, but only that, in order to subvert, she must do so by way of these norms. The conscious decision to do so is still fully independent from those norms. Despite Butler's potential rebuttal that Irigaray is a Gendered Subject, there is no prompt explaining or contextualising Irigaray's decision to engage with problematic gender binary discourses. Irigaray's means of contesting phallogocentrism may not have an alternative origin, but Irigaray's decision to do so does.

Butler may have wanted to avoid it, but there are certain gaps in her analysis of Irigaray's philosophical practice in the form of language use, what she describes as 'philosophemes' (Butler, 2011: 18). These gaps are the product of her specific understanding of Althusser, one which at the time did not revolve around Althusser's concept of the Authoritative Subject. The relationship that Butler established between the subject and the norms that the subject cites is a direct one which is grounded in parity. As explained in the previous chapter, Butler examines naming but never asks the question as to who is the one that names and is in an authoritative position to do so. As I said before, she takes from Althusser but misses crucial features of his theory of interpellation, rendering

⁷² In light of this, Butler writes, in a manner almost criticising her earlier engagement with Irigaray, that '[i]ndeed, one might reconsider the convention characterization of Irigaray as an uncritical maternalist, for here it appears that the reinscription of the maternal takes place by writing with and through the language of phallic philosophemes' (Butler, 2011: 18). Where 'maternalism' denotes the belief in a pre-given source of subversion, Irigaray's actual practice denotes the belief that the maternal is nothing other than a deviation of acts from within the dominant binary gender performances, described here as phallogocentrism.

his theory non-essentialist. Those very features become apparent here. To take a key case in point, Butler never asks what has made possible Irigaray's critical engagement with binary gender discourses. By not asking, the assumption is that Irigaray is the origin of her own engagement. Interpellation, however, emphasises that one is always a subjugated subject, constituted by particular interpellative relations. Althusser would argue that Irigaray's subversion is made possible by the very relations she will eventually seek to contest. Material changes in those relations constitute Irigaray as a militant subject, and that, with developments in her particular philosophical context, renders possible a successful subversive performance in gendered discourses and their reproduction. Irigaray is still an agent in this endeavour, but her agency is the result of conditions we can theoretically identify and analyse.

What are the specific relations, the material changes of which have precipitated Irigaray's militant subjectivity? Clearly we cannot identify them all. The subject is after all an overdetermined subject constituted by multiple ISAs and their respective interpellative relations. That said, philosophy, or rather, key philosophical figures are her object of critique. It is these figures who constitute the object of 'play' as Balibar conceptualised it above, and by extension they are among the Authoritative Subjects interpellating Irigaray. Part of her militant subjectivity, her ability to contest, is perhaps the result of material changes in the ISA to which these Authoritative Subjects belong. Irigaray mimes these figures, but given that they are the figures of her critical mimicry, an Althusserian reading of Irigaray asks what in the material form of these various interpellative relations, has precipitated her ability to subvert or to play? Butler, for example, emphasises Irigaray's relation to Plato and what she is doing when she mimes Plato in a non-phallogocentric way (Butler, 2011: 18). Butler, however, fails to explain the conditions yielding Irigaray's ability to do so. What explains Irigaray's ability to contest where others reproduce the phallus? We need to identify what has changed in the material form of her interpellative relations precipitating her militancy. Indeed the fact that Irigaray's project of mimicry is a mimicry of other authoritative figures in philosophy suggests there is a change in the material form of those very figures facilitating her play.

I should add here that I am not attempting to provide answers to these questions. Rather, I am trying to demonstrate what an Althusserian reading of Irigaray's critical engagement with gender binary discourses is looking for. By asking these particular questions, we assume agency is situated within particular constitutive relations which accumulatively create the subject. It is asking these very questions which renders Althusser's analysis non-essentialist and failing to ask these questions which renders Butler's analysis essentialist. I am not saying Butler's theory of performativity is insufficient for this reason, but that it is insufficient by her own standards of creating a non-

essentialist theory of gender. If we consider Althusser's treatment of the artist Leonardo Cremonini (1966d), we can see that Althusser emphasises precisely this point. An analysis of Cremonini as the subversive artist cannot forget that his work is preconditioned by prior ideological conditions, i.e. changes in the ISAs and certain philosophical conditions, what he describes as materialism. As such, Cremonini the subversive artist, or Irigaray the subversive philosopher both occupy positions constituted by the very conditions they will subsequently contest, writing that '[a]t any rate, we know that 'consciousness' is secondary, even when it *thinks*, in the principle of materialism, its derivatory and conditioned position' (Althusser, 1966d: 166).

Althusser is not giving us answers. In the case of Cremonini, he does not conduct the kind of analysis he calls for, namely, one which identifies the interpellative conditions rendering militant subjectivity possible. Had his work on interpellation preceded his discussion of Cremonini as opposed to the other way around he might explored those important interpellative relations. Nevertheless, before his analysis of interpellation Althusser insisted that consciousness or agency is secondary, which is to say a 'conditioned position'. What is interpellation but precisely the mechanism Althusser would later identify as that which conditions the subject, that which constitutes the subject in a position defined by what is it and what it is not? Furthermore, I do not have the information to successfully analyse the conditions surrounding Cremonini nor Irigaray through an Althusserian lens. I do however know what I would be looking for if I had that information.

The Guilty Subject

Before concluding this chapter, I want to draw on one final yet important concept that emerges in *The Psychic Life of Power* and is noticeably distinct from the rest of Butler's writings, in ways that cast light on her relationship with Althusser and her own essentialism. This is the concept of the 'guilty subject' and it is important because it depicts a subject bound to the norms constitutive of subjectivity, explaining why it is we repeat those very norms which define us in respective positions of domination and subordination, equally characterised by prohibition:

This means that, prior to any possibility of a critical understanding of the law, there is an openness or vulnerability to the law, exemplified in the turn toward the law, in the anticipation of culling an identity through identifying with the one who has broken the law. Indeed, the law is broken prior to any possibility of having access to it, and so, "guilt" is prior to knowledge of the law and is, in this sense, always strangely innocent (Butler, 1997b: 108).

For the conscience that compels the wayward pedestrian to turn around upon hearing the policeman's address, or the one that ushers the murderer into the streets in search of the police, appears to be driven by a love of the law that can be satisfied only by ritual punishment (ibid: 128-129).

These two quotations are exceptionally important because each betrays precisely the essentialist pre-given subject against which Butler juxtaposed her own theory of gender in a way which is far more explicit than anything else discussed above. Prior to signification by the very norms one cites and performs, exists a subject whose guilt creates a perpetual desire to adhere to those very norms. Guilt is an emotion in this context betraying consciousness prior to the norms or laws which is cited. In the first quotation, guilt is clearly depicted as something distinct from those norms. In the second quotation, Butler explicitly conjures up Althusser's theory of interpellation and inserts guilt as a pre-condition for why one turns to the call of the policeman. Butler forgets, however, that Althusser explicitly denies the presence of guilt as an explanatory concept for why we turn in the example of the policeman he provides, preferring instead the notion that we are always already subjects (Althusser, 2006: 118-119). I believe Althusser emphasises the absence of guilt in his example of the policeman to avoid precisely the essentialist depiction of subjectivity prior to the relations constituting subjectivity. I believe the intentional absence of guilt is to avoid what de Ípola describes as 'subjectivity without a subject' (de Ípola 2018: 101), consciousness which is not constituted by the social however the social is understood. Pierre Macherey, a student of Althusser's, raises this point when he writes the following:

[Butler] supposes as a prerequisite something like an intention or a desire to obey, unconscious of course, whose origin can only a "that one" ... or a subject predating the production of the subject: this results in the fact that, in order to really effect this production, there needs to be a subject there already, a subject carrying the motor of guilt that inclines it towards submitting itself to the voice that calls, by adopting an obedient posture that corresponds not solely to the functioning of an automatism because it also consists of the fulfilment of a desire (Macherey and Bundy, 2013: 17).

Here, guilt is synonymous with desire, namely, a desire to obey norms which predate the socially signified subject. In the latter part of Macherey's quotation, he emphasises that guilt plays the role of a motor compelling the subject to the norms they eventually cite. This emphasises a distinction of time between the desiring subject and the norms that are desired and eventually cited, demonstrated in the absence of 'automatism' to which Macherey turns his analysis. It is this automatism between the Authoritative Subject and the subjugated subject formed which avoids essentialism in Althusser's interpellative theory of gender. Admittedly, automatism renders

subversion different in the interpellative model compared to performativity but it is certainly not nullified, a point I have gone to pains to emphasise and explain above.

That Macherey reframes a discussion of guilt fundamentally as a discussion of desire is telling of the same problem in Butler as it is in Lacan. In a recent application of Lacanian theory to analysis of videogames, Bown (2018) unintentionally remarks on the dual treatment of desire in Lacan's thought and the essentialist/non-essentialist dichotomy which underpins this dual treatment. As Bown explains, desire is remarked by Lacan's theory of the unconscious as something which is constituted by the social dynamics which constitute subjectivity. The ever-increasing virtual world with its multiplicitous and insidious permeations is such that it is ever-increasingly constituting what we desire, given that desire is a fundamental component of our subjectivity (Bown, 2018: 76). When Lacan describes the unconscious as structured like a language he is making this point, that there is no *prima facie* unconscious which is not socially and temporally structured. At the same time, Lacan describes *object petit a* as the perpetual desire for satisfaction, a desire which pre-exists the subject and is never satisfied (Grosz, 2005: 75). In one sense then, desire is constituted in the social; in another, desire predates the social and Bown unexpectedly helps identify this contradictory employment of desire. Butler's guilty subject is Lacan's *object petit a*, insofar as both occupy a space independent from the social.

Far from a passing comment in *The Psychic Life of Power*, the guilty subject draws on the temporal distinction between the subject and the norms that the subject cites and serves to explain why it is that the subject cites these very norms. In the absence of automation, the guilty subject explains the compulsion towards those very norms. This is a late concept which perhaps most explicitly undermines Butler's attempts to provide a non-essentialist theory of gender. Nevertheless, is it made possible by Butler's earlier writings and cannot be treated independently from those writings, but rather as symptomatic of them. In other words, the guilty subject is an underlying pretext throughout the development of performativity and only finds its explicit articulation in this later text.

In this chapter I have outlined: a) Judith Butler's intention to provide a non-essentialist theory of gender; b) how the performative theory of gender attempts to adhere to non-essentialism; and finally, c) the degree to which agency as it emerges in performativity undermines the very non-essentialism which inspired and framed Butler's theory of performativity in the first place. I should emphasise again that at no point am I saying Butler's theory of gender is inadequate. It clearly satisfies the criteria I set out in my introduction for measuring the adequateness of a theory of gender. It is by her own standards that she fails. Were Butler to more thoroughly incorporate the

primary tenets of Althusser's theory of subjectivity, by paying attention to the particular asymmetrical relations characterising interpellation, she would have avoided committing the very essentialism she sought to avoid. The direct and equal relation between the subject and the norms constituting the subject, as well as the temporal distinction between the subject and norms are such that Butler portrays agency within the very paradigms she formerly criticised. Butler presents the subject as separate, guilty, and ultimately independent from gender norms. This subsequently cannot avoid a conception of agency whereby the subject is not the origin of their decision to subvert and contest dominant gender norms. This is in clear contrast to Althusser's claim that there is no thinking, no consciousness which is not already positioned or constituted by particular relations. It is now appropriate to turn to my final chapter which, through analysis of Herculine Barbin's memoirs, will explain the differences between these two approaches and the position agency occupies in both.

Chapter 4 The Case of Herculine Barbin

The purpose of this final chapter is to apply the theoretical analyses in the preceding chapters to an empirical example. I will use the example of Herculine Barbin's memoirs to demonstrate the distinct nature of both a Butlerian and Althusserian approach to Gendered Subjectivity, and to demonstrate the essentialism that permeates the former and not the latter. It is these aims which organise its structure of what follows. In the first section titled 'Herculine Barbin' I outline Herculine's life as she recounts it in her memoirs. In the second section, 'A Butlerian and an Althusserian Reading of Barbin', I will explain the degree to which a Butlerian or Althusserian reading places greater focus and emphasis on different aspects of that story in understanding the constitution of Herculine's subjectivity. Unlike Cremonini and Irigaray, Herculine's memoirs provide us with enough information to conduct an Althusserian analysis of Barbin's subjectivity and the conditions which may yield a change in her subjectivity. For that very reason, these memoirs are important in exemplifying what I have in the previous section only outlined at a theoretical and abstract level. In the final section titled 'Barbin, Essentialism and Non-essentialism', I will explain how differences in interpretation – in particular, differences in what is emphasised – yield essentialism in a Butlerian reading compared to non-essentialism in an Althusserian reading of the same text.

It is my contention that Herculine's memoirs illustrate key ideas central to Althusser's theory of Gendered Subjectivity. The first such idea is that the memoirs clearly communicate the idea that subjectivity is the constituted effect of multiple overlapping ISAs, each with their own Authoritative Subjects and that we can identify them throughout the memoirs. The second is that we witness in Herculine a complete absence of resistance to the hail of the Authoritative Subjects. Herculine exhibits complete passivity to interpellation as to be expected of a non-essentialist theory of the subject. Finally, the sadness of change in Herculine's subjectivity is perfectly explained from within an Althusserian theory of subjectivity which identifies the origins of subjectivity in interpellative relations. In contrast, the memoirs struggle to be explained by Butler's theory of performativity. In a Butlerian reading of the memoirs we would expect to see habituation, as each performance by Herculine consolidated a particular Gender Subjectivity and made repeated performances more likely. Habituation however plays no role in the memoirs as the sudden change in Herculine's subjectivity, and her passivity to that change, contravenes the notion that gender is citational in nature. Interpellation not performativity best accounts for the memoirs. Although this point

occupies the analysis below, I will first outline the history of these memoirs as they emerged in Foucault's research on subjectivity before examining Barbin's life as depicted in the memoirs.⁷³

4.1 History of the Memoirs

In researching the first volume of *History of Sexuality*, Foucault came across a fictional story by the psychiatrist Oscar Panizza titled *Scandal at the Convent* (1893). The story concerned a French hermaphrodite Herculine Barbin and fictionalised the period of Herculine's life where her idiosyncratic anatomy became a public scandal, given her membership in a convent where only women were supposed to reside. The problem with this account is that it is not loyal to the text. Panizza does not sufficiently consider life for a hermaphrodite in 19th Century France, with all the social implications, especially social isolation which would follow. Nor does Panizza adequately consider the mechanisms which change Herculine's Gendered Subjectivity from man to woman which make the text so interesting to begin with. In the context of research revolving around subjectivity and the mechanisms constituting the subject, the memoirs provide Foucault an exciting opportunity to test his own discursive understanding of subjectivity. That Herculine exhibits both male and female reproductive organs raises interesting questions about how discourse signifies the body it supposedly brings into existence, what happens when the body is in disjunction with dominant (dichotomous) sexed discourses and, finally, what this unique situation tell us about agency within a discursive framework for understanding subjectivity.

These memoirs and their critical introduction by Foucault were first published in English in 1980 under the title *Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-century French Hermaphrodite*. They tell the story of a French hermaphrodite who, initially interpreted as a female, was required to behave as a woman. In short, she entered into a convent, a school for girls and finally entered into teaching, a profession for women. Eventually, a doctor proclaimed that, after all this time, Herculine was not a woman but a man. The final years of Herculine's life as a man were lonely and socially isolating, culminating in her eventual suicide. It will become clear that Pazzina's inaccurate treatment of Herculine's memoirs is repeated in Foucault's own analysis of the memoirs.

⁷³Indeed, it should be noted that, to the best of my knowledge, Althusser never discussed the memoirs in his own writings.

The disjunction between Herculine's body and the hegemonic discourses on sex is telling for Foucault. These discourses signify and constrain the body according to either side of the sex dichotomy. They delimit corporeal possibilities according to rigid dichotomous lines through various mediums of discourse outlined in *History of Sexuality*. What is special about Herculine is precisely this difficulty of hegemonic discourses to signify her body. Her anatomy is such that it confuses these rigid dichotomies. Indeed, consider the difficulty for language to provide a stable pronoun to describe Herculine. S/he betrays precisely the conflation and destabilisation Herculine's body poses for these very discourses which assume and reproduce a clear sexed dichotomy. In my analysis, I have chosen to use the female pronoun in relation to Herculine as that was how Herculine – she – understood herself, but that is not to suggest that Herculine's female subjectivity was stable throughout the memoirs, quite the contrary. It is clear to me that her female subjectivity and its eventual resignification posed an existential threat for Herculine. It is for that reason I would like to turn briefly to Foucault's notion that Herculine's grin resembled that of the Cheshire cat, and how this betrays agency in Foucault's analysis and the degree to which it commits the very same insensitivity for which Foucault condemns Panizza. I want to focus on Foucault's analysis of Herculine because I believe that, despite Butler's attempts to juxtapose her interpretation of Herculine's memoirs with Foucault's, the space attributed to agency as fundamentally essentialist is the same for both. Consider how Foucault describes the unique position held by Herculine in light of her unique body:

And what she evokes in her past is the happy limbo of a non-identity, which was paradoxically protected by the life of those closed, narrow, and intimate societies where one has the strange happiness, which is at the same time obligatory and forbidden, of being acquainted with only one sex (Foucault: 1980: xiii).

This is an extraordinary statement despite Foucault's aim to provide a non-essentialist theory of subjectivity. What is the space of 'non-identity' that Foucault attributes to Herculine's experience as a woman but precisely the belief in agency, in consciousness independent from those very discourses constitutive of the subject.⁷⁴ In *Discipline and Punishment* (originally published 1975), Foucault describes the 'soul as the prison of the body' (Foucault, 1995: 30), by which he means that the material body is constrained, imprisoned by the discourses imposed on the body (the soul). The soul connotes discourses of what it is to be a human subject, with sex is a primary signifier. Given

⁷⁴ Admittedly one could suggest that it is simply Gendered Subjectivity which is traversed rather than subjectivity in general. That said I believe Foucault's particular description of 'non-identity' is sufficiently encompassing enough to entail all aspects of the subject, not just the gendered dimension of the subject (as fundamental as it may be).

discourse (the soul) is the prison of the body, it determines what is possible and what is foreclosed on the part of bodily actions. In fact, there is no body beyond the body constituted by constraint, as exemplified in Foucault's repressive hypothesis developed in the first volume of a *History of Sexuality* (1976). In the *History of Sexuality* Foucault also makes the observation that we are forced to speak within particular discursive paradigms:

But more important was the multiplication of discourses concerning sex in the field of exercise of power itself: an institutional incitement to speak about it, and to do so more and more; a determination on the part of the agencies of power to hear it spoken about, and to cause it to speak through explicit articulation and endlessly accumulated detail (Foucault, 1998: 18)

When we speak, we speak through already existing discursive paradigms. Speech is already determined by constraints; indeed, like the body, speech exists within pre-existing discursive paradigms constituting what is sayable and what is not. To that end, when one speaks it is never one's own speech, but speech simultaneously constituted through constraints. Foucault's point in both of these texts is that there is no subject who is not subjected to discourse. Consciousness and agency are imprisoned by the discourses which constitutes it. Consciousness and agency are already constituted by the discourses that entice the subject to speak through the 'multiplication of discourses', assuming and reproducing dichotomous sex. Thus, when we speak, we automatically speak as sexed subjects. The entire description of the subject that Foucault is trying to depict is a non-essentialist one and yet by the time we reach the memoirs of Herculine Barbin, Foucault undermines this non-essentialism. The non-identity that Herculine supposedly enjoys is a position of complete freedom. Foucault's attribution of consciousness and agency to Herculine in this supposed condition of non-identity is precisely the essentialist space he formerly wants to avoid. That Herculine's body conflicts with dichotomous sexed discourses and the possibilities afforded to Herculine in light of that conflict is presented by Foucault as truly liberating (Foucault, 1980: xiii)

That Foucault's optimistic interpretation of Herculine's life is in conflict with his earlier writings is obvious. The place of the agent irreducible to discourse clearly conflicts with his earlier deliberations on subjectivity. That this same interpretation commits the same inaccuracy for which Foucault criticises Panizza is equally true on closer inspection of the memoirs. Foucault at no point considers the conflicts at the level of Herculine's subjectivity which arise from the dissonance between her intersexed body and rigid discourses on dichotomous sex. In fact, as will become clear in my later analysis of these memoirs, Foucault completely disregards the trials and tribulations constituting Herculine's life, preferring to focus attention upon the 'happy grin' (Foucault, 1980: xiii). That Foucault goes so far as to say that 'where the identity of the partners and above all the enigmatic

character around whom everything centred, had no importance' (ibid: xiii) demonstrates Foucault's lack of appreciation for the central role these figures or 'partners' play in Herculine's life. Foucault imposes his undue theoretical optimism surrounding agency and contestation onto Herculine, failing to see how Herculine's sorrow culminates in her appalling, but theoretically interesting suicide. Indeed, as will be demonstrated in the analysis to follow, Herculine's life and eventual suicide are not the promise of an agent who voluntarily contests and subverts the conditions constituting subjectivity, but a damning indictment of precisely the belief in the pre-given, pre-social subject. Herculine's life and death is a reminder of precisely what happens to life which does not correspond to the discursive or the ideological, it is an unintelligible and by extension non-existent life. The very conditions of subjectivity, after all, holds a monopoly on what characterises a liveable life, and Herculine's suicide is a reminder of that point.

This is the history of the memoirs and Foucault's analysis of them. As I discussed in the previous chapter, Butler criticises Foucault's analysis of these memoirs for committing the very essentialism Foucault opposes in previous texts. Butler never explicitly gives a thorough Butlerian reading of these memoirs, attempting to understand the memoirs from a performative perspective. Instead Butler focuses on providing a critique of Foucault's interpretation of the memoirs. In light of the conceptions of gender outlined in the preceding chapters, I will now provide both a Butlerian and Althusserian reading of Herculine's memoirs. In the case of Butler, I will argue that a Butlerian reading of these memoirs draws on the very essentialism she criticised in Foucault. In the case of Althusser, by emphasising those 'enigmatic character[s]' who for Foucault had 'no importance', I argue that an Althusserian reading provides the only non-essentialist interpretation of Herculine's memoirs. As a set of memoirs concerned with a hermaphrodite trying to live in a society dominated by discourses enforcing dichotomous sex, Herculine's experiences are fundamentally about Gendered Subjectivity, its constitution, and the place of agency in that constitution.

4.2 Herculine Barbin

In this section I will provide a Butlerian and Althusserian reading of Herculine Barbin's memoirs. Before doing so, it is best to outline the macro-narrative that is Herculine's life as she explains it. Having done so, I will outline how Butler would interpret the narrative before moving on to an Althusserian interpretation of the same narrative.

The Early Years (Woman)

Adélaïde Herculine Barbin (called either Alexina or Camille) was born in Saint-Jean-d'Angély, south east of La Rochelle on November the 8th 1838. Despite being born with both female and male genitalia and spending the first years of her life in the local civilian and military hospital (Foucault, 1980: 4), at the age of seven, Herculine was admitted into a 'holy house', the convent of Ursulines of Chavagnes where she 'lived among the motherless girls who brought up in this pathetic refuge', indicating that by this point she was defined by the hospital as a female (ibid: 5) Here she is told by 'Sister M' that, at the convent, 'you will share in the life of the girls who are mostly rich and noble' (Foucault, 1980: 6) exemplifying the point that her treatment is exceptional and, I think, the result of her unique anatomy. From 'Sister M's' care, Herculine was transferred into the care of the Mother Superior, Mother Eléonore (ibid: 7). Throughout what are predominantly happy years in the convent, Herculine undertakes classes, her first communion (ibid: 13), excels in her studies (ibid: 8) and develops an intense relationship with a fellow pupil at the convent named Lea (ibid: 10).⁷⁵

At no point are we ever to assume that this relationship became sexual but that is probably more to do with the age of the girls at the time. Herculine clearly feels something qualitatively different for Lea than she does for Mother Superior, who we are left in no doubt Herculine also utterly adores. Consider how she writes of Lea: 'Her beautiful blond head bent down toward me, and I thanked her with a kiss that was full of warmth. "Lea," I would say to her then, "Lea, I love you!"' (ibid: 10) One occasion during these years does stand out. This is when Herculine is sent to Mother Eléonore's to be punished for being continuously caught violating curfew in order to see Lea: 'I entered [her office] trembling, like a condemned man going before his judge' (ibid: 12) and indeed the chastising that followed was a combination of threats and a consolidation of the authoritative relationship characterised by adoration. Mother Eléonore threatened Herculine but simultaneously comforted her, and Herculine walked out 'with my heart penetrated by the sweetest joy and the deepest gratitude' (ibid: 13).

After the holy sacrament, and a passing comment that Lea died of consumption two years after leaving the convent (Foucault, 1980: 14), we turn to the next section of Herculine's life where she moves to La Rochelle to join a family her mother had been living with for the past 5 years (ibid: 15). This family

⁷⁵ It is important to note that Herculine very seldom mentions God despite belonging to religious institutions from a young age. The communion is really one of the only explicitly religious events noted in the text and yet as we will see God comes to occupy the role of an Authoritative Subject as the memoirs draw to a close. It is therefore best to recognise God as playing a subordinate yet constitutive role concerning Herculine's subjectivity from this early point, only to become more prominent when other Authoritative Subjects become absent in her life.

comprised 5 members: 'Its head, a venerable old man with white hair [who was] truly the living personification of honor and loyalty' (ibid: 15) – Monsieur de Saint-M, his daughter Madame de R., and his three grandchildren, the most important of whom was Mademoiselle Cloitilde de R., for whom Herculine was required to be maid (ibid: 16).

From the age of 15 to 18 Herculine, resided here and in that period of relative stability and comfort, it is clear that she became attached to both Monsieur de Saint-M and his daughter Mademoiselle Cloitilde. In the case of the latter, the daughter occupies for Herculine a clearly intimate relation with Herculine, falling short of sexual, although not for lack of Herculine's desire:

The whiteness of her skin had no equal. It was impossible to imagine more graceful contours without being dazzled by them... Sometimes I could not refrain from paying her a compliment, which she received with the best grace in the world, without its either surprising her or making her vain (Foucault, 1980: 16-17)

It is equally obvious that Mademoiselle Cloitilde recognised these advances, proceeding to change the subject from herself to Herculine's health which by this time was increasingly problematic (ibid: 17). She clearly occupies the space for Herculine previously occupied by Lea, with all the sexual ambivalence associated with the intensity of the emotional attachment. At the same time, Herculine becomes a carer for the Monsieur de Saint-M. Her friendship with him was grounded in the type of adoration witnessed previously with Mother Eléonore back in the convent. During this time, Herculine would read his letters and his family correspondence to him, organising and dealing with the family papers; as she remarked: 'I was his reader, his secretary' (ibid: 17). Roughly three uneventful and rather pleasant years passed before Madame Cloitilde eventually married her cousin, clearly devastating Herculine:

I could not refrain from weeping when I saw again the elegant apartment that my mistress had occupied. An indefinable sensation tortured me at the thought that she would no longer be there to give me her first smile in the morning, her final word before going to sleep (ibid: 20)

Her sense of loss is noteworthy and precipitates developments in Herculine's life, namely the impetus to become a teacher. The profession was first suggested to her by the parish priest (ibid: 20) but initially Herculine disapproved of the idea. It was not until Monsieur de Saint-M, in failing health, implored Herculine become a teacher that she conceded to undertaking the profession: '[h]is words had touched me, and I was furthermore struck by the rightness of his reasoning, in which I had unshakeable faith', further commenting that, 'It was all over. My fate was sealed. That evening had

determined the rest of my life' (Foucault, 1980: 21) demonstrating the determinant effect Monsieur de Saint-M had on Herculine's choices.

Herculine moved that year to train to become a teacher at a conventional school on the island of Oléron, just south of La Rochelle. The pages of the memoirs concerning this part of her life detail her experiences as a boarding student at the school and the weekly chores that were expected (ibid: 29-30). She prefaces her explication of these two years by emphasising that, throughout, she never fully desired to be a teacher. She would do it and accepted that this was the correct occupation for her, but at no point does she embrace the decision (ibid: 22). We are left thinking that this decision is solely the result of Monsieur de Saint-M's insistence rather than of Herculine's volition, presenting an underlying theme that the choices Herculine makes do not originate within her, but from external Other.⁷⁶ At the same time, she explains that the female teacher is always susceptible to exploitation by the male Superintendent and that this dynamic is characteristic of the gendered world she inhabits. That Herculine wants the reader to know that sexual exploitation was rife in the profession is, I believe, her way of emphasising to the reader that this pursuit is imposed upon her rather than one emerging solely from her volition.

It is during these two years at the school that physiological complications begin to become explicit for Herculine: '[a]t that age, when all a women's graces unfold, I had neither that free and easy bearing nor the well-rounded limbs that reveal youth in full bloom' (ibid: 26). She remarks on how body hair began to grow in areas it did not with her student colleagues, which drew ridicule, and that the very shape of her body stood out compared to those around her (ibid: 27). Indeed, on a school outing, she notes how the uniqueness of her physiology explicitly drew attention and anxiety from her peers. As she attempts to cut her body hair, it grows with greater fervour, perpetually reminding her that she is different. Despite this, two relationships develop, one with a fellow student named Thécla and the other between Herculine and one of her teacher, Sister Marie-des-Agnes. Thécla appears to follow the line of relations previously occupied by Lea and Mademoiselle Cloitilde. This relationship is characterised by an intimacy atypical for two women of the time,⁷⁷ and betrays a clear sexual nature foreshadowed by the two previous relations. Herculine recounts that, 'I would lean toward Thécla to kiss her, sometimes on her brow and – *would you believe it of me?* – sometimes on her lips. That was repeated twenty times in the course of the hour' (ibid: 27). The intensity of the interaction over such a short space of time betrays the sexual nature of their relation, although we are never led to believe

⁷⁶ This Other is, I will claim below, Althusser's Authoritative Subject.

⁷⁷ As demonstrated by the concern caused to Herculine's teachers who witnessed such moments of intimacy (ibid: 28).

this developed any further. The depiction of two young women continuously kissing to the point of having to be separated (ibid: 27) suggests that it is precisely the regulatory framework (Sister Agnes's) which foreclose the possibility of any further sexual interactions. It is the very same Sister who notices these interactions and regulates them, who occupies the second relationship that Herculine outlines during her two years at the school.

While Thécia is the spiritual reincarnation of Lea and Mademoiselle Cloitilde before her, Herculine's relationship with Sister Marie-des-Agnes is different from her relationships with Monsieur de Saint-M and her relationship with Mother Eléonore. In the case of Sister Agnes, authority and sexual desire are no longer separate but intertwined in one figure:

Holy and noble woman! My memory of you has sustained me in the difficult hours of my life! It has appeared to me in the midst of my frenzies like a celestial vision to which I have owed strength, consolation! (Foucault, 1980: 28)

The relationship between Herculine and Sister Agnes is idiosyncratic to the extent that in this one relationship, feelings of adoration and authority are accompanied by sexual desire. For the most part, this kind of confusion does not occur, but I think it highlights a very significant point for Herculine, namely, that the agents of prohibition are entwined with the very desires they prohibit or, as Foucault would say, the prohibition brings about the very thing that is prohibited. The telling moment in question is during a thunderstorm. So strong and ferocious was the storm that, at one point, Herculine leapt from her bed to Sister Agnes's, which was adjacent. In Sister Agnes's embrace, Herculine realised that she was in fact naked. Sister Agnes was not angry, but was sure to mitigate any kind of escalation, prohibiting Herculine thereafter from kissing her hand (ibid: 32). At this moment, Herculine remarks that she was 'possessed by feelings it would be difficult to describe' and that her 'imagination was ceaselessly troubled by the memory of the *sensations* that had been awoken' in her (ibid: 33), sensations I would contend are sexual. This part of her life is dominated by a growing awareness of the physiological changes to her body. It is no coincidence that her sexuality develops and finds its first mature form of articulation in relation to one of the very people prohibiting her from exercising her sexuality with Thécia. I will return again to this point in my later analysis, but I wanted to highlight its significance now before moving on.

Other than a trip to Saint-Trojan which brought Herculine's idiosyncratic body into greater public attention, Herculine concludes this section of her memoirs by remarking that she passed her tests to become a teacher and, to her Mother's and Monsieur de Saint-M's delight, was first in her class (ibid:

40). From here, she embarked on a two-year career as a schoolmistress at an undisclosed school at an undisclosed location. It is these two years that occupy the majority of Herculine's memoirs.

The Middle Years (Woman)

Before we are given any details as to the school, the students, or anything else, Herculine draws the attention to Sister Sara. The school is ran by Madame P, but the actual teaching is conducted by Sara and Herculine alone (ibid: 42).⁷⁸ One may assume that at this point the memoirs would detail Herculine's life as a teacher, interspersed with details of those around her. What the reader instead witnesses are details about Herculine's growing intimate relationship with Sara interspersed with details about her life as a teacher. The conditions were perfect for a secret love affair and it is this affair which characterises this section of the memoirs.⁷⁹ Sara and Herculine sleep in the same room (Foucault, 1980: 47) and the amount of time shared between the two entirely unregulated is substantial. Herculine is also far less reserved here in the details she provides of her relationship with Sara. It is this explicitness which I think betrays the clearly sexual relations which between the two:

Bit by bit I got into the habit of undressing her. She had only to take out a pin without my help, and I would be almost jealous! These details will seem trivial no doubt, but they are necessary. When I had laid her upon her bed, I would kneel beside her, my forehead brushing her own. Her eyes soon close beneath my kisses (ibid: 48).

These trivial details for us are central to Herculine's experience as teacher, and that centrality is because the focus is on Sara. Herculine would undress Sara, kiss her in complete privacy and is candid about the details. Herculine continues:

What I felt for Sara was not friendship; it was real passion. I didn't love her. I adored her! ... A little before eight o'clock Sara would go up to the dormitory to take off her dressing gown and put on other clothing. I would not allow her to do it without me, we were alone then. I would lace her up; with an unspeakable happiness I would smoothe the graceful curls of her naturally wavy hair, pressing my lips now upon her neck, now upon her beautiful naked breast! (ibid: 48-49)

The intimacy shared between the two is explicit and we have no reason to believe such acts of intimacy are withdrawn at the point of kissing Sara's naked breast. I believe the other subtle point is the

⁷⁸ In fact, the first three pages are dedicated solely to describing Sara.

⁷⁹ Why have I chosen to describe this as an affair? This is because Herculine is understood to be a woman despite having both male and female genitalia. It is an affair insofar as it contravenes or violates heterosexual norms to which Herculine is still expected to adhere.

absence of Sara's title in Herculine's account of her. Where applicable, until this point Herculine has always referred to people by their title, emphasising the authority that person held over Herculine, or the authority and resulting sexual ambivalence as in the case of Sister Agnes. Sara is, however, for most part just Sara, betraying further the unique and intimate nature of this relationship.

Eventually we are given confirmation of the sexual relations that ensued. One day Herculine admitted to Sara how she felt, to which Sara responded with trepidation, given the context of the school they were in and the strict regulatory framework and expectations engulfing them. Several evenings later Herculine pushed again and, to her surprise, Sara decided to join her in bed:

It would be impossible to express the happiness I felt from her presence at my side! I was wild with joy!...with my arms encircling her waist, she with her face resting near my own!... Henceforth, Sara *belonged to me!!!... She was mine...* Destined to live in the perpetual intimacy of two sisters, we now had to conceal from everybody the terrifying secret that *bound* us to each other (Foucault: 1980: 51)

Herculine never spoke of anyone in terms of possession until this point. Herculine was always submissive to the authoritative figures around her, and the parallel set of relations grounded on sexuality, with Lea, Mademoiselle Coitilde, Thécla and Sister Agnes never matured to the point of reaching sexual intercourse. In the case of Sara, however, Herculine's relationship is clear and reveals an symmetrical sense of being bound to one another. We are left in no doubt that this is a sexual affair, traversing heterosexual norms particularly acute in a 19th Century Catholic boarding school, when she writes: 'What in the natural order of things, ought to have separated us in the world had united us!! Try to imagine, if that is possible, what our predicament was for us both' (Foucault, 1980: 51). The 'natural order of things' denotes that both Sara and Herculine are women (albeit Herculine displaying by this point greater male anatomical features than before) and, given that they ought to have had sexual relations with others in light of their sex, were actually brought together. This was by her own admission unnatural insofar as it contravened what was expected of them both.

Herculine and Sara keep this relationship secret for a year and the following ten pages of Herculine's memoirs detail the slow but progressively problematic nature of their relationship as people, including Sara's mother Madam P who began to suspect some form of a relationship. Only two occasions particularly stand out as the first year of teaching draws to close. The first is when Herculine decides to admit her relationship with Sara to the resident priest during confession. His response was 'sarcastically violent', claiming that 'it was not pity that inspired him; it was horror, a vindictive horror' (ibid: 55). This emphasises the degree to which Herculine and Sara's relationship contravenes dominant norms of society, as the priest's 'vindictive' response betrays an entitlement to revenge for

a violation of a moral sexual imperative. The second occasion develops from the first insofar as the reader is reminded this is not simply a case of two women lovers, but one woman and another woman/man, owing to Herculine's intersexed body. This appears to be a factor which contributes to the relationship rather than rendering any further complications: 'In our deliciously intimate conversations, she took pleasure in using masculine qualifiers for me, qualifiers which would later suit my official status "*Mon cher* Camille, I love you so much!! Why did I meet you if this love was to become the sorrow of my life?!!'" (ibid: 58). Far from being ignored, that Herculine presented clear male anatomical features does not pose a problem for Sara, but is rather playfully embraced.

With the vacation period setting in, we witness the first point at which Herculine's sex begins to be redefined. Returning briefly to La Rochelle to see her mother and Monsieur de Saint-M, Herculine makes her way to the school where she trained to become a teacher. After meeting Sister Agnes again, Herculine attends confession but this time confesses her relationship with Sara to a priest she had fond memories of when she was student. The priest, after contemplating the confession overnight meets Herculine the next day and says the following: "I shall not tell you... what you know as well as I do, that is to say, you are here and now entitled to call yourself a man in society. Certainly you are, but how will you retain the legal right to do so?" (Foucault, 1980: 63). The priest is adamant that Herculine's relationship with Sara is indicative of her being a man, despite contrarily being legally defined as a woman. The priest pleads with Herculine to leave the school and become a nun for fear of a public scandal breaking out, but Herculine is reluctant to do so. Herculine does not provide many details about this vacation, and the reader is returned to the school as quickly as Herculine wanted to return to Sara.

Entering into what would be her final year of teaching, our attention is drawn away from the specific relationship she had with Sara, but rather is focused on the increasingly difficult conditions surrounding that relationship. In the first instance, the priest who formerly scorned Herculine for her confession implored the other students during their confessions to provide him details of Herculine and Sara's relationship (ibid: 65). Although this transpires to be more of a nuisance, what does develop to be a problem are the physical pains Herculine's body experiences which become increasingly debilitating (ibid: 67). Herein lies the second important moment in which Herculine's re-definition occurs. As the pain increased, Sara and her mother decide to call a local doctor. Upon examining her, the doctor remarks, "'My God! Is it possible?'" (ibid: 68), depicting his surprise at Herculine's intersexed body. Although his examination was focused on her torso, the doctor was able to establish that Herculine's body did not conform to the sex attributed to it. It is not clear how he reacted or what he specifically said to Madame P, Sara's mother, but it is clear he insinuated that Herculine was not

who everyone thought she was and that it was in the interest of the school if she were to leave (ibid: 69-70). Although Madame P refuses to take the doctor's advice, it clearly perturbed her and what we witness is a rise in her suspicion of Herculine's and Sara's relationship.⁸⁰ This growing suspicion and the increasing difficulties surrounding the affair are the primary focus of this point of the memoirs.

The following ten pages account for Herculine's second and final vacation period after a tumultuous year at school, and the final point in the story focuses on Herculine's re-definition as a man. This begins with her returning to La Rochelle. Here, clearly upset and jaded from the year's growing tension, she is continuously harangued by Monsieur de Saint-M and her own mother. As the vacation period comes to a close, Herculine's mother implores Herculine to tell her why she has been so upset throughout the year, and noticeably in La Rochelle (ibid: 77). Eventually agreeing to do so the following day, Herculine attends yet another confession, but on this occasion the resident priest asks if he can break the silence expected of a confession and reach out to a local doctor. The next day, Herculine visits this doctor with her mother. Interestingly, considering this doctor has a scientific background, he asks Herculine 'to regard me not only as a doctor but also a confessor', explaining that 'I must not only see for myself, I must also know everything you can tell me' (Foucault, 1980: 78), as if details of her sexual encounters with Sara are as pertinent to who Herculine is as are her anatomical features. After providing these details and physically examining her, the crucial moment arises when the doctor re-defines Herculine's sex from female to male, with what is perhaps the most important part of the text from a theoretical perspective. Upon examination, the doctor says to Herculine, 'your godmother had a stroke of luck when she called you Camille. Give me your hand, *mademoiselle*; before long, I hope, we shall call you differently', and turning to her mother her states that, 'It's true that you've lost your daughter... but you've found a son whom you were not expecting' (ibid: 78). I will return to this moment in my following analysis of the memoirs, but I want to emphasise that this is the defining event re-signifying who Herculine was.

⁸⁰ A clear example is when, upon entering their room, Madame reacts differently to Sara sleeping in Herculine's bed. Whereas formerly she would be blind to such interactions, she responds as such: "'As for that, I positively forbid you to do it! I have my reasons. And I shall add that if my authority is not enough, I would have recourse to another's. I am making it a matter of conscience for you.'" (ibid: 72). The mother is unable to articulate precisely what is wrong with this relationship, but this confused suspicion and sporadic aggression would come to characterise what remained of the academic year.

The Later Years (Man)

Hitherto, society has defined Herculine as a woman despite her anatomical features. Throughout her life, Herculine was a member of institutions specific to girls and, as she grew up, occupied positions for women. At the same time as the doctor pronounces Herculine's sex as a male, he tellingly remarks on that which is now foreclosed from her: '[w]hen I leave you, I will go to the bishopric. I don't know what Monseigneur will decide, but I doubt that he will permit you to return to L. There, your position is lost: it is not tolerable' (ibid: 78). In keeping with the emphasis on being a confessor, the doctor insinuates that what Herculine does, or in this case does not do, is of equal concern to her intersexed body. Interestingly, Herculine never tells the reader how she reacted to this news. Instead, the first reaction we receive is that of Monsieur de Saint-M's later that night (ibid: 79). He was, predictably, distraught by the news. The following day Herculine meets Monseigneur who, upon having spoken to the doctor, agrees that Herculine's continued employment as a teacher must come to an end. It is the closing of this part of her life, which she aptly describes as the end of the 'phase of my existence as a girl' (Foucault, 1980: 87) which occupies what remains of this section of her memoirs.

Two days after speaking to Monseigneur, Herculine returns to her post as a teacher with Sara on the agreement that she leaves when a replacement has been decided. We as a reader are left with no doubt that this is perhaps the most painful couple of weeks for Herculine. Herculine emphasises the pain shared by her and Sara at the prospect of loss (ibid: 80) and, indeed, the pain shared by Sara's mother, Madam P, who at this point is aware of Herculine's physiological condition but not her sexual relation with Sara. Despite Madame P's insistence that Herculine remain in her post, the prospect of scandal is such that by Herculine's own admission, she had to leave. Indeed, Herculine points out that Madame P's continued adoration for Herculine was predicated on precisely her lack of knowledge of Herculine's and Sara's relationship:

Could she [Madame P] pardon me for the mysterious role that I had played in her house, with her daughter, whose purity was so dear to her? Still, I cannot believe that she suspected the *intimacy* of our relations. No, for she would have been struck down by the violence of her feelings (Foucault, 1980: 86).

There is little else of note in these final pages of this section of the memoirs. The day finally emerges that she says goodbye to her life with Sara and her job as a teacher and, importantly, goodbye to her life as a woman. Herculine is explicit here as she introduces the final section of her memoirs. In saying goodbye to her life as a woman, we turn to her future life as a man which will be plagued by trials and tribulations and an underlying sense of loneliness:

I believe that I have said everything concerning this phase of my existence as a *girl*. They were the fine days of a life that was henceforth doomed to abandonment, to cold isolation. O my God! What a fate was mine! But You willed it. No doubt, and I shall say no more (ibid: 87)

Although this section of my thesis is dedicated to explicating the salient features of Herculine's life as they emerge in the memoirs, I want to briefly change tone here and emphasise the importance of this excerpt to Foucault's interpretation of the memoirs, and simultaneously demonstrate the limitation of his interpretation. Herculine unabashedly depicts her life up until this point as predominantly a happy one. We have seen how Herculine, along with Sara, has contravened social norms and expressed a sexuality antithetical to dominant norms of heterosexuality and dichotomous sex. Her intersexed body and its idiosyncratic nature has never been far from the focus of the narrative, as Herculine outlines time and again either socially embarrassing moments relating to her unique body, or the physical pain that develops from it. In other words, her intersexed body is always in the periphery, but rather than take away from the pleasure she experiences in certain relationships, it contextualises them. It is for this reason that Foucault describes Herculine's life as that of the perpetual smile of the Cheshire cat, as her body and her acts traversed the dictates of gender norms. I am not convinced by Foucault's optimism for reasons slightly different to Butler's but not entirely unrelated to her criticism. For Butler, Foucault's optimistic interpretation of Herculine's memoirs are predicated on situating Herculine beyond or outside heterosexual and dichotomous sexed discourses. My problem is not so much that Foucault commits the kind of essentialism he has hitherto attempted to avoid (although I believe Butler is correct in this criticism); rather, my concern with Foucault is that he is just simply wrong to assume that Herculine sees herself as traversing or fundamentally contravening discourse.

Herculine explicitly states that she was, up until this point, a 'girl'. Herculine's body may have at times brought Herculine's Gendered Subjectivity into question, but for most part but we are under no circumstances led to believe that Herculine understood herself differently from what society had hitherto understood her as. Consider a quotation I discussed earlier: 'What, in the natural order of things, ought to have separated us in the world had united us!!!... Destined to live in the perpetual intimacy of two sisters, we now had to conceal from everybody the terrifying secret that *bound* us to each other!!!' (Foucault: 1980: 51). The 'natural order of things' betrays Herculine's recognition that she and Sara are both women and that they ought to have sexual relations with their opposites, not with one another. Indeed, she remarks that they are both 'sisters', women contravening sexual norms but not contravening the totality of Gender Subjectivity. For Herculine, her sexual relation with Sara does not bring into question her femaleness, her gender as a woman, but rather renders her a 'bad

subject' or, rather, a bad woman who does not fully adhere to those behavioural norms expected of her. It is for this reason that Herculine keeps the entire relationship a secret. Herculine is not beyond discourse but firmly situated within it. Far from a Cheshire Cat, Herculine is conscious not to be seen to traverse the norms which still very much define her. Herculine is a bad Gendered Subject but a Gendered Subject nonetheless. This is similar to the case of Heather explored in my first chapter when I outlined Althusser's theory of gender. Although I want to refrain from providing an Althusserian analysis of Herculine's memoirs until later, the case of Alyson Simpson's daughter Heather, discussed in my previous chapter, is clearly pertinent to my point here. Neither Herculine nor Heather occupied a space beyond discourse or ideology. Both contravened behavioural norms central to who they were, but at no point does Heather stop being a daughter in the same way Herculine does not stop being a woman.⁸¹

The second point I want to briefly emphasise concerning the quotation above is Herculine's direct address to us *as a man*.⁸² Herculine claims that we in some way willed her fate which the reader anticipates is a sad and isolating fate as a man. I believe Herculine is presenting herself as a passive agent to our judgement. It was our judgment as the reader and from society at large which formerly defined Herculine as a woman. It is that very judgment which was articulated in the doctor's re-definition of Herculine as a man. Herculine is almost entirely the passive agent, and all that is hers to control is what she does within the confines of that judgment. Indeed, that her relationship with Sara was held in secrecy does not bring into question her passivity but re-affirms the clear salience an authoritative other has for Herculine. In keeping with the point I made above, she is a bad Gendered Subject, gendered according to the reader's judgment. This relates to John Berger's famous analysis of female representation in *Ways of Seeing* (1972). A common feature of nude female paintings is her direct focus on the audience, on the viewer of the painting. It is an address to the reader, that she is the passive object to (the assumed) male view:

One might simplify this by saying: *men act* and *women appear*. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and woman but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male the surveyed female.

⁸¹ Admittedly Heather's repetition of a rhyme is not obviously comparable to Herculine's sexual relationship with Sara. That said, subordination to her father is a central expectation of a good daughter's subject positionality in the same way that abstention from homosexual sex is a central expectation of what it is to be a woman. Arguably all subjectivity is positioned subjectivity and by extension Heather and Herculine are bad subjects to the extent they do not loyally adhere to what's expected of them.

⁸² Indeed confirms it is men she addresses by writing that 'Men! I have not soiled my lips with you false oaths, nor my body with your hideous copulations' (Foucault, 1980: 99), and continues the next two pages comparing herself to the male audience she holds increasingly in contempt.

Thus she turns herself into an object- and most particularly an object of vision: a sight (Berger, 1972: 190).

The presentation of women staring at the audience is the presentation of women constituted by the other as an object for the other, a passive object. It is the act of looking at oneself being looked at, rendering the female subject passive. Herculine's direct address to the reader is an acknowledgement that, throughout the story, she knew that the reader (society) was always there, and that she sees herself as the reader sees her. We willed that Herculine be male and as the passive object, a sight to our viewing, she was constituted so. This is a very different type of address to the one Hall discusses concerning Velasquez's *Las Meninas*. In this painting, the majority of figures, including the infant who occupies the focal point of the painting, are looking back at the viewer:

The spectator, we might say, is painted into position in front of the picture. In this sense, the discourse produces a *subject-position* for the spectator-subject. For the painting to work, the spectator, whoever he or she may be, must first 'subject' himself/herself to the painting's discourse and, in this way, become the painting's ideal viewer, the producer of its meanings – its 'subject' (Hall, 2002: 60).

This is a fundamentally different type of address to the one Berger theoretically outlines and, I believe, Herculine illustrates. Here, the subject is equally passive to the direct address of the subject (object) of the painting. Hall's presentation of subject-positionality is one grounded in parity, so that neither the viewed nor the viewer are solely passive or active. Herculine forecloses this interpretation. It is Herculine's subject positionality which is constituted by a stable 'You' which is never brought into question, in the same way that the doctor is not constituted by Herculine's subjectivity, but that subjectivity was defined by the doctor. This is a linear relation between subject and object and Herculine's direct address reflects her own experience as the passive object, despite her unique and potentially subversive body. I will return to both of these points in my analysis of a Butlerian and Althusserian reading of the memoirs, but for now I will return to what remains of Herculine's account of her own life.

Now at the age of 21, Herculine begins the last section of the memoirs comprising her experience as a man. This section is short of actual details about what happens in her life but is, rather, dedicated to articulating the extent of her unhappiness and loneliness. The section begins with Herculine describing how some former figures of her life were slower than others in adapting to the change. The Mother Superior, for example, (who I believe was Mother Eléonore) still called her '*dear daughter*' (Foucault: 1980: 88) despite being fully aware of Herculine's increasingly famous predicament. This unfolds in the Mother Superior drawing attention to the now un-lady-like manner with which Herculine held her umbrella (ibid: 88-89).

Upon returning to La Rochelle, Herculine is required to attend a further examination and this confirms what Herculine has already accepted, that she is indeed a male. It is at this point that Herculine legally becomes a man:

the civil court of L. ordained that a rectification be made on the civil status registers, which meant I was to be entered there as belonging to the masculine sex, and at the same time I was to be given a new name in place of the feminine one I had received when I was born (Foucault, 1980: 89).

Her re-designation as a man complete, Herculine tells us that her period in La Rochelle witnesses the development of the scandal that was eventually to engulf a lot of her later life. Beginning first at church when Herculine, now dressed as man, caught the attention of other worshippers, the newspapers began to report on Herculine's change from female to male. This would spread to Paris, attracting the attention from the upper echelons of Parisian society (ibid: 90). Herculine was fast becoming a modern-day news sensation, but in the Catholic society to which she belonged and due to her previous employment, the implications this had for Sara and her mother were undeniably problematic. It is here where Herculine considers the social ramifications for Sara that Herculine begins to articulate a theme which characterises this entire section. Clearly no longer able to sustain communication with Sara by the time of writing her memoirs, Herculine remarks on her vivid sense of loneliness and isolation:

Perhaps at the moment I am writing these lines she has forever banished from her heart the one for whom was as the unique happiness. My God! What remains to me then? Nothing. Cold solitude, dark isolation. To live alone, always alone, in the midst of the crowd that surrounds me, without a word of love ever coming to gladden my soul, without a friendly hand reaching out to me (ibid: 92).

Herculine's first profound remark on her loneliness as a man is immediately situated within the context of a growing existential crisis, a disorientation concerning her sense of self. She writes in the same passage as that introducing her deep sense of loneliness that, 'Oh, death! Death will truly be the hour of deliverance for me', before reaching out in some desperate sense to find one lasting relationship with God: 'Though I am a sad disinherited creature, I can still lift up my eyes to You, for You at least will not reject me!' (Foucault, 1980: 93).⁸³ The reader must therefore treat isolation with the feeling of loneliness with the severity it deserves, although at the same time recognise the constitutive role Herculine's relationship with God plays in terms of Herculine's subjectivity.

⁸³ This is no trivial detail. Given Althusser described Moses relation to God as an archetypal example of interpellation (Althusser, 2006: 120-121), it would be correct to give weight to Herculine's relation with God the extent to which it continues to orientate her sense of self

The memoirs continue by recounting Herculine's attempt to work on the railroads in Paris. As she waited in La Rochelle for news as to whether her application was successful or not, news of her change of sex reached the school at which she trained. Although there was no noticeable degree of animosity directed at Herculine, Sister de-Agnes, for whom Herculine formerly shared both adoration and sexual attraction, is clearly perturbed by the revelation, giving the reader a sense that former relations with Herculine are beginning to dissipate due to Herculine's re-signification (ibid: 94-95). Herculine also remarks at this point that any communication with Sara's mother, Madame P, is untenable, given the social implications Herculine's tenure will have for Sara and the school she so loved (ibid: 96).

Eventually, Herculine inaugurates the final section of her memoirs with her permanent departure from La Rochelle for residence in Paris. On the day of her departure for Paris, Herculine recounts the final time she saw Monsieur de-Saint M. Now an old man on what was clearly his deathbed, when saying goodbye, Herculine is aware that she will never meet her benefactor again. Upon his death, Herculine wants the reader to know what a great loss he was to her and, by doing so Herculine falls into yet another vivid episode of loneliness as if she is experiencing an existential crisis at the time of writing. For example, as in the case of acknowledging the loss of Sara, here in the case of Monsieur de-Saint M, she writes: '[n]ow he is no more! This death broke in me a bond that nothing in the world could replace!!!' (ibid: 97). Equally as in the case of Sara, this acknowledgment of loss is followed by the presentation of loneliness and the profound effect this has for Herculine: 'And now, alone! ... alone ... forever! Forsaken, outlawed in the midst of my brothers! What am I saying! Have I the right to give that name to those who surround me? No, I do not. I am alone!' (ibid: 98). Unlike her previous episode, where she at least acknowledges God as an unyielding relationship which sustains her, God is noticeably absent. The loneliness which was formally mitigated by that abstract relation begins to emerge untampered as the memoirs draw to a close.

What follows is Herculine's last reflections on life in Paris, seeking desperately to find employment after what the author can only surmise was a failed attempt to work for the railroad. This is not before we get a final outburst by Herculine, a final thrust through which Herculine metaphorically sticks her middle finger at society, and in particular at men, who have defined her as a man and subsequently isolated her. This is, however, best understood as her swansong. Metaphorically speaking, she is on her death bed and as her breaths draw deeper, she proclaims the following:

I have breathed in only the fragrance of that golden cup. You have drunk to the dregs all its shame, all its dishonor, still without being satisfied. So keep your pity to yourself. You are pitied more than I, perhaps. I soar above all your innumerable miseries, partaking of the nature of angels; for, as you have

said, my place is not in your narrow sphere. You have the earth, I have boundless space (Foucault: 1980: 99).

The next page or so is saturated with the metaphorical positioning of Herculine as in some way above or beyond the otherwise limited and constrained life dominated by, but also dominating men. Herculine describes herself as broken free of the 'earthly ties to humanity' (ibid: 99) and that it is from her unique position that she claims that she should feel sorry for us (ibid: 10). Herculine directly addresses the audience but at the same time presents the audience as generically male. The invocation of 'you' throughout these pages is numerous but occurs simultaneously as she criticises men. I understand this to be a general address to society which judges her rigidly according to one sex or another, and that it is men who tend to benefit from but are equally judged within those same paradigms. We can also see why this outburst at such a late stage of the memoirs might allude to Foucault's interpretation that Herculine existed in a space beyond or outside the discursive paradigms constituting selves. She 'soars' above us all, finding company among others not bound by predominant 'earthly' discourses, occupying 'boundless space'. She appears to occupy the very space of heterogeneity that Foucault celebrates in his introduction to these memoirs.

I should reiterate that I believe this final outburst to be Herculine's swansong, an outburst rather than any fundamental admission that Herculine felt that she was truly beyond society's dictates. One would be premature if they interpreted this final outburst to be anything other than a fleeting attempt on Herculine's part to assert herself as independent, one which is undone only a couple of pages later. Herculine states that she has broken from all 'earthly ties' and we can see this as all prior relations recede as a result of her becoming a man. Yet it is the breaking of these ties which no more than two pages later are articulated as a relapse into isolation again equated with a form of existential crisis:

Immediately, unselfishly, I broke with all memories of my past. I buried myself alive, young, in that eternal solitude that I find everywhere, in the midst of the turmoil of the crowds as in the most unfrequented retreat! (Foucault, 1980: 101-102)

Herculine presents herself as buried alive, constituted by that sense of isolation. I take this to announce the ensuing existential crisis, a loss of a coherent sense of self precipitated by an isolation from all those who, formerly, that sense of self originated. As the memoirs draw closer to their end, Herculine gives up almost entirely on providing the reader with anything other than rudimentary biographic details. She is clearly near the end of her life as the reader experiences the account of a now-defeated Herculine inclined to her fate: '[f]or I have come to that point. Reality is crushing me, is pursuing me. What is going to become of me? I do not know. Where can I find for tomorrow the bit

of bread that is given by work?’ (ibid: 104). Herculine’s predicament is one of a lonely, isolated individual unable to find sustainable employment. She has been re-defined as a man by a society which now rejects her. What remains of the memoirs are Herculine’s failed attempts to find work, spiralling ever deeper into a suicidal discourse. Her final relation with God, which she maintained despite all else is finally rendered void with a passage similar to that of Christ on the Cross, who during his crucifixion begins to question God. The difference being that, for Christ, his reproach is temporary, for Herculine that relationship is now permanently gone: ‘Oh! How I craved the sleep of the tomb then, that final refuge of human nature. Why, then, Lord, have You prolonged until now an existence that is useless to everybody and so crushing for myself? That is one of the mysteries which is not for man to fathom’ (ibid: 110).⁸⁴ Herculine is now almost entirely alone except for her relationship with her mother. The almost complete silence surrounding her relationship with her mother betrays the fact that for Herculine the relationship is predominantly insignificant, although we cannot assume it was non-existent.

On the final pages of the memoirs, Herculine is provided with an employment opportunity in the form of working on the merchant ship *Europe* which would entail travelling to the United States (ibid: 112-113). The problem with this is that it will entail irrevocably hurting her mother, who until this point has not been afforded much mention in the memoirs. This suggests that although the relationship between Herculine and her mother was predominantly insignificant throughout her life, it still retained a (albeit limited) degree of meaningfulness for Herculine. For the most part Herculine has always drawn on relationships with others. Here, however, what remains of her relationship with her mother poses as a problem. Take up the job on the *Europe* or lose her mother? Far from a triviality, this bind is the topic of the final substantive comment that Herculine writes in her memoirs. This was clearly never resolved as the memoirs abruptly end with a comment by Foucault that in February 1868 Herculine killed herself by charcoal stove (Foucault: 1980: 115).

This is Herculine’s memoirs as I have understood them. I have only omitted details when I felt they were not pertinent to Herculine’s life, but have tried to keep my account of the memoirs faithful to the way the text describes them. Unlike Foucault, who imposes his theoretical framework on the memoirs and thereby forces Herculine’s experiences within particular paradigms, I begin first with

⁸⁴ Herculine’s choice to capitalise ‘You’ alludes to the point that Herculine is addressing both God and us, or rather, society in general. That society has defined Herculine in such socially problematic terms in light of her unique anatomy, inserted itself into her life and then condemned her has caused nothing but pain, a prolonged sense of being ‘useless to everybody and so crushing’ to herself. Herculine’s experience is one of being the excess or ‘lack’ described in my previous chapter, and her life embodies the trials and tribulations of being that lack. Far from necessarily subversive, hers is a punitive experience.

Herculine to see whether Butler's and Althusser's theoretical framework then fits. This endeavour of analysing the memoirs from a Butlerian and Althusserian framework will now occupy my following section.

4.2 A Butlerian and an Althusserian Reading of Barbin

What does a Butlerian compared to an Althusserian reading of Barbin's memoirs look like? What are the differences in these two different approaches to the memoirs? To what extent do those differences precipitate an essentialist or non-essentialist reading of the memoirs? The purpose of this section is to answer the first two questions, emphasising the different points of emphasis in both frameworks. I will also explain why I think an Althusserian reading better corresponds to Herculine's experiences as she outlines them. The third question will be answered in the section following this one, arguing that those different emphases yield an essentialist analysis of the memoirs in the case of Butler and a non-essentialist analysis in the case of Althusser.

Given the nature of the two analytical frameworks of subjectivity outlined in my previous chapters, I can summarise my answers as follows. A Butlerian analysis will conceptualise Herculine's gender as a repeated performance of gendered behaviour, sexuality and sex. A Butlerian reading would focus on the dissonance between those three performances as the result of human agency subverting dominant gendered norms cited, but in their citation are actively contested in formerly incompatible performances. Herculine's inter-sexed body is distinct from the dominant gender norms organising the body according to heterosexual, dichotomous confines. Her body occupies a time independent from those norms and by extension the opportunity to contest them. An Althusserian reading is, by contrast, far more pessimistic, focusing not so much on Herculine but on those around her. Here, emphasis is placed on the relationships which punctuate her life and how changes in those relationships bring about changes in Herculine's subjectivity. An Althusserian reading of the memoirs focuses on the asymmetrical relationship between Herculine and those around her and the monopoly on her sense of self held by those around her. By denying a temporal distinction between Herculine and those around her, an Althusserian reading also denies the intrinsically subversive potential of Herculine's inter-sexed body, paying greater attention to Herculine's developing loneliness, disorientation, social isolation and eventual suicide. I do not mean to suggest that Butler's account would be inevitably optimistic in comparison to Althusser's – indeed, Butler emphasises the problems associated with a socially unintelligible existence and the implications this has for Herculine. That said,

given my account of Althusser's and Butler's theories of Gender Subjectivity above, it is clear an optimism permeates a Butlerian reading of the memoirs, and in the following section I will link this optimism with the same essentialism that I claim subtly yet importantly permeates throughout her analysis of gender in contrast to Althusser.

Butler's Reading

What, then, would Butler make of the memoirs if she had actively situated Herculine's life within a performative framework? As I said above, at a fundamental level a performative framework would underline the distinction between Herculine the hermaphrodite and the predominant gender norms that Herculine is supposed to cite. Herculine's gender comprises three performances her gendered behaviour, her sexuality and her sex, and throughout the memoirs Herculine alludes to each of these.

In the first instance, Herculine's behaviour repeats and conforms to predominant norms of what it is to be a woman in 19th Century France. The entirety of Herculine's younger life is characterised by her belonging to convents and boarding schools solely for girls. By repeatedly and consistently engaging in the rituals of these institutions, the doer is constructed by the deed and the deeds are those of a woman (Butler, 2006: 195). At no point does Herculine demonstrate any subversion at the level of gendered behaviour. Herculine's memoirs give no account of attempts to undermine gender norms at the level of gendered behaviour. Even when she is clearly opposed to a particular behavioural expectation, she adheres to it, as in the case of her undertaking becoming a teacher despite her inclination otherwise. On one of the only occasions Herculine does appear to subvert gendered norms, this is short-lived as the threat of retribution returns her to strict conformism. This occurs when Herculine repeatedly breaks curfew to be with Lea, only to adhere to the rules when chastised by Mother Eléonore (Foucault: 1980, 12).

As I mentioned, Herculine begrudgingly became a teacher, a woman's profession and as a teacher goes to pains to act accordingly, at least in front of others. An important point to note is that Herculine's behavioural performance of being a woman is never undermined by her sexual performance insofar as her relationships with other women are always kept away from public scrutiny, and indeed are conducted as a woman herself. None of the either potentially or explicitly sexual relationships that Herculine enters into undermine the gendered behavioural performances that Herculine repeats and we can interpret her attempts to keep her relationship secret as an attempt to retain her fragile subjectivity as a woman. When Herculine does become a man, we see this

correspond with new performances antithetical to her former subjectivity. One such performance is fashion, which, as Behnke (2016) rightly points out, Butler entirely fails to appropriately discuss throughout her works, despite its clear salience as a contributing performance to gender subjectivity.⁸⁵ Herculine explicitly remarks on how she now dresses as a man (Foucault, 1980: 90). Herculine now behaves as a man, as a friend of her mother's remarked that she 'had been especially struck by my bearing, by my appearance, by my manner, which was just a bit cavalier' (ibid: 88). This is, of course, the point. Herculine's new performance in the form of dress and demeanour reproduces her gender as a man, conflicting with her former subjectivity as woman. There is no 'Herculine the doer' who is not continuously produced by the deed, and new deeds are constructing a new Herculine. Herculine is the culmination of repeated gendered behavioural performances. These are always loyally cited and Herculine never truly contests in her behaviour what it means to be either a man or a woman. The same, however, is not true for her performance of sexuality.

As explained in the previous chapter, sexuality is another component performance of Gendered Subjectivity and, in the case of Herculine, this is markedly more interesting. Insofar as our performance of sexuality ought to conform to the dictates of a dichotomous organising of Gendered Subjectivity, the memoirs demonstrate the kind of subversive performances interesting to a project of gender contestation. Herculine *as a woman* ought to have sexual relations with men, but this neither implicitly nor explicitly ever occurs. The crypto-sexual relationships Herculine enters into before Sara, in the form of Lea, Thécla, Sister Agnes and Mademoiselle Clotilde, and the explicitly sexual in the form of her relationship with Sara, are incompatible with her gendered behaviour performances. Again, this is clearly the case, given the secrecy which surrounds these relationships. For fear of undermining her subjectivity as a woman, she is keen to ensure the delineation between Herculine as she dresses, acts and behaves and Herculine in the context of the person with whom she has sexual relations. At no point does Herculine's sexuality bring into question her subjectivity as a woman. A point equally worth recognising is that Herculine never suggests that she believes her sexuality brings into question her gender as a woman. Herculine has sexual relations with Sara, a woman, as a woman. This is admittedly problematic and draws Herculine's subjectivity closer to the fringes of what Butler describes as intelligible social existence. On the fringes, the incoherence between Herculine's behavioural and sexual renders Herculine a bad subject, a deviation from the standard woman but, at least in terms of

⁸⁵ 'While dress and sartorial code are involved implicitly in her discussion of drag and cross-dressing, there is no systematic engagement with the way that women dress in order to perform their social roles' (Behnke, 2017: 4).

her behaviour and sexuality, these performances do not fundamentally bring into question dichotomously organised Gender Subjectivity.

Herculine's sexuality does not exceed the paradigms of a bad subject, a woman who behaves unwomanly but is a woman nonetheless. Butler considers, for example, the 'repetition of the law into hyperbole' or the repetition of acts which 'produces a set of consequences that exceed and confound what appears to be the disciplining intention motivating the law' (Butler, 2011: 82). The difference that Butler is indicating is the difference between a fundamental contestation of Gender Subjectivity as we know it, and a bad subject who violates gendered norms but whose violation is perfectly explained within it. Until this point, Herculine is a bad Gendered Subject but a Gendered Subject nonetheless. It is in this context that we turn to Herculine's performance of sex.

The performance of sex is the most abstract of Butler's three component performances constituting Gendered Subjectivity. This is because it is simultaneously the least discussed and the least obvious performance. Butler never truly explicates what it means to perform sex. That said, we can establish what it means to describe sex as performative, without integrating that description too heavily into a description of the performance of gendered behaviour. I think for the purpose of clarity, it is best to see the performance of sex to mean the performance of the sexed body, rather than solely the performance of genitalia. To describe the sexed body as the culmination of repeated performances is to claim that the body comes into being at the same time that it is performed. A female sexed body as defined by its relative weakness and frailty is the effect of a repeated performance producing and consolidating that definition. Clearly the body is more malleable than we may initially presume. In fact, it is Jaggar's contention that the body is defined by the social and the social by the biology and that the corporeal is so heavily integrated in social gendered paradigms that is difficult to distinguish between the two:

A dialectical conception of human biology sees human nature and the forms of human social organization as determined not by our biology alone but rather by a complex interplay between our biological constitution, our physical environment and our forms of social organization, including our level of technological development. The effect of each of these factors cannot be isolated because each affects and changes the others. In other words, the factors are not only related to each other but dialectically related (Jaggar, 1992: 84).

Invoking a specific notion of the dialectic as an 'interplay' between the anatomical and the social, Jaggar begins to draw on the performance of the body resulting from citing particular gendered social norms. The repeated performance of foot-binding, for example, shapes the foot. The repeated performance of taking the contraceptive pill reshapes or rather reconstructs the female body with

modified menstruation patterns. The body exists but not in a social vacuum. It is pulled, twisted, shaped and contorted and Butler's point would be that Jaggar does not go far enough. It is in this very dialectic between the social and the body, the social body, exists at all. Indeed, that we distinguish people according to their genitalia is a norm produced and reproduced every time we go into designated toilets which assumes a dichotomous organisation of sex.⁸⁶

There are, however, two points that we need to remember. Unlike gendered behaviour and sexuality, the performance of the sexed body is not entirely without compulsion. Body hair grows, menstruation occurs and genitalia obtain irrespective of volition, whereas the adherence to satirical codes requires our citing and performing them. Even though each of these can be manipulated around ritualised practices, they persist and incite performances because of their inherently persistent nature. Even genitalia can be shaped by ritualised practices as witnessed in the tucking of the penis between one's buttocks as often occurs in drag. The second point is that the continuous performance of the dichotomously organised sexed body is a salient performance in the construction and maintenance of Gender Subjectivity as we know it. The underlying dichotomy which maintains an underlying difference between men and women requires a corporeal underpinning and performance of the sexed body. The performance of sexuality according to dichotomous lines, as important as it is, does not fundamentally underpin Gendered Subjectivity. Hence, when Herculine sleeps with women, it renders her a bad subject, falling short of radically contesting contemporary Gender Subjectivity; however, what characterises Herculine's sexual practices socially problematic and threatening is the fact that her genitalia do not correspond with predominant discourses of sex. Herculine's sexual practices are accompanied by condemnation only once Herculine has been redefined as a man (Foucault, 1980: 91-92). Herculine is not a socially problematic subject because she sleeps with women, she is a socially problematic and threatening subject because she sleeps with women *and* because her genitalia do not clearly conform to a dichotomous organisation of sex. It is that society cannot easily identify what Herculine is when she has sexual relations with Sara.

It is the performance of the body, or rather the impossibility of the performance to correspond to dichotomous sex discourse, which underpins the subversive potential of Herculine's life and experiences:

Herculine is not an "identity," but the sexual impossibility of an identity. Although male and female anatomical elements are jointly distributed in and on this body, that is not the true source of scandal.

⁸⁶ Equally, a rise in unisex bathrooms may indicate changes to dichotomous sex norms, changes which are produced and reproduced in that very material change.

The linguistic conventions that produce intelligible gendered selves find their limit in Herculine precisely because she/he occasions a convergence and disorganization of the rules that govern sex/gender/desire. Herculine deploys and redistributes the terms of a binary system, but that very redistribution disrupts and proliferates those terms outside the binary itself (Butler, 2006: 32).

Butler is explaining here that it is in the domain of the bodily performance of sex that Herculine's subversive potential exists. That Herculine threatens a binary conception of sex is exemplified in the problem of imposing a pronoun organised around that very sexed binary. Curiously, Butler claims that Herculine's memoirs 'provide the opportunity to read Foucault against himself' (Butler, 2006: 132), by which she means to avoid Foucault's brief 'temptation to romanticize Herculine's sexuality as the utopian play of pleasures prior to the imposition and restrictions of "sex"' (ibid: 133). I do not doubt Butler explicitly wants to avoid the essentialist depiction of agency but were Butler to actively provide a reading of the memoirs according to a performative framework, she would struggle to avoid an analysis which did not provide an 'agential rendering of gender' silently embedded in her thought (Behnke, 2017: 4). In other words, when we consider that Gender Subjectivity is constituted by three performances, behaviour, sexuality and sex, and each of these result from the citation of norms temporally distinct from the subject doing the citing, then a performative reading of the memoirs must re-centralise the doer behind the deed – Herculine. Herculine's agency is central to a performative reading of the memoirs and identifies the emancipatory nature of Herculine's sex. The disjunction between Herculine's sex and predominant discourses of sex are not anomalous to Herculine, but the exaggeration of a temporal distinction between all of us, our bodily performances and the norms they cite.

In the latter part of *Gender Trouble* where Butler engages slightly more thoroughly with the memoirs (still falling short of providing a performative reading), she remarks on the 'ambiguous' nature of Herculine's subject positionality, the same ambiguity characterising agency from the outset of Butler's project to create a performative theory of gender back in 1986. This ambiguity, we should remember, constitutes the theoretical bind behind a theory of the subject grounded in agency and a theory of the subject, which avoids any notion of a pre-given consciousness. Butler may explicitly attempt to avoid this, but I believe performativity ultimately cedes to the pull of agency:

Herculine's anatomy does not fall outside the categories of sex, but confuses and redistributes the constitutive elements of those categories; indeed, the free play of attributes has the effect of exposing the illusory character of sex as an abiding substantive substrate to which these various attributes are presumed to adhere. Moreover Herculine's sexuality constitutes a set of gender transgressions which

challenge the very distinction between heterosexual and lesbian erotic exchange, underscoring the points of their ambiguous convergence and redistribution (Butler, 2006: 136-137).

This is an important quotation to analyse. Here, Butler provides a reading of the memoirs according to a performative framework before reverting to a critical engagement with Foucault. When read with *Bodies that Matter* in mind, Herculine's body exaggerates the temporal distinction between her and the norms she is supposed to cite. Her body confuses the norms but, in that confusion, exaggerates a truth for Butler, namely, that the agent who cites the norms is temporally distinct, it just so happens that Herculine's body never easily conforms to those norms. Herculine's performance of sexuality gains meaning precisely because Herculine's performance cannot be easily accounted for with recourse to an intelligible binary bodily performance. She is not a lesbian, nor a heterosexual, and thus the ambiguous space that Herculine occupies is none other than one which chooses to play freely with the norms we cite through our performance. Herculine's ambiguity is ours, but the explicit nature of her dissonance between her body and predominant binary discourses on sex emphasises a freedom to play with those norms in our performance fundamental to us all.

I do not doubt Butler would disagree with this reading of the memoirs. Her discussion of Herculine's suicide is framed as the effectivity of discourse over the body and what happens when such a body does not conform to discourse (Butler, 2006: 135). But in light of the absence of a thorough reading of the memoirs through a performative lens, I believe the theory of performativity developed throughout Butler's writings yields a different reading to the one intended. It monopolises focus on Herculine as the one who cites and critically subverts the norms she cites as it recentralises the doer behind the deed. The doer may be constituted by the deed, but this relationship is 'ambiguous', and such ambiguity re-emerges here to emphasise that the doer was behind the deed all along. A performative analysis of the memoirs fetishises the individual Herculine as the performer constituted by that which they perform, but ultimately that which they perform is a choice. The capacity to choose is predicated on the distinction between the performer, the performance they undertake and the norms cited which form the backdrop of the performance undertaken. Herculine's condition is not so much anomalous to her, but through exaggeration demonstrates the fundamental temporal disjunction between the Gendered Subject and gender norms and the capacity of the Gendered Subject to subvert those norms.

This is what a truly Butlerian reading of Herculine's memoirs entails, a reading Butler herself fails to provide. When we take performativity as it develops in the primary works explored in the previous chapter, it becomes clear that performativity necessitates a re-focus of Herculine. A performative analysis of the memoirs is all about the consistency and changes in her performance and how that

performance reproduces or alters Herculine's subjectivity. At no point does performativity require we analyse the conditions outside the subject which surround or may even precipitate that choice, nor does performativity find the abruptness of the change in performance suspicious. Such a reading necessitates a focus on the changes in Herculine's performance from woman to man and sees Herculine as the origin of that change, rather than attempt to correlate changes in her performance with changes in the relational dynamics Herculine dedicates so much time depicting. Where Butler never asks the question of what underlying conditions make possible Irigaray's contestation with gender, focusing instead on Irigaray's practices, this is the same in the case of Herculine. The clear essentialist overtones of this reading will be explicated in my final section of this chapter, but it is on this point that I will turn to an Althusserian reading of the memoirs.⁸⁷

Althusser's Reading

An Althusserian reading of the memoirs can be accurately summarised by saying that it starts with situating Herculine as an effect. An Althusserian reading makes no apologies for clearly situating Herculine as an effect of those relations which constitute her, rather than ambiguously situating Herculine as an important figure in the constitution of her subjectivity. An Althusserian analysis of the memoirs thus focuses attention on the material manifestations of those relations with Authoritative Subjects who accumulatively interpellate Herculine the Gendered Subject. Consistency and changes in Herculine's subjectivity do not originate with Herculine but in changes in the material forms of those who interpellate her. From an Althusserian perspective, the memoirs provide a fresh opportunity to exercise his particular analytical framework into practice. In the case of Cremonini and Irigaray, we were without sufficient information to accurately explain the conditions yielding subversion at the level of subjectivity. Herculine's memoirs, on the other hand, abound with the relevant information in order to conduct an Althusserian analysis, in particular information concerning the kinds of relations Herculine had with others. I hope then to provide as close to an Althusserian reading of the memoirs as possible given their clear relevance to a theory of gender developed in this thesis.

What then does an Althusserian reading of the memoirs specifically say? The memoirs through an Althusserian lens articulate the notion that subjectivity is contingent on constitutive relations and by extension Herculine's life is punctuated by the membership and material changes in those relations.

⁸⁷ I have not drawn attention to the complete absence of guilt in the memoirs despite the role guilt plays in *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997a). I have dealt with the problem of essentialism following from the conception of the guilty subject in the previous but it is noticeably absent in Herculine's memoirs.

Herculine's memoirs are not so much about Herculine as they are about Herculine's relations with others and the development of those relations. Each of these relations interpellates Herculine's subjectivity and their changing material form explain the development of Herculine as a woman and eventual change from a woman to a man. The important moment of Herculine's fundamental change in gender is not something Herculine does, but is something done to Herculine. In other words, Herculine's interpellation from a man to a woman is explained in terms of her membership into new ISAs and the varying constitutive relations they beget. After all each ISA is characterised by its own Authoritative Subject (with their own specific hail), and it is the combination of different ISAs which yield the subject as an effect. Herculine is the effect of the overlapping ISAs and at different points of her life different ISAs are prominent. In the case of her transition from woman to man it is the medical ISA, with its Authoritative Subject the Doctor whose hail is now prominent. Indeed we cannot understand the change in Herculine's Gendered Subjectivity independently from those who hailed her differently, and were in an authoritative enough position to render that hail meaningful. Herculine's subjectivity is thus reducible to the relational dynamics performativity fails to appreciate.

An Althusserian reading of the memoirs monopolises focus on the changing Authoritative Subjects who hail and thereby constitute Herculine's subjectivity. Herculine's memoirs are specifically helpful here precisely because Herculine catalogues the different Authoritative Subjects throughout her life. Concerning Herculine's life as a woman, the relevant Authoritative Subjects who interpellate Herculine's woman subjectivity are Mother Eléonore, the Mother Superior at the convent Ursulines of Chavagnes, Monsieur de Saint-M in La Rochelle and Madame P who was head teacher at the boarding school Herculine taught. During her life as a woman, there is a second group of Authoritative Subjects who equally interpellate Herculine as a woman, but the relationships contains or are characterised by sexual investment. These are Lea, a fellow student at Ursulines of Chavagnes and Herculine's first love interest, Mademoiselle Cloitilde de R, Monsieur de Saint-M's granddaughter, Thécla and Sister Agnes, both of whom Herculine met whilst training to teach in Oléron. Finally, we have Sara, Madame P's daughter and Herculine's only truly prolonged sexual relationship.

I wanted to draw on the qualitatively different nature of these interpellative relations within which Herculine is enfranchised whilst a woman because I think they illustrate an assumption underlying Althusser's ideas, which I was keen to emphasis above. This is that the interpellation of subjectivity is contextualised within the context of an impure social formation, by which Althusser means interpellation occurs in a social formation characterised by contestation. We can recall that this assumption is first developed in his earlier analysis of Montesquieu (1959) and silently informs his analysis thereafter. An Althusserian reading of the Herculine's memoirs must assume that Herculine's

subjectivity is constituted in an impure 19th Century social formation characterised by internal contestation. This contestation should materialise in the contradictory hails by different Authoritative Subjects. This is clearly the case when we consider these two groups of Authoritative Subjects, where, in the former group, rigid notions of what it is to be a woman are communicated, for example Monsieur de Saint-M associates womanhood with teaching and Mother Eléonore associates womanhood with subordination. In the latter group, stereotypical heteronormative notions of womanhood are challenged, where to be a woman *does not* necessarily entail engaging in subordinate sexual relations with men. Sara has a sexual relation with Herculine *as a woman* but in so doing demonstrates that interpellation does not occur within a political vacuum but within an impure, socially contested patriarchal social formation.

An Althusserian reading of the memoirs thus entails an examination of micro-contestation at the level of interpellation, with the macro assumption that the social formation is impure. At the level of the micro-interpellative relations, we can also see how these maintain Herculine's Gendered Subjectivity. Returning to Mother Eléonore, we see how the authoritative relation between her and Herculine is invoked in order to maintain Herculine's obedience '[t]hen, changing her manner, she made me a sign whose meaning I understood, and I sat down on a little stool at her feet. I wept silently, my head leaning against her arm, which she did not withdraw' (Foucault, 1980: 12). Althusser reminds us that ISAs function by ideology as opposed to other state instruments which function by physical repression (Althusser, 2006: 98). Mother Eléonore could have physically chastised Herculine for her insubordination, but rather the constitutive relation between Herculine and herself is employed in order to ensure future acquiescence. Mother Eléonore embraces Herculine, reminding Herculine of their relation and that such a relation could be broken. It is the interpellative relation between the two which is re-invoked and used in order to ensure Herculine's specific subjectivity. To further consolidate this point we can draw parallels by the joyous relief Herculine experiences in this interaction with Lacan's description of joy upon recognising oneself for the first time in the mirror. In the case of Herculine, she claims that 'I left Mother Eléonore with my heart penetrated by the sweetest joy and the deepest gratitude' (Foucault, 1980: 13) and in the case of Lacan '[t]he mirror image is held together, it can come and go with a slight change of the infant's position, and his mastery of the image fills him with triumph and joy. The mirror image anticipates the mastery of his body that the infant has not yet objectively achieved' (Benvenuto and Kennedy, 1986: 54-55). Lacan's point here is that the infant's sense of self, their subjectivity, is contingent on the metaphorical but very real function of others to reflect and simultaneously create a sense of self. The joy emerges from that sense of self being obtained, but is dependent on and monopolised by a relation with the Other

(the mirror) to simultaneously reflect and constitute subjectivity. The role of the mirror is clearly the same as the role of the Authoritative Subject and the joy that Herculine experiences is the joy the infant experiences upon consolidating a sense of self.

An Althusserian reading of Herculine's memoirs situates Herculine's subjectivity as entirely dependent upon these very relations. Herculine's unique anatomy is, according to a Butlerian reading, an exaggeration and by extension an illustration of the notion that all subjectivity is predicated on repeated performances on the part of the subject. Her anatomy only brings to bear on the reader a condition of freedom and possibility attributable to all. An Althusserian reading, however, interprets Herculine's anatomy differently. Here, Herculine's unique anatomy does not betray a degree of freedom enjoyed by all, but rather emphasises that, even in the absence of a clearly delineated body, our Gendered Subjectivity is still entirely dependent on the hail of others. Herculine's biography is split into two halves, the first half is Herculine interpellated as a woman, the second is Herculine interpellated as a man. My point is that, even in the absence of an anatomy fitting into either side of the predominant binary conception of sex, Herculine is still organised by others according to that dichotomy. This is exemplified in the important moment where Herculine is finally hailed as a man by the doctor having previously been hailed as a woman until this point.

The focus on the doctor as the origin of Herculine's change in subjectivity is a primary feature of an Althusserian analysis of the memoirs. Herculine's change in subjectivity is something done to Herculine rather than something Herculine does. This is exemplified the archetypal interpellative moment when the doctor says to Herculine's mother, '[i]t's true that you've lost your daughter... but you've found a son whom you were not expecting' (Foucault, 1980: 78). This is an exceptionally important moment for depicting the primacy Althusser affords the Authoritative Subject. Herculine has become newly enfranchised into the scientific/medical ISA, having previously been enfranchised in educational/religious ISAs, with their respective Authoritative Subjects who hailed Herculine as a woman. The material changes in the ISA and resident Authoritative Subject has, on this occasion, taken the same anomalous body and interpreted Herculine as a man. The doctor accompanies his diagnosis with a list of permissible and impermissible acts, in keeping with the notion that subjectivity is a positioned, that to be a woman is to be differently positioned from a man and the resulting performances are conditioned by that positioning.

Equally telling about this passage and the passages following is that despite the fundamental nature of the doctor's hail, from woman to man Gendered Subjectivity, Herculine poses no resistance to the hail. At no point within the passage or after does Herculine resist the call that she is now a man with

all the behavioural and sexual expectations that follow. This silence on the part of Herculine is adequately conceptualised within an Althusserian framework which denies a temporal distinction between the time of the subject and the time of ideology which hails. For Herculine to resist the call of interpellation is to assume that Herculine is a subject prior to her subjection to the hail.⁸⁸ That Herculine does not resist such an important and life changing hail is explained by the concept of automatism which implicitly informs interpellation. Macherey, a student of Althusser's, employs the concept of automatism which he understands to be the denial of 'the possibility of lag between the question asked and the response it brings' (Macherey, 2012: 14). Here, he is explicitly juxtaposing a performative theory of subjectivity with an interpellative theory of gender, where the former is characterised by the very temporal lag the latter forecloses. Herculine does not resist the hail because Herculine cannot resist the hail. Such notion of resistance would be antithetical to the idea that Herculine is only ever the effect of those who interpellate her.

That is not to say that resistance is not feasible, indeed, interpellation still holds a place for agency. It is to say, however, that the degree to which Herculine can contest the call of interpellation would be reduced to contestation between the different Authoritative Subjects, between those who hailed her as a woman and the doctor who hails her as a man. Herculine is the effect of interpellation and by extension the degree to which she can 'play' with interpellation is conditioned by the material interplay of those who interpellate her. In the case of Herculine, the authoritative position of the doctor is not contested by those who formerly interpellated Herculine as a female Gendered Subject. It is telling that the next scene Herculine depicts for the reader does not illustrate how she felt about such a change, but rather involves Monsieur de Saint-M. Upon hearing the doctor's diagnosis, Monsieur de Saint-M is 'stupefied' but immediately accepts the doctor's judgment (Foucault, 1980: 79). We should remember that, for Althusser, we are all overdetermined subjects, constituted by the hails of various Authoritative Subjects in various ISAs. Hypothetically, Herculine could have resisted the doctor's hail but that she does not, and that other Authoritative Subjects acquiesce to the doctor's judgment, is indicative of the authoritative position afforded to the doctor and the ISA he belonged to at the time Herculine's Gender Subjectivity changes.

Herculine's memoirs are thus punctuated by an unending discussion of those with whom she entered into some kind of relation, resulting in her subjectivity. From an Althusserian perspective, the fact that an Other hails Herculine as a man is an archetypal illustration of interpellation at work. In keeping with this emphasis on interpellative relations, an Althusserian reading provides a clear explanation for

⁸⁸ That Herculine can play with interpellation from within the paradigm of interpellation, given Herculine was already an interpellated subject, will occupy my discussion in the next section.

Herculine's suicide and the tone of the memoirs approaching her eventual death. Butler discusses Herculine's suicide as a fleeting comment in her attempt to contest Foucault's optimistic interpretation of the memoirs (Butler, 2006: 133). Butler never thoroughly engages with Herculine's suicide at a theoretically substantive level and, at the same time, I do not believe performativity has a means of adequately framing Herculine's suicide. Interpellation, on the other hand, can adequately explain Herculine's suicide and, furthermore, Herculine's clear deterioration provides us with a means of doing so. As a man, this portion of the memoirs can be adequately summarised by a developing and eventually unyielding sense of loneliness. Soon after her resignification as man and at the same time as she considers the public humiliation Sara must have felt, Herculine introduces the theme of loneliness and isolation: 'Nothing. Cold solitude, dark isolation. To live alone, always alone, in the midst of the crowd that surrounds me, without a word of love ever coming to gladden my soul, without a friendly hand reaching out to me' (Foucault, 1980: 92). As a man, Herculine begins to experience social isolation as her former relations and employment unfold in the public domain. Herculine is keen to tell us that, despite the growing social stigma, her relationship with God remains: 'Though I am a sad disinherited creature, I can still lift up my eyes to You, for You at least will not reject me!' (ibid: 93). What is this loneliness she experiences but precisely the absence of the Authoritative Subjects in whose subordination Herculine was formerly positioned, mitigated only at this late stage of the memoirs by her interpellative relation with God? Herculine explicitly equates loneliness with death.

As this final section of the memoirs develops, Herculine's sense of loneliness become more intense, as all those who formerly substantiated her social existence disappear. As her continued correspondence with Madame P and Sara comes to an end (ibid: 96), Herculine turns the reader's attention immediately to the death of Monsieur de Saint-M, a key figure in the development of Herculine's life (ibid: 97). Once in Paris, Herculine's desperate attempt and failure to cling onto someone indicates the importance others play in Herculine's social existence. Indeed, near the very end of the memoirs, Herculine comes across a potential job opportunity, but the reader gets the impression that the job is not what is being sought but rather it is employment under a particular individual, under a particular Authoritative Subject, the Countess de J (Foucault, 1980: 107). After the failure to secure employment, Herculine's loneliness intensifies and even the interpellative relation with God is lost (ibid: 110). The parallel developing existential crisis is explicit. An Althusserian perspective will note that Herculine's craving of 'the sleep of the tomb' at the same time as she articulates the loss of God is indicative of precisely this loss of her final interpellative relation, a loneliness a performative reading fails to appreciate and analyse.

On the final pages of the memoirs, Herculine recounts how she does eventually find employment, but as I said before, this puts her in a difficult position. Was she to leap into the void with no certainties as to how her life would unfold, saying goodbye to her mother, the most insignificant of all the Authoritative Subjects? Her mother plays a surprisingly inconsequential role throughout the memoirs and emerges here, out of the blue, as a problem. From an Althusserian perspective, she does not occupy an authoritative position in order to socially sustain Herculine's existence, an existence which has always been predicated on Herculine's relations with others. In other words the familial ISA plays less a role in the constitution of Herculine's subjectivity than others, as exemplified in the ability of the doctor to newly interpellate Herculine as a man. Yet here, the potential loss of Herculine's mother poses too much of a problem. Unable to leave for a life for which she has no certainties, and unable to lose the final (remotely interpellative) relation she has with her mother, Herculine's loneliness eventually culminates in her suicide. Herculine's mother proves to be the residual legacy of the family ISA, the lack of prominence of which proves insufficient for sustaining Herculine's subjectivity.

Herculine's suicide is framed as the logical conclusion to a life dependent on others for social existence, a hypothesis theoretically articulated in Althusser's theory of gender. One final point I wish to draw on is the distinction between the metaphorical and metonymic function of interpellation discussed earlier and the illustration of that distinction here. Just to remind ourselves, I explained in my first chapter that the metaphorical function of interpellation is to bring the subject into existence. This is the very basic sexed element of subjectivity, to be defined according to particular genitalia. To be sexed is to be a subject, but one's relation to other subjects and what is permitted and foreclosed by virtue of existing is not defined in the metaphorical function. This is the vertical line in the 'T' shape structure of subjectivity. We are simultaneously organised by the metonymic function of interpellation, the phallus ideology, our gender, which organises us in positions of dominance and subordination, permitting some behaviours and foreclosing others. This denotes the horizontal line of the 'T' shape structure of subjectivity and links us to other Gendered Subjects who are or are not similar to us, and regulate and dictate our relations because of the degree of similarity, thus relations are in a chain with one another ('TTT'). I also mentioned that the act of naming illustrates the simultaneous nature of these two functions of interpellation, by bringing us into existence and organising us according to the phallus. In the act of naming, these two functions of interpellation occur at the same time although they are distinct. There is nothing inevitable about naming a child 'Craig' which renders the child a boy, or 'Nicole' a girl, rather, these are subsequently but simultaneously metonymically organised according to unequal gender dynamics organised around the phallus.

Certain names emphasise the fundamentally arbitrary nature of the name and the gender it connotes, betraying a condition of all names. When we return to the occasion that the doctor interpellates Herculine as a man, we see depicted the distinction between the metaphorical and metonymic functions of interpellation: 'Frankly... your godmother had a stroke of luck when she called you Camille. Give me your hand, *mademoiselle*; before long, I hope, we shall call you differently' (Foucault, 1980: 78, emphasis in original).⁸⁹ The doctor demonstrates precisely the joint metaphorical and metonymic functions of interpellation. Herculine (Camille) brings the subject into existence but is at present organised by reference to the phallus in a gendered position of subordination, hence the subsequent 'mademoiselle'. Herculine (Camille) only denotes the existence of Herculine as a subject, *that* she exists with specific genitalia. *Who* Herculine is specifically is subsequently but simultaneously an organised metonymic effect of interpellation. The doctor himself even explicitly says that he hopes we will 'call' Herculine differently, that she no longer be 'mademoiselle' – Herculine the woman.⁹⁰ To reiterate, Herculine is in no way presented as the active agent but is rather the passive effect of a new call which will interpellate her differently with respects to how she has formerly metonymically organised according to the phallus (but still organised by the phallus).⁹¹

What I have provided above is two alternative readings of Herculine's memoirs according to the performative-Butlerian and interpellative-Althusserian frameworks. What I have also demonstrated is the clear degree to which Herculine's memoirs and the experiences recounted in them comfortably fit an Althusserian reading, whereas a Butlerian reading gives too much to Herculine's agency and analyses too little the importance others had for Herculine's social existence and the sense of intense loneliness she later felt which culminated in her suicide. Foucault attributed great significance to the memoirs insofar as they provide us with an example of the processes constituting subjectivity and Herculine's unique experiences dramatise conditions applicable to us all. Where performativity inserts agency on the part of Herculine and situates Herculine as the origin of her change in her fundamental change in subjectivity, Althusser's interpellation is far more pessimistic. Herculine is not the origin but

⁸⁹ Camille is the name Herculine chooses to call herself in the memoirs in an attempt to retain anonymity.

⁹⁰ That the doctor notes that there is a lag between how he understands Herculine and how Herculine has been historically understood, 'before long ... we shall call you differently' does not diminish the significance of this moment. Rather this simply reminds us that past interpellations specific to the religious and educational ISAs remain important for understanding Herculine, but that new ISAs are interpellating Herculine differently. This is in-keeping with an overdetermined theory of the subject.

⁹¹ Monsieur de Saint-M's reaction to the change in Herculine also betrays the distinction between the metaphorical and metonymic functions of interpellation when upon hearing the news he calculated 'that it might give me a more advantageous position in the future' (ibid: 79). By virtue of being newly organised through the phallus signifier as a man, the opportunities afforded to her are different and potentially beneficial. Herculine remains named Herculine, but the metonymic function of interpellation creates a new affect in the form of Herculine the man.

the effect of those who interpellate her and any changes that occur originate in the Authoritative Subjects who punctuate her life. The degree to which Herculine could resist that interpellation was predicated on material conditions which simply did not obtain at the time, although we can see glimpses of it in the form of those Authoritative Subjects like Sara who altered the behaviour dictates associated with what it is to be a woman. I do not doubt that an Althusserian reading is more pessimistic than Butler's, but anything other would be a disloyal reading of the memoirs, seeking to achieve some kind of hermeneutic cycle whereby our theoretical predispositions are forced onto an object of analysis in order to further verify them. There is nothing forced in an Althusserian reading of the memoirs. What remains left is an explication of how a Butlerian reading of these memoirs relapses into essentialism whereas an Althusserian reading avoids such a relapse.

Herculine and an Althusserian Strategy

The purpose of this section of my thesis has been to read Herculine's memoirs from an Althusserian perspective and to show that Herculine's experiences are explained by an interpellative model of subjectivity. An obvious question at this late stage of my analysis would be, how can an Althusserian reading point towards a strategy for social change? In other words, Althusser's interpellation and non-essentialism may account for the experiences of a 19th Century hermaphrodite, but insofar as Herculine's story ends with suicide, we are left wanting for a strategy for social change. We are left twiddling our thumbs whilst Herculine dies. Additionally to not explore an Althusserian strategy for social change would be to do Althusser a disservice. I have after-all emphasised throughout my thesis that the totality of Althusser's oeuvre show us that Althusser was always dedicated to understanding social change, even when he was focused on understanding social reproduction and subject constitution.

Whilst reading Herculine's memoirs and interpreting her experiences as manifestly interpellative in nature, I would like to turn the reader to an extract of *Contradiction and Overdetermination* (Althusser, 1966). Originally written in 1962 *before* Althusser's correspondence with Lacan, Althusser examines Lenin's concept of the weakest link:

'In general, anyone who wants to control a given situation will look out for a weak point, in case it should render the whole system vulnerable. On the other hand, anyone who wants to attack it, even if

the odds are apparently against him, need only discover this one weakness to make all its power precarious' (Althusser, 1966: 94).⁹²

Contradiction and Overdetermination is entirely about understand what rendered Lenin a successful revolutionary both in theory and practice. The weakest link in the chain is for Althusser that instance or moment from which the characteristics of society are dependent, and by extension the fragility of which brings those characteristics into contention. Given Althusser's later analysis of social reproduction is reduced to an analysis of subject and their constitution, for our purposes the weakest link is that ISA from which society most depends. This text is also important from the perspective of strategy because, firstly it reminds us that society is laden with contradictions, or as he writes 'the 'contradiction' is inseparable from the total structure of the social body in which it is found, inseparable from its formal *conditions* of existence...' (Althusser, 1966: 101. emphasis in the original). In other words an understanding of the social totality, be it capitalist or in our context patriarchal necessarily requires the recognition of the contradictions forever brings the stability of that totality into question. It is precisely to repeat Althusser's earlier contention that society is always 'impure', riddled with contradictions potentiating social change. Secondly, in the text Althusser reminds us that identifying the weakest link, the dominant ISA is not enough to enact social change. Rather social change and contestation is predicated on a number of necessary but independently insufficient conditions yielding what he describes as a 'ruptural unity':

If this contradiction is to become '*active*' in the strongest sense, to become a ruptural principle, there must be an accumulation of 'circumstances' and 'currents' so that whatever their origin and sense (and many of them will *necessarily* be paradoxically foreign to the revolution in origin and sense, or even its 'direct opponents'), they '*fuse*' into a *ruptural unity*: when they produce the result of the immense majority of the popular masses *grouped* in an assault on a regime which its ruling classes are *unable to defend* (Althusser, 1966: 99).

The social totality is impure insofar as it is inherently characterised by contradictions. Patriarchal society conceptualised in the same way is, Althusser would argue, plagued by contradictions between the various legal, social, economic and principal gender dynamics. To develop from a contradictory social totality to a 'ruptural unity' is not the result alone of theoretically analysing the weakest link, the dominant ISA. It is not enough to say the familiar ISA is the predominant interpellative institution from which subjectivity is constituted. A 'ruptural unity' characterised by the 'immense majority of

⁹² If one was under any question as to the intellectual period of Althusser's life this text pertains, his immediate turn to Machiavelli is perfectly in keeping with my earlier assessment that his earlier intellectual efforts were dedicated to understanding social change (ibid: 94).

the popular masses grouped in an assault' is equally dependent on other 'circumstances' and 'currents' to which Althusser struggles to thoroughly elaborate.

Althusser outlines the principle of a ruptural unity and explains one such cause is the identification of the weakest link. When we return to Althusser's assessment of Mother Courage, we are reminded of the frustrating paradox of a mother who sees war for everything that it is and has taken from her, and a mother unable to act in any other way that does not in some way contribute to that war. Metaphorically this illustrates the shortcomings of theoretical praxis in yielding a change to the social totality. *On the Reproduction of Capital* however points to yet another prong of an Althusserian strategy of social contestation in the concept of the militant subject, and I will demonstrate how this can be read in the memoirs described above. What will follow will not be a complete exposition of an Althusserian strategy for patriarchal contestation, but at least indication that a strategy exists and demonstrate what the strategy looks like.

I want to be clear in outlining what a possible Althusserian strategy would look like. Such a strategy is predicated on first recognising that both the social totality *and* the subject are overdetermined. Both Patriarchal society and Gendered Subjects are structurally and metonymically constituted. So too however are they inherently unstable, defined by contradiction, impure. It is this philosophical perspective which seeks to find the weakest link in the overdetermined social totality *and* the subject which comprises of the first prong of an Althusserian strategy. Althusser believed that social reproduction of the social totality is dependent on the social reproduction of specific subjects, meaning that the weakest link for both is the Familial ISA. Patriarchy in all its complexities is only made possible because of the constant constitution of Gendered Subjects. The second prong of an Althusserian strategy then turns to the contestation of Gendered Subjects from a non-essentialist perspective.

The Gendered Subject who reproduces the patriarchal social totality is overdetermined by multiple ISAs, the dominant being the familial ISA. The Gendered Subject is also characterised by contradictions in interpellations of different ISAs. Recall for example my earlier assessment of Simpson's discussion of how the scholastic ISA interpellates differently to the familial ISA, making the subject's play between the two possible. What then does this contestation look like from a strategic perspective, and how can this be read in the memoirs? To answer this I would like to take a very brief detour and consider the early psychoanalytic concept 'ambivalence' developed by Bleuler in 1910 (Hajda, 1968: 28). Ambivalence for our purposes encapsulates precisely what Althusser would mean by the Gendered Subject is overdetermined and by extension inherent contradictory as it outlines

contentions and struggles at the level of the subject: 'Ambivalence is the simultaneous presence of contradictory tendencies in behavior. It is an inherent antimony or bipolarity or co-existence of opposing forces in social as well as non-social phenomena' (ibid: 21). Ambivalence is a term used to describe the subject's condition of feeling contradictory emotions and feelings, compelled to act in opposite directions. It perfectly encapsulates the state of subject interpellated by multiple different, and at times, contradictory ISAs. Hajda helpfully goes on to write: '[a]mbivalence takes on a pathological character only under special circumstances, e.g. when personal disorganization reaches such proportions that the individual is unable to choose a course of action, or in a perpetual antinomian group fission which destroys the permanence of social ties; or in a state of anomie where any goal' (ibid: 28). Ambivalence can become 'pathological', at the point when ambivalence becomes unsustainable, when the intensity of the separate interpellations demand contradictions in the subject which simply cannot be reconciled.

Althusser's strategy assumes the subject is always an ideologically ambivalent subject. The subject is always contending with contradictory interpellations. I believe that an Althusserian strategy is about exacerbating that ambivalence, transforming the ambivalent subject into the *Militant Subject*. Recall Althusser's introduction of the militant subject in *On the Reproduction of Capital*. Here the subject interpellated acts contrary to the social and economic dynamics of the social totality, a totality already suffering perpetual contradiction (Althusser, 2014: 227). Althusser uses the language of 'exacerbation' throughout *Contradiction and Overdetermination* to encapsulate this ruptural moment at both the level of the social totality and the subject. That is to say, an Althusserian strategy for social change is about the Militant subject, the exacerbation of contradictions at the level of society by subjects themselves the exacerbation of contradictions at the level of the ISAs. An Althusserian strategy for social change can also point to Bleuler's concept of ambivalence because it shows what a strategy wishes to avoid. Central to ambivalence is pathology, what was described above as that point contradictions stifle or debilitate the subject 'when personal disorganization reaches such proportions that the individual is unable to choose a course of action' (Hajda, 1968: 22). Where the contradictions inherent in ambivalence intensify but are equal, far from rupturing into militancy, the subject is rendered incapacitated. One could point to Herculine's suicide as that pathology manifest. Herculine's suicide marks the end of a life which did not reach militancy, which did not fundamentally behave in a way antithetical to the social totality. For the remainder of this section I will demonstrate that Herculine's memoirs illustrate what this strategy looks like precisely because it shows that strategy not coming to fruition.

Herculine's memoirs are a clear story of someone's life punctuated by various constitutive relations. Herculine's story is also one of a radical change in one's Gendered Subjectivity all because of a single interpellative moment, a call by one who can name her so. Despite the radical change in Herculine's subjectivity, Herculine never becomes militant. The memoirs are a story of an existential change in one's self perception and their ultimate acquiescence to the hail that interpellates them. Herculine's memoirs end with her suicide, as if the choice of killing herself was easier than any challenge against to the notion that she was now a man. I believe an Althusserian strategy asks two questions: 1) why didn't Herculine ever become a militant subject as conceived in *On the Reproduction of Capital*? 2) what political significance, if any, can we attribute to those homosexual acts Herculine engaged with when interpellated as a woman? The first question pertains precisely to what Althusser discussed above as the absence of ruptural unity, the necessary conditions yielding a concerted attempt to contest the social totality. The second question is dedicated to recognising those moments Herculine 'played' with her interpellation.

Turning to the first question, I suggest that Herculine always remained in a position of ambivalence. Herculine's memoirs are fundamentally split into Herculine as woman and Herculine as man and at no point does she contest a social totality organised on those terms. Herculine's Gendered Subjectivity is, at least for the majority of her life stable. She is interpellated as a woman, enfranchised into institutions for women and expected to behave as a woman. Other than for moments I will investigate shortly, Herculine completely acquiesces to the dictates imposed upon her. Even those occasions she does contravene the expectations of her, Herculine always went to pains to keep these occasions hidden. The significant section of the memoirs relating to militancy comes *after* the doctor's hail, wherein Herculine is interpellated as a man.

One condition of militant subjectivity is the contradictory subject resulting from contrasting interpellative hails. The religious and familial ISAs interpellation of Herculine as a woman, and the medical ISAs interpellation as a male potentiate a ruptural unity.⁹³ The corporeal, social and economic demands of what it means to be a man contradict with everything Herculine knew to be true and expected. I would hasten to add that given the demands are opposite to what she was previously required, this reaches the intensity of ambivalence rendering subjectivity unstable. Yet Herculine does not contest the authority of the medical ISA that now interpellates her. Moreover the Herculine does not critically engage with the familial and religious ISAs which formerly interpellated her as a woman. Herculine *never* challenges the authority of her mother, the multiple Head Sisters, of Monseigneur or

her various sexual interests who interpellated her as a woman. Moreover Herculine never suggests she maintained her previous subjectivity in her subsequent actions as a man. She does not apply for jobs other than those which fall within rigid understanding of what it means to be a man. She completely ceases to dress as a woman and dresses within the strict dictates of contemporaneous notions of being a man.

That said, the fact that Herculine is utterly miserable points to the instability of her newly interpellated subjectivity. Herculine is what Bleuler describes as intensely ambivalent, whose actions as a man an Althusserian strategy recognises shroud unstable level of contradiction. An Althusserian strategy recognises this depressed and disconsolate Herculine as the satisfaction of one condition of social contestation, but that contradiction is not 'exacerbated' for political purposes. Herein lies the second condition, the role of feminist theory in identifying the weakest link the chain. This contradiction in Herculine's subjectivity brought on by conflicting interpellations can only be exacerbated for political purposes if revolutionary feminist theory simultaneously obtains. That is to say, Herculine's understanding of herself was at a point where she could contest what was demanded of her and to contest the authority of the medical or scientific ISAs. However the absence of a feminist philosophy which identifies the structures constituting oneself and the social totality meant it was impossible for Herculine meaningfully identify the ISAs from which the social totality is reproduce: 'philosophy represents politics in the domain of theory...and vice versa, philosophy represents scientificity in politics' (Althusser, 2006:99).

Contradictions in Herculine's Gendered Subjectivity would have translated into militancy were Herculine equipped with a feminist structuralist philosophy enabling her to identify the structural weaknesses of her own subjectivity and by extension social totality. Instead, the contradictions (or ambivalence) in Herculine's subjectivity remained in the realm of pathology, falling short of translating into concerted political activity.

A concern of mine is the clearly elitist overtones with the suggestion that Herculine was unable to sufficiently contest the social totality in the absence of revolutionary philosophy. The worry is that revolution is contingent on the theoretical musings of the intelligent. I believe however that this elitism is only the product of contemporary structures of academia which spatially separates academia from everyone else. This spatial distinction is not in keeping with an Althusserian strategy for social change. Rather, the strategy I am espousing now reiterates a key insight founding the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1970s. Juliet Mitchell's *Women's Estate* (1971) is a good illustration of the encounter between revolutionary theory and practice in the form of the Women's Liberation

Movement. (Mitchell, 1971: 53). It is far beyond the scope of my analysis to discuss the movement in any length, but as a case study it exemplifies what Althusserian strategy for social contestation looks like. Militant subjectivity by extension is a coming together of revolutionary theory and contradictory subjectivity, the latter of which thoroughly encapsulate Herculine's memoirs.

Herculine's memoirs show what an Althusserian strategy could look like by virtue of showing why Herculine was not militant in her subjectivity. Herculine did not have the conceptual tools facilitating a structural deconstruction of both the social totality and one's subjectivity and so despite her intense ambivalence and instability, did not become a militant subject.

I want to now turn to my second question: what political significance, if any, can we attribute to those homosexual acts Herculine engaged with when interpellated as a woman? I want to emphasise that these acts, short of being systemically and structurally problematic, are moments of what Balibar would describe as 'play' and are therefore politically significant.

Presenting an Althusserian strategy as dependent on two conditions obtaining runs the risk of trivialising individual actions as insignificant where those conditions are absent. Moreover the potential consequences of these actions may fall short contesting the social totality, but the individual cost can still be devastating. The intimacy Herculine shared with multiple women, culminating in a sexual relationship with Sara was both exceptionally brave and potentially socially devastating. We have to ask ourselves, are actions which do not translate into systemic contestation rendered analytically unimportant? I am reminded of the following passage, where a woman named Helen decided to act contrarily to gendered imperatives of feminine hygiene.

I've turned myself into a walking laboratory of pussy hygiene. I enjoy plopping myself down on any dirty toilet seat anywhere. That's not all. I rub the entire seat with my pussy before I sit down, going once around with a graceful gyration of my hops. When I press my pussy onto the seat it makes a smacking noise and then it sucks up all the pubic hairs, droplets, splotches, and puddles of various shades and consistencies. I've been doing this on every sort of toilet for four years now. My favourites are the ones at the highway rest stops where there's just one toiler shares by men and women (Roche, 2009: 14).

I have decided to quote Helen's account at length because she is clearly proud enough to proclaim the minute details of her actions the reader may find unpleasant. Her pride and the incremental level of detail she provides betrays the personal importance of such actions. These actions are fundamentally private and secret (in the same way Herculine's were) but they are explicitly personally important.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ A more thorough analysis of this excerpt can be found in Scharff's *Repudiating Feminism* (2016: 120).

Is an Althusserian strategy worthy of pursuing if it renders such intimate moments trivialities? I do not think so. Butler's performativity of course does conceivably recognise the importance of these actions by framing them as performative deviations of gender. I believe Balibar's 'play' also recognises the political importance of these actions within an Althusserian theoretical framework.

The concept of 'play' is for Balibar the concept of Althusser's which captures individual digressions from an Althusserian perspective:

Althusser drew an explicit parallel between Brecht's practice of theater and Marx's practice of philosophy, arguing that they both wanted not to overcome theater or philosophy but to introduce a dislocation or a "play," a disjointedness or out-of-jointedness, in the relationship between their constitutive elements that was the condition for their being turned around against the effects of the dominant ideology to which, in a sense, they still belonged (Balibar, 2015: 7)

Balibar's discussion of play is precisely those moments of critical engagement, the digression from the ordinary, 'a disjointedness' between the 'constitutive elements' of the dominant (patriarchal) ideology and the dominant ideology itself. Play is firmly within the dominant ideology but is no less important as a result. Herculine's sexual interactions, meaningful as they are for her, are also meaningful for us because they indicate a 'play' or critical engagement from within patriarchal ideology. Focusing specifically on Herculine's relationship with Sara, an Althusserian strategy could see these relations as a symptom of contradictions within the structure of ISAs which accumulatively make up the dominant patriarchal ideology. Herculine's desire, non-essentialism maintains, is not inherent to herself but a constituted component of her Gendered Subjectivity.⁹⁵ Her desire for Sara is both constituted by the ISAs from which the patriarchal ideology is materially articulated, but also conflicts with the heteronormative imperatives within that ideology. To that end an Althusserian strategy ought to recognise these moments of play as symptoms of contradictions at the level of the ISAs. From an analytical approach framed in structuralist terms, the memoirs enable us to identify the contesting interpellations manifest in Herculine's Gendered Subjectivity in terms of her sexuality. For example, Herculine's sexuality could indicate contestation between the Scholastic, the Religious and the familial ISAs. Moreover, that Herculine engages in a sexual relationship with Sara *despite* the potential social condemnation *prima facie* suggests that to me at least that that material changes in one ISA are impacting the metonymic dominance of other ISAs whose hail continues to invoke heterosexuality.

⁹⁵ See Girard (2008) which provides one such non-essentialist model of desire, as desire mimetically constituted by an Other.

What are these material changes in the ISAs Herculine's memoirs suggest and can we identify the specific contestations between the different interpellations? Can we identify contestation from a synchronic analysis of Herculine's experiences and look to the potentially diachronic implications this has on the social totality? As important as these questions are, I am solely engaged in a project which seeks to ask new questions about the constitution of Gendered Subjectivity and Patriarchal society. Frustrating as I personally find it, the scope of this thesis is about the 'transformation of the problematic' (Althusser, 1972: 27), one where Althusser is absent from feminist critique to one where Althusser helps frame that critique. Be that as it may, it is clear to me that we can at least point to where such answers can be found. Beetz (2016), Herzog (2016) and Beetz and Schwab (2017) are all examples where contemporary theoretical developments in the pursuit of a materialist, discursive analysis provide methodological tools for examining interpellation. Where I am preoccupied with developing the principle of Althusser's contribution to feminism, such works in the domain of discourse and materialist studies provide new means of framing discursive analysis of the literal hail.

For now it is important I return to the context of Althusserian strategy for social change as it can be read in Herculine's memoirs. I have sought to explain that principally Herculine's memoirs illustrate an Althusserian strategy for social change. Herculine's memoirs are a fascinating story of fundamental changes in subjectivity. They are also a story of acquiescence, of obedience to the dictates of interpellation and most importantly, of misery. Herculine's memoirs tell us of a hermaphrodite compelled by contrasting interpellations, in whose contradictions fall short of what Althusser calls a rupture unity, of militant subjectivity. It is by explaining *why* Herculine does *not* contest patriarchy that we are able to illustrate an Althusserian strategy. Herculine's memoirs illustrate the presence of one condition for social contestation, and the absence of another- the presence of contradiction at the level of interpellation and the absence of feminist structural theory. Despite her obedience, Herculine's memoirs are also a tale of bravery, of sexual exploration in the face of social condemnation. They are a meaningful account of contradictions at the level of interpellation and the resultant play, moments of joy in an otherwise miserable social significance. These moments were hugely significant to Herculine and so should be hugely significant to us.

4.3 Barbin, Essentialism and Non-Essentialism

The purpose of this final section of my thesis is to illustrate with reference to a particular object, Herculine's memoirs, the degree to which Butler's theory of gender relapses into essentialism and Althusser's does not. From the outset of my thesis, I explained that Butler's theory of gender as performative initially draws from Althusser's theory of interpellation but, in missing primary tenets of his thought, Butler commits the very essentialism against which she critically situated her own theory of gender. At a fundamental level, Butler fails to export the role of the Authoritative Subject as the origin of subjectivity and performance. At a more intricate level, Butler fails to see how changes in the material form of the ISAs and the Authoritative Subjects that reside within them account for changes to subjectivity. Butler has no account of social reproduction, of conceptualising why we experience both the reproduction of those dominant sections of the social formation (social stasis) and at others the contest the social formation (militant subjects). Neither of these occur at the whim of the subject performing their subjectivity as if they existed within a vacuum. Butler emphasises that the performance of gender is predicated on the citation of norms, but the temporal distinction between the subject and the norms cited produces more problems for Butler than it resolves. A Butlerian reading of the memoirs must relapse into essentialism whereas an Althusserian portrayal of the subject as the interpellated effect continues to avoid such essentialism. At the same time, we must not forget that the pessimism associated with an Althusserian reading must not itself relapse into a form of determinism by denying any space for agency. As I will emphasise, agency is still conceptualised in an Althusserian reading of the memoirs, albeit a qualitatively non-essentialist type of agency compared to the essentialist alternative unintentionally advocated by Butler.

Butler's Essentialism

It is clear through providing a truly performative reading of the memoirs that Butler relapses into essentialism. The agency afforded to Herculine as the performer who cites gender norms and performs them ignores the central role played by those relations with others which punctuate her life. Herculine is situated as the pre-given subject temporally distinct from the norms she cites. No doubt Butler wants to avoid this type of reading of Herculine's memoirs but performativity presents Herculine as having a choice as to whether to repeat the norms loyally or disloyally and that such a choice occurs in a vacuum. Indeed despite her best intentions, a Butlerian reading of the memoirs emphasises Herculine's capacity for 'self-invention', whilst de-emphasising the compulsive nature of

habituation (Butler, 2006: xxvi). Herculine is the product of the repetition of performances but her unique body cannot be seen as affording Herculine opportunities which are not afforded to us all. Rather, Herculine's body merely dramatises a condition of freedom beyond the gender norms that are cited and, in the case of Herculine, it explicitly portrays a freedom afforded to us all. Herculine's body does not easily conform to binary sex performances and, as such, Herculine's choice to repeat performances associated with dichotomous gender subjectivity or to engage in subversive performances is made clear. That choice is, after all, made in a space beyond and distinct from the norms being cited.

This is Butler's theory of performativity when we analyse its primary features as it develops in *Gender Trouble*, *Bodies that Matter* and *The Psychic Life of Power*. I am not doing anything other here than loyally applying performativity to the memoirs in a way that Butler never achieves and, in so doing, demonstrating the relapse into essentialism. In Butler's chapter 'Competing Universalities', a contribution to a debate between Laclau, Žižek and herself published as *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality* (2002), Butler discusses the space created by Kant in the form of the 'transcendental' which is beyond history, that which is 'not considered to be a shifting episteme which might be altered and revised over time' (Butler, 2000: 147). This ahistorical space is Kant's conception of reason universal to all and thereby precedes the social. It is precisely what Butler describes as an 'essential' space (ibid: 147), and for that reason juxtaposed to everything she explicitly advocates. Despite this, Butler's performativity situates Herculine's consciousness and capacity to subvert within Kant's transcendental. To repeat the concept mentioned at the beginning of my thesis, Butler advocates the very 'pregiven' she sought to avoid (Butler, 2011: 159). Butler clearly wants to advocate the real possibility for subversion, rendering gender nothing but the voluntary acts repeated over time. Butler injects an emphasis on the regulatory nature of these norms in foreclosing certain possible actions but all the while she maintains the temporal independence of the subject cites and performs what they cite. The emphasis on the regulatory and the punitive is only ever a caveat undermined by an underlying capacity of the subject to contest the norms they cite. Performativity establishes a pre-given Herculine, a doer with the capacity of engaging in deeds which, through their repetition, contest the norms that were cited.

As regards the relapse into essentialism consistent with a performative reading of the memoirs, two significant yet interrelated problems emerge. In the first case, performativity renders Herculine at fault for her inability to contest predominant gender norms. Volition underpins our performance and Herculine chooses to repeat acts either associated with being a woman or a man. Connected to this

problem is the complete inability to explain why Herculine did not contest these norms and what conditions could have rendered subversion possible. Herein lies Althusser's non-essentialism.

By situating Herculine as the overdetermined effect of multiple interpellative relations, we are able to maintain a non-essentialist reading of Herculine's life. Despite her unique anatomy, Herculine is never given a life independent from these relations. Herculine's entire understanding of herself is the effect of how others see her. For the majority of her life, others define her as a man and hail her as such. However, at a certain point, someone of a higher social standing – the doctor – interprets Herculine as a man and hails her as such. Herculine's understanding of herself changes but only as the material form of those who understand her changes. Herculine's unique body demonstrates that, even in the absence of genitalia which clearly fit binary understandings of sex, our sense of self is entirely predicated on the other's understanding of us. Furthermore, Herculine's incapacity to subvert predominant gender norms in light of her anomalous body is explained by the material forms of those who interpellate her.

Althusser's Non-Essentialism

Herculine very much exemplifies what Althusser would call a *Trager*, a support of the social formation she inhabits and contributes. She is hailed according to predominant gender norms and she acts accordingly. There are clear moments of contestation, as witnessed in Herculine's sexual practices, but these are only ever in relation to others, Sara being the most obvious case in point. Additionally, these never amount to anything other than that of being a bad Gendered Subject – a lesbian *woman*. That said, Herculine could have exhibited agency in the form of militant subjectivity, provided that two structural conditions that were outlined in my chapter 'Althusser's Theory of Gender and Patriarchy' obtained. These are, firstly, that particular changes in the material forms of interpellative relations occur, resulting in changes in the content of the phallus ideology being articulated and, secondly, that structural changes occur at the theoretical level.

Concerning the first condition – that particular material forms of interpellation develop to the extent they start articulating an ideology contrary to the dominant phallus ideology – we can see that certain material developments could have metonymically organised subjects differently from the hierarchical binary gender model. In my chapter outlining Althusser's theory of gender, I explored Donzelot's analysis of the changing nature of the family and the effect this had on changes to subjectivity. I then explored the case of Simpson's daughter Heather, which illustrated at a micro level the struggles

occurring within (and between) ISAs. Material changes in the familial ISA enabled Alyson to interpellate her daughter Heather in such a way as to contest the authority of Heather's father. At the same time, Alyson was able to do this by appealing to developments in the scholastic ISA which again have precipitated interpellations which, at times, contest a rigid metonymic organisation of the subject according to the phallus. Here, Heather's militancy, albeit brief, originates from structural developments occurring within ISAs, developments in the structural dynamics and interplay between Authoritative Subjects at home, and developments between ISAs, the development of the rhyme at the school. Heather's ability to contest standard notions of gender originates from her mother and her school, not from herself.

Herculine embodies a similar point to the one just discussed. It would be wrong to say she is entirely a *Trager*, one who wholly reproduces patriarchy. As I remarked earlier, Herculine did engage in actions attributed with what it is to be a bad woman subject, albeit still a woman. Although Herculine did not fundamentally contest binary gender paradigms, in Butlerian terms her performance of her sexuality was problematic in relation to predominant conceptions of what it is to be a woman. Unlike Butler, Althusser would situate this subversive homosexuality as the effect of those interpellative relations which called for such actions. In other words, her homosexuality (a term assuming a recognisable gender to begin with) is the result of a list of relations with people ending with Sara. Indeed, the fact that Herculine never discusses a general sexual predisposition for other women but is always articulated in reference to a specific other is indicative of the interpellative nature of that desire. That said, we cannot believe that Herculine is as subversive as Foucault explicitly claims or performativity implies. Herculine is predominantly a *Trager* with bouts of what Althusser would describe as militancy, always originating from an Authoritative Subject. With reference to Donzelot and Simpson, we must remember that Herculine existed in an impure social formation and, to that end, we must see militancy on the part of the subject as reflecting the varying degrees of material development and social contestation between the ISAs. Even had Herculine's social formation experienced greater material instability, with greater contestation of the phallus ideology at the level of the ISAs ensued, Herculine's subjectivity would have fallen short of some form of militancy the type Althusser envisaged. The degree to which Herculine or any of us can actively contest the social formation is predicated, in part, on developments at the level of the ISAs, but is also predicated on developments at the theoretical level, at the level of theoretical practice. Herein lies the role of feminist theory.

I do not profess that Althusser's theory of theoretical practice is entirely worked out, nor does he sufficiently explain the role of theoretical practice and philosophy as a contributing factor to historical social change. Althusser's analysis of theoretical practice and philosophy very seldom bleeds into his

analysis of the material social formation and the material relationships constituting subjectivity. Despite Althusser's predominantly distinct treatment of theory from the material social formation, as I demonstrated in my earlier chapter, Althusser understands the development of critical philosophy to be necessary but not sufficient for militant subjectivity, and for the play with interpellation this entails. This point is epitomised in the case of *Mother Courage*. Here, the literary figure Mother Courage experiences a theoretical rupture in which she sees war for what it is, a phenomenon which has taken away her children, from which she has profited and to which she contributed. Despite this realisation, this fundamental change in the theoretical structure, she carries on regardless, profiting from the material conditions which have taken away so much from her. Mother Courage experienced a philosophical change but in the absence of a change in subjectivity, in how she understood herself, she embarked on the same material practices as before. That said, Althusser does spend considerable time emphasising the importance of critical philosophy despite its ineffectiveness in the context of *Mother Courage*.

In 2015, a series of manuscripts and extracts was first published in French in 2015 under the title *Être marxiste en philosophie* and subsequently translated and published into English in 2017 under the title *How to Be a Marxist in Philosophy*. The text provided a rare insight into the material role attributed to philosophy and, I think, verifies my interpretation of philosophy as having a material effect on society as long as the condition that interpellative relations change, obtains. Take, for example, the following quotation which I believe demonstrates that, certain conditions permitting, changes in the theoretical structure can enable a subject to play with interpellation and structurally subvert synchronic conditions of existence:

Yet the field in question is not that of philosophy *alone*. It is also... the field of the sciences and their practices and, as well, the field of the ideologies and their practice... *The adjustment which is carried out this way in philosophy and which results in the production of theses has repercussions on the ensemble of human practices*. If words mean anything, this means, at the limit, that the ensemble of human practices finds itself, more or less, if not adjusted, then at least adjustable by the theses of philosophy, if not directly (that is the exception), then at any rate indirectly (Althusser, 2017a: 44, emphasis in original).

This text is helpful for my purposes of trying to figure out the nature of agency within a non-essentialist theory of the subject and the social formation. On this rare occasion, Althusser explains that developments (or 'adjustments') in philosophy can have a real effect on other practices, one being ideological practices. By ideological practices Althusser means the practice or relation that is interpellation, the practice of constituting subjects. When taking into consideration Althusser's other

observations concerning the role of philosophy and, indeed, the very purpose of *On the Reproduction of Capitalism* as a practice of providing a stratagem for social change, it is clear to me that critical philosophy provides to the newly formed militant subject the tools to contest effectively the social formation to which they belong. The capacity of the newly formed subject to play with ideological practices, with material interpellative relations, is partly conditioned by those relations to begin with, but necessarily requires a philosophy providing the subject with a strategy for doing so. Althusser understands this philosophy to be Marxist philosophy, but clearly in the context of gender rather than class dynamics, it is developments in feminist philosophy which concern us. Feminist philosophy which is able to identify the various different ISAs constituting the overdetermined Gendered Subject, and the differing roles played by each of these ISAs in articulating the phallus patriarchal ideology is necessary for the subject to actively contest or 'adjust' those very ISAs. Indeed, that he describes philosophy's effect on interpellation as predominantly 'indirect' is precisely because philosophy itself does not directly affect change in the ISAs but, rather, it is philosophical developments motivating calculated 'plays' with interpellation which affects change.⁹⁶

The subject is then afforded a significant role in affecting change in the social formation to which they belong. The subject is said to have agency, that is to say, the subject can actively engage with the conditions of their existence in a critical way so as to contest and change those conditions. The subject can actively engage to change the familial, educational or cultural dynamics which constituted them, but, unlike the Butlerian model of subjectivity, the decision and capacity to do so relies on two conditions obtaining: already existing changes in the material interpellative relations (the ISAs) and sufficient philosophical developments. For Butler, the subject actively chooses to subvert gender norms by repeating subversive performances and identifies the subject as the originator of that decision. Here, however, it is the very conditions which will be subverted which condition the subject to subvert, by interpellating militant subjects as opposed to *Träger* and providing sufficient strategy to do so in the form of feminist philosophy. To designate the subject as the originator of their subversive practices is an essentialist conception of agency, whereas to designate the originator of subversion in the very conditions which will be subverted is to advocate a non-essentialist conception of agency.

⁹⁶ It is for precisely this reason, the absence of sufficient critical philosophy, that contestation of the cultural ISA through subversive satirical practices, namely, alternative fashion was ineffective. Althusser claims that this was fundamentally misguided, as the primary ISA constituting capitalist subjectivity was the educational rather than cultural ISA. The presence of an adequate critical philosophy, for him Structural Marxism, would have been able to disaggregate between the important and unimportant ISAs, and sufficient engagement could have been appropriately directed thereafter (Althusser, 2017a: 113-114).

To this end, we can see why Jørgensen and Phillips's criticism that Althusser invokes determinism is both true and not true. It is true to say that Althusser refuses to account for 'the possibilities for resistance against ideological messages that are presented to the subject – the question of the subject's *agency* and freedom of action' (Jørgensen and Phillips: 2008: 16). In a sense, this attempt at a criticism is correct: the subject is always an interpellated subject. Herculine never questions her interpellation. In another sense, this statement, and the implications of social stasis are incorrect. The subject cannot refuse interpellation *in general* but can refuse particular moments of interpellation, but this is because of material developments at the level of interpellation *in general*. For example, in the case of Heather, material developments both in the case of the family and the school allowed her to contest her father's hail. General structural developments precipitated specific moments of refusal, but this does not constitute evidence of the subject's general ability to refuse gender interpellation. In addition, the inability of the subject to resist interpellation does not yield social stasis. The subject exists in an impure social formation from the outset, a social formation which is itself overdetermined and characterised by material struggles. The subject is thus always an interpellated subject, determined by their social formation. Given, however, that the social formation which determines them is itself characterised by contradiction and contestation, this affords the subject agency to engage and fundamentally articulate that contradiction and contestation in their own praxis.

Herculine's adherence to the proscribed behaviours demanded by her interpellation as a man, despite how seismic a change they effect, was a symptom of the stability the social formation enjoyed at the time in which she existed. There were neither sufficient developments at the level of the material relations of interpellation, nor were there sufficient critical feminist philosophy. However, given all social formations are fundamentally impure social formations, we can conceptualise Herculine's misbehaviour as indicative of that contestation and conflict articulated in her subjectivity.

I have demonstrated how the Althusserian rather than Butlerian models of subjectivity and social contestation are born out of a reading of Herculine's memoirs which truly listen to what Herculine said, rather than impose a rigid framework from which Herculine can speak. Butler criticises Foucault's reading of the memoirs for enforcing this silence but clearly a Butlerian/performative reading achieves precisely the same outcome. Only an Althusserian reading adequately listens to Herculine's experiences and adequately acknowledges the pessimism, whilst retaining a degree of optimism in the notion that Herculine's adherence to predominant gender norms is never guaranteed, given that all social formations are social formations of contestation and struggle. That Herculine's anatomy was so problematic for binary gender and still her subjectivity was organised metonymically in relation to others around the phallus verifies the interpellative model of subjectivity. Furthermore, it is clear that

agency - the ability of the subject to actively engage with their conditions - exists but this is itself determined by the very conditions which the subject will choose to subvert. Finally, this satisfies the criteria for an adequate theory of gender and patriarchy outlined in my introduction. Firstly, Althusser's theory of ideology accounts for social change insofar as it renders subjects the effect of a contested social formation, a contestation they articulate and exacerbate in their subsequent actions. Secondly, Althusser's theory of interpellation and social reproduction equally accounts for agency but conceptualises agency within a non-essentialist framework. Finally, an Althusserian contribution to feminist thought avoids the problem of twiddling thumbs by attributing a real role to the subject, without ever affording agency beyond the social paradigms of its existence. As a result, it is clear that Althusser provides an adequate and truly non-essentialist theory of gender and patriarchy.

Conclusion

I want to begin this section by explaining that the purpose of my conclusion is twofold: in the first instance, it is a practice of summarising the argument above. In the second instance, it is a reiteration of the title of my thesis, namely that my thesis is an exercise *towards* a non-essentialist theory of patriarchy, and by extension I will give preliminary insights into where future research may lie. In keeping with the reflexive concerns outlined at the beginning of my thesis, I want to repeat *ad nauseam* that in no way do I offer a definitive account on the subject of non-essentialism and how we theorise patriarchal society. In ensuring my commitment to a feminist academic praxis based on dialogical rather than antagonistic political theorising, it is imperative I frame my contribution to feminist theory by what I have not said. To that end, less emphasis will be paid to summarising my argument above, where more attention will be paid to outlining the limitations of my research from which future contributions can be based.

In summarising the argument of my thesis, I have endeavoured to provide a truly non-essentialist theory of gender and the social reproduction of patriarchy. I have done this by utilising the ideas and oeuvre of Louis Althusser, a pioneer of Structural Marxism, to examine the social reproduction and contestation of patriarchal society. Louis Althusser was concerned with developing a non-essentialist understanding of capitalist society by exploring how capitalist subjects are constituted, through an innovative concept of the 'Ideological State Apparatus'. What I have done is explore the contributions Althusser made to developing a non-essentialist Marxism in the context of patriarchal, not capitalist relations. Insofar as my thesis is an endeavour of examining a non-essentialist theory of patriarchy, it is also a critical engagement with Judith Butler who sought to provide a non-essentialist theory of gender. I have demonstrated in my thesis that Butler's own project of performativity and citationality undermines her non-essentialist aspirations. Butler's theory of performativity and citationality offers a dynamic conception of gendered subjectivity which emphasises the role of agency in gender's reproduction and contestation. At the same time I have outlined important occasions within Butler's oeuvre where that focus on gender contestation, as important as it is to an adequate contribution to feminist theory, does not satisfy the non-essentialist mantra which motivates Butler in the first place.

Insofar as my thesis is a productive endeavour to provide a non-essentialist theory of gender and patriarchy, and is critical in its investigation of Butler, it is also a productive exercise of Althusserian theory. My thesis has only been made possible by the recent translation and publication of *On the Reproduction of Capital*, which offers Althusserian theorists opportunities to recognise and

conceptualise Althusser as a thinker of social contestation and not solely contestation. *On the Reproduction of Capital* brings together two previous concerns of Althusser's into one single analysis of capitalist society: a concern with social contestation and a concern with social stasis. *On the Reproduction of Capital* does this by way of developing certain concepts like the 'militant subject', 'state ideology' and 'social reproduction'. The first Althusser, one prior to his meeting theoretical engagement with Jacques Lacan in the mid-1960s, was the Althusser of *Politics and History*, *Machiavelli and Us* and *The Place of Psychoanalysis and Psychology*. In these texts and others, Althusser's primary concern was with theorising social contestation and developing a Marxism predicated on the belief that societies are inherently unstable, 'impure'. Here one would not doubt Althusser's commitment to understanding the fragility of any asymmetrically societal arrangements, a truly conflict theorist. The second Althusser, the one who emerges during and after his professional interaction starting in 1963 is an Althusser focused on understanding social reproduction. This is the Althusser of *Freud and Lacan*, *The Humanist Controversy* and of course, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*. Rather than focusing on the inherent instability of societies, Althusser's focus is redirected to understand the constitution of subjects within society and how, in their actions, they reproduce the conditions of their existence.

What *On the Reproduction of Capital* offers us is an Althusser who never subverted his earlier concerns with social contestation with an examination of social stasis. This translated text offers those interested in Althusser with a negation of the strict dichotomy of "two Althusser's", replaced by an Althusser whose analysis of subjectivity and social stasis was always framed by understanding how things could change. The concept of militant subject is an example of framing an understanding of subject constitution within the greater paradigms of social contestation. Read on its own, Althusser's theory of interpellation only explains why we are constituted in such a way as to reproduce the conditions of our existence. Read in the greater context of social contestation and society impurity, interpellation explains that we are constituted in such a way as to reproduce the *unstable* conditions of our existence. Militant subjectivity is precisely an example of these two Althusser's coming together, demonstrating clearly that Althusser was always engaged in a long term project of understanding how society can change whilst recognising the deterministic, socially constituted nature of subjectivity. *On the Reproduction of Capital* thereby demonstrated that the division of Althusser into a *before* and *after* Lacan is pedagogically convenient, but reminds us that Althusser was always a theorist of struggle.

Having outlined what I have said in my thesis, I now want to focus on the personally more important point of what *I have not said*. To return to my section on reflexivity at the beginning of my thesis, I

described desire to dance with, rather than write against Judith Butler. In finishing my thesis, our dance routine is by no means over. Butler and myself have many further steps and turns left. In other words, I am categorically not saying Butler's contribution to feminism is nullified. I have only explained why, from what I have read, Butler appears to undermine her project to develop a non-essentialist theory of gender. No doubt she would have myriad responses to this claim, but supposing for one moment I am correct, even under these circumstances, I would not want to silence Butler's contribution to a feminist theory of gender.

It is clear to me that firstly I have not remotely explored the relationship between performativity and interpellation enough. Performativity (and indeed citationality) may offer the subject an essentialist space to contend with their gender, as if there was a dissonance between one's consciousness and their subjectivity, but I have not said that such an insight offers nothing in understanding social contestation. Non-essentialism may try to explain that critical engagement with one's subjectivity as contingent on the interpellative structures around us, but it simultaneously runs the risk of reducing individually brave and sincere actions to mere inevitabilities. Equally I have said nothing to performativity's observation that gender is fluid and flexible, where interpellation falls short of such an insight. Performativity sees every action, every moment of citation as a moment of fragility. Butler's reduction of the level of constitution at the level of the constituted, namely actions of X constitute X, conflicts with the asymmetrical relationship between the ISAs which constitute and the subject who is constituted. At no point have I properly considered the reproductive (or dare I say performative) relationship between one's actions and the Authoritative Subject that constitutes. To take an example, Althusser emphasises the materiality of the Authoritative Subject manifest in the ISAs.⁹⁷ Yet, performativity demands we recognise that the Authoritative Subject's capacity to interpellate us is also in some way dependent on the actions of the constituted subject. That is not to say that it is the subjugated subject's fault that the interpellative dynamics exist. It is rather the simple observation that (to use Althusser's example) God does not exist without the Churches, paintings, literature and performative rituals.

In other words, I have said nothing substantial of the interrelationship between Butler and Althusser. Given the focus on non-essentialism and Althusser, I never intended to speak to this relationship in length but clearly future work in this area is warranted. To conclude on an antagonistic tone towards Butler would after all undermine my reflexive concerns not to repeat a trite approach to political theory. I have not said anything to the continued value of Butler's theory of performativity but it

⁹⁷ For example God does not exist separately from the churches, the literature, the painting and so on from which Christian subjects are interpellated.

strikes me that performativity and interpellation can complement one another in a way I have not explored in my thesis, and an exploration of the performative existence of the Authoritative Subject is an obvious place to start.

Turning finally to the other theoretical space *I have not* spoken to, I ask the reader to briefly recall my discussion of the value of essentialism, specifically strategic essentialism. I mentioned above how non-essentialism runs the risk of explaining away the brave and sincere moments of subversion as predetermined. I also explained at the beginning of my thesis that strategic essentialism utilises primary tenets of essentialism to explain contestation and subversion, whilst maintaining a non-essentialist ontology. My entire thesis has gone to lengths to emphasise that Althusser was *always* a theorist of social contestation, and by extension it strikes me the continued value of strategic essentialism can complement an Althusserian analysis of social change. To take an example, I have not spoken at all of strategic essentialism in the context of my analysis of *Mother Courage*. Althusser's analysis of *Mother Courage* reminds us that the philosophical and epistemological developments are necessary but not sufficient for an individual's capacity to subvert. Strategic Essentialism poses questions of what those developments look like, of what is required in order for say a woman to utilise the signifier for their purposes, and indeed poses questions of what that subversion looks like. I also do not want to suggest that Strategic Essentialism and Butler's performativity are mutually exclusive. To utilise the signifier for one's own purposes can clearly be conceived in performative terms as a moment of contestation in one's actions. Perhaps then the relationship between Althusser/Interpellation, Butler/performativity and Strategic Essentialism invites further research.

I am not sure at this point what further research into the interrelationships between interpellation, performativity and strategic essentialism looks like, but it is clear to me that such an endeavour would emulate the theoretical endeavours of Christina Scharff. In her paper *Towards a Pluralist Methodological Approach: Combining Performativity Theory, Discursive Psychology and Theories of Affect* (2011) and book *Repudiating Feminism* (2016) Scharff develops a theory of analysing discourses by way of employing three originally distinct schools of thought; Butler/Performativity, Ahmed/Affect Theory and Wetherell/Discursive Psychology. At first glance, Butler's theory of performativity and Ahmed's theory of the Affect struggle to facilitate any psychological concepts which assume a space beyond the strictly corporeal. That said we cannot deny that when employing these three distinct theoretical approaches, Scharff's assessment of women's engagement with feminism is both exciting and convincing. Scharff offers an imaginative approach which seeks to draw on other theoretical approaches rather than treat them as exclusive factions antithetical to one another. By extension,

Scharff encapsulates precisely what I aspire to when I claim I not only want to write a thesis on feminism, but write a *feminist* thesis on feminism.

In keeping with the title of the order of my thesis, I have developed a non-essentialist theory of gender and the social reproduction by way of exploring Louis Althusser's oeuvre. My endeavours are however *towards* a non-essentialist theory of gender and patriarchy, I have not by any means settled accounts. In continuing my overall intellectual project of exploring non-essentialist feminist theory, I hope to emulate Scharff's inclusive approach which is both dedicated to feminism in theory and in academic practice.

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Appendix

Table 1:

Before Lacan	Althusser's Correspondence with Lacan begins 1963	After Lacan	
Montesquieu Politics and History (1959)		Psychoanalysis and Psychology (1963-64)	Marx's Relation to Hegel (1968)
Machiavelli and Us (1962)		Freud and Lacan (1964)	For Marx (1966)
The Place of Psychoanalysis in the Human Sciences' and 'Psychoanalysis and Psychology' (1963)		Reading Capital (1965)	On the Reproduction of Capital (1969/70)
		Three Notes on the Theory of Discourse (1966a)	Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (1970)
		Letters to D (1966b)	Reply to John Lewis (1973)
		Philosophical Conjuncture & Marxist Research (1966c)	The Future Lasts Forever (1992)
		Cremonini, Painter of the Abstract (1966d)	
		The Humanist Controversy (1967)	

Table 2:

Title	First Published In French	First Published in English
Montesquieu Politics and History	1959	1972
Reading Capital	1965	1970
Cremonini, Painter of the Abstract	1966	1971
For Marx	1966	1969
Marx's Relation to Hegel	1970	1971
Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses	1970	1971
Reply to John Lewis	1973	1976
The Future Lasts Forever	1990	1993
Freud and Lacan	1993	1996
Letters to D	1993	1996
Machiavelli and Us	1995	1999
Three Notes on the Theory of Discourse	1995	2003
Philosophical Conjuncture & Marxist Research	1995	2003
The Humanist Controversy	1995	2003
On the Reproduction of Capital	1995	2014
The Place of Psychoanalysis in the Human Sciences' and 'Psychoanalysis and Psychology'	1996	2016