

Exploring Interpellative Encounters in “The Hitchhiking Game” by Milan Kundera

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Pascal says more or less:

“Kneel down, move your lips

in prayer,

and you will believe.”

(Althusser 1971, 168)

Abstract

The objective of this paper is to examine “The Hitchhiking Game” through Louis Althusser’s concept of interpellation. Althusser’s view of ideology and its role in subject formation is mediated by interpellation which was inspired by Lacan’s psychoanalysis. An integral part of Lacan’s account of subjectivity is the mirror stage embedded in the Imaginary Order. Althusser’s conception of ideology and interpellation is analogous to Lacan’s the mirror stage, in which the child, confronted with their reflection, misrecognizes it as themselves, forming a preliminary sense of identity. Based on this formulation, this study seeks to argue that the two main characters of this story perform actions and make decisions as a result of interpellative practices that have begun to shape their subjectivities positioning them in a particular relationship with their self-identity and others. Thus, in the analysis of “The Hitchhiking Game”, interpellation represented by four instances of interpellative encounters will be used as the theoretical framework to explain the changing attitudes and perceptions of the characters. The point is to show how interpellative addresses form and sustain a specific mode of subjectivity. Additionally, by examining characters’ interactions in light of interpellation the paper will address the material aspect of ideological interpellation, a point which distinguishes Althusser’s definition of ideology from its traditional conception as a system of false beliefs. This aspect of Althusser will be discussed in the concluding section and in connection with the question of gender and corporeality.

Keywords: interpellation, the Imaginary Order, ideology, subjectivity, corporeality

Introduction

“The Hitchhiking Game” is part of a collection of short stories published under the title of *Laughable Loves* (1999). The collection can be taken “as the aesthetic prototype for” his more notable works including *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* and to some extent *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (Carroll 2003, 93). Though not completely a typical Kunderian work, “The Hitchhiking Game” contains some of the recurring themes which are commonly found in Kundera’s fiction, namely, the search for love, the absurdity of existence as well as the question of identity. This paper as the quote from Pascal suggests, is concerned with the effect of the imagined or ‘the imaginary’ on the real which is an idea raised in the story. Kundera has always been interested in undermining dualities in his fiction or as Roger Kimball puts it, “By self-consciously warping the border between fact and fiction, Kundera’s work manifests a characteristically modernist preoccupation with the relation between art and truth, between art and reality” (Kimball 1999, 204). If Kundera’s preoccupation with the connection between these categories qualifies him as a modernist writer, his tendency to question and problematize such binary oppositions will certainly place him in the postmodern camp.¹ Considering postmodernist fiction as the embodiment of poststructuralism in its cultural and literary forms, we can argue that Kundera’s oeuvre can be an interesting domain for probing instances of problematization that pertain to identity, truth, and reality. One of the unique aspects of “The Hitchhiking Game” is the way it problematizes and tampers with such notions that have had the privilege of being treated as permanent, immutable and stable. By calling attention to the precarity and constructedness of these concepts, “The Hitchhiking Game” serves as a reminder of how binary oppositional relationships

¹ For an interesting discussion on modernist/postmodernist features of Kundera’s works, see David Lodge’s “Milan Kundera, and the Idea of the Author in Modern Criticism” and “Milan Kundera: The Search for Self in a Post-Modern World” by Vicki Adams.

can be destabilized. The story also demonstrates how our conception of identity, and reality is inextricably bound to sociohistorical determinants. In other words, neither reality nor identity nor subjectivity can be conceptualized as universal and timeless but rather as socially, culturally and historically determined. Having said this, the objective of this paper is to examine the changes in the attitude and behavior of the story's protagonists toward each other, in light of the theory of subject-formation introduced by Louis Althusser, which is premised on the key concept of 'interpellation'. Accordingly, the paper will zoom in on four scenes that include interactions between characters to demonstrate how these encounters amount to interpellative moments that are conducive to the formation of a specific subjectivity. Althusser's theory of subjectivity, which hinges upon 'interpellation', offers a useful tool because it includes psychosocial dynamics inspired by a Lacanian model of subject-formation.

Before I proceed any further, I will present an overview of critical studies on "The Hitchhiking Game". The theoretical framework will be explained thereafter, followed by the argument and conclusion.

Literature Review

In *The Book of Imitation and Desire*, Trevor Cribben Merrill argues that in Kundera's fiction "we desire primarily what others already desire, or what they appear to desire" (Merrill 2013, 2). Merrill's claim is based on the triangulation of desire, a theory proposed by René Girard who argues "that our desires are influenced by what others desire. In other words, they are derivative, mediated, imitative" (Merrill 2013, 3). This is an interesting observation because in "The Hitchhiking Game" characters' desires are enmeshed in "the reciprocal dimension of mimesis . . . that obliges each of them to react and to respond according to the other's desire" while at the same time the "mirage of desire" urges the players to wear a mask (Merrill 2013, 86). For Merrill,

characters' attitudes and perceptions are motivated by the mimetic desire that materializes in terms of the "endorsement of an admired third party" that has nothing to do with the "innate qualities" of the object of desire nor with the preferences of the desiring subject (Merrill 2013, 3). While Merrill's study focuses on the triangulation of desire where the characters envision themselves in a triadic relationship consisting of the girl, the boy and the phantom presence of a rival, another critic, Krzysztof Olechnicki, takes a broader view of "The Hitchhiking Game" by applying a sociological analysis to it. In his study, Olechnicki considers the three conceptions of identity including social identity, personal identity and self identity to explore their relevance to this story (Olechnicki 1996, 114). For Olechnicki, the relationship between the young man and the girl, on the one hand, and the driver and the hitchhiker, on the other, can be studied in terms of personal identity and social identity, respectively. The conflict arises when "the alternation of roles transported the centre of gravity of their interaction from personal identity to social identity" (Olechnicki 1996, 114). Such a transportation results in the confusion of role and identity which can be "extremely dangerous for the coherence of human relationships" because it "destroyed interaction, and most importantly, made identity uncertain" (Olechnicki 1996, 115) bringing about shame and humiliation at end of the story.

While Merrill's interpretation of "The Hitchhiking Game" based on the Girardian theory of imitative desire, and Olechnicki's focus on the permeability of the boundary between identity and role each deal with different binary oppositions in this story, Elisabeth Snyman and Elsa Crous explore the pairing of mimicry and chance from the perspective of game theory. According to these critics, the story revolves around a game of mimicry while the characters are unaware of the aleatory nature of their game. Thus, players are placed in a precarious position because both games of mimicry and chance are permutable: "Games of chance are perverted when players'

superstitions or self-delusions get the upper hand, so that it is no longer just a question of having luck on your side” whereas games of mimicry or “pretence spiral out of control when players can no longer distinguish between make-believe and reality” (Snyman and Crous 2014, 32). According to Snyman and Crous, because the plot of this story is driven by chance and mimicry (as two components of their role-playing game), the ending can be ambivalent and indeterminate. At any rate, they conclude that the girl’s indulgence in a game about which she “has no particular goal in mind, and revels in the to-and-fro motion of the exchanges between her and the young man” can result in her empowerment but at the cost of destroying “a much-valued relationship” (Snyman and Crous 2014, 41).

The critical overview discussed above sought to present different approaches to the analysis of “The Hitchhiking Game”. All these three critical works on this story are in a way concerned with the question of identity and self either in terms of desire (cf. Merrill), or the confusion of social and personal identities (cf. Olechnicki) or the conflictual relationship between chance and role-playing (cf. Snyman and Crous). The adoption of an Althusserian approach seeks to complement these critical perspectives by concentrating more on the manner in which change is realized in characters’ subjectivity and self-perception.

Theoretical Framework: Interpellation and Subjectivity

Althusser can be credited with a groundbreaking conception of subjectivity and ideology that links Lacanian psychoanalysis to political thought. A key notion in this equation is ‘interpellation’ or ‘hailing’ which was introduced as a manipulative strategy in the toolbox of ideology. According to Althusser, subjectivity is formed and influenced by interpellative practices that are embedded in ideological structures. By arguing that ideology has a material reality that places individuals in an imaginary relationship with the real conditions of their existence, Althusser

allows for a more inclusive formulation of subject-formation through external determinants. This is where Althusser's theory of interpellation becomes relevant to the analysis of "The Hitchhiking Game" as this paper intends to demonstrate how characters' exposure to interpellative encounters has a determining influence on their actions and behaviors.

In his seminal essay, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," Althusser modifies the traditional conception of ideology proposed by Marx. According to Althusser, Marx defines ideology "as a pure illusion, a pure dream, i.e. as nothingness. All its reality is external to it. Ideology is thus thought as an imaginary construction whose status is like the dream among writers before Freud" (Althusser 1971, 159). Althusser draws two important conclusions from this Marxian characterization of ideology: first, "ideology is nothing in so far as it is a dream"; second, ideology "has no history of its own" (Althusser 1971, 160).

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Unlike Marx, Althusser does not believe in ideology but in ideologies. For him, "ideologies have a history of their own," while ideology in general has no history ... in an absolutely positive sense" (Althusser 1971, 160-161). In a way, Althusser's idea of ideology is comparable to the Freudian concept of the unconscious because "ideology is eternal, exactly like the unconscious" implying that it is "omnipresent trans-historical and therefore immutable in form throughout history" (Althusser 1971, 161). Having said this, Althusser proceeds to define ideology as "a Representation of the Imaginary Relationship of Individuals to their Real Conditions of Existence" (Althusser 1971, 162). Based on this definition, ideology is not concerned with men representing their real conditions of existence to themselves in an imaginary form but with the representation of their relations to these conditions. Althusser places considerable emphasis on this imaginary relationship because "it is the imaginary nature of this relation that underlies all the imaginary distortion that we can observe ... in all ideology" (Althusser 1971, 164).

For Althusser, ideology has a material existence that involves actions and practices. These practices cause individuals to perform actions or observe rituals on the basis of their consciousness, which inspires them to act in accordance with their ideas. Put differently, the ideas of a subject's beliefs have a material existence because "his ideas are his material actions inserted into material practices governed by material rituals which are themselves defined by the material ideological apparatus from which derive the ideas of that subject" (Althusser 1971, 169). The corollary of this argument is that "ideology interpellates individuals as subjects" (Althusser 1971, 170). In other words, there is a reciprocity between subject-formation and ideological functioning as "the category of the subject is constitutive of ideology, which only exists by constituting concrete subjects as subjects" (Althusser 1971, 173). The important function of ideology is to enable the passage from individuality to subjectivity via interpellation. But what is exactly interpellation? Interpellation or hailing implies the sense of being singled out through an address or a call which an individual recognizes as being exclusively directed to them. According to Althusser,

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 1971,174)

The address is similar to an indiscriminate call in the street when someone shouts 'Hey, you!'. Out of all the people on the street I turn back as if I believe it is I who is meant to acknowledge this call. The call that I recognize as addressed to me is indeed ideology which transforms me into a subject as I consider it as mine. Therefore, any interpellation requires a recognition of oneself mediated or brought about by an external address.

For Althusser, subjectivity is predicated on an acknowledgment through which one recognizes oneself via an external element or entity, involving the recognition of one's reflection,

similar to what happens in a mirror. This specular (mis)recognition is a notion that Althusser borrowed from Lacan. According to Lacan, we are involved in an ongoing process of (mis)identification that dates back to our first encounter with our specular image in the mirror stage. In the mirror stage, the infant contemplates its image in a specular reflection in the imaginary order that evokes a nascent feeling of selfhood:

It suffices to understand the mirror stage in this context as an identification, in the full sense analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes [assume] an image—an image that is seemingly predestined to have an effect at this phase, as witnessed by the use in analytic theory of antiquity's term, 'imago'. (Lacan 2006, 76)

The contemplation of our image in the mirror leads to a nascent feeling of selfhood that is, in fact, erroneous and misconceived. The image that we contemplate in the mirror is not us, but we tend to identify with it. Identification with the reflected image is indeed a misrecognition which serves as a lynchpin in Lacan's and Althusser's account of subject-formation. The reason is that misrecognition has "a transformative power" paving the way for the "process whereby subjectivity is assumed in language, within the Symbolic Order" (Moriarty 1994, 240). Once past the Imaginary Order we do not stop aligning ourselves with the not-self to shape our subjectivity. This is a continuous process spanning our entire lives. For Althusser, the specular relationship has reciprocal effects because "this mirror duplication is constitutive of ideology and ensures its functioning" (Althusser 1971, 180).

For Lacan, as Donald Hall maintains, "the concept of the 'mirror stage' points to the continuing human desire for self-sufficiency and agency that is always dialectically bound with, and undercut by, feelings of powerlessness and fragmentation" (Hall 2004, 80). The subject is thus caught between the allusion-illusion dynamics, because "ideology . . . allows [the subject] to 'recognize' themselves in their world, . . .but at the same time, ideology only introduces them to

its misrecognition” (Althusser, qtd. in Ferretter 2006, 79). The subject’s relationship to the real is thus summed up as ‘allusion-illusion’ or ‘recognition-misrecognition’. At any rate, it is the lure of the Ideal Ego invoked in ideological interpellation and the specular image that instigate and sustain subjectivity as it evokes a sense of unity and autonomy in the individual. The Ideal Ego or the idealized ego is the other with which the subject tends to identify because the very act of identification imparts to the subject a sense of unity and security. In this way the subject’s desire is brought into being in accordance to an external illusory entity. The question that can be asked is whether subject’s desires are constitutionally determined or defined in relation to the desire of the other. Put differently, considering the process of subject-formation which is contingent upon the internalization of an external provocation, subject’s desires and wishes can be an evocation stemming from a false or fictitious representation of a need. What the subject desires is in fact an introjection of others’ desires which means that the subject can never understand what it truly wishes or wants to have, but is rather strung along by an illusion that it takes to be the reality of its desire.

For Lacan, as Amerongen explains, “the infant not only desires recognition but constitutes its desire in a dialectical relationship in which the child is also the mother’s desire” which means that desire is “a social product” deriving from “the desire of another. The infant becomes what the mother desires it to be” (Amerongen 1980, 81). This structure of relationship also applies to ideology and subject. According to Ferretter, misrecognition “retains the connotation of desire that it has in Lacan’s psychoanalysis” meaning that “in misrepresenting or ‘misrecognizing’ historical reality, ideology expresses a wish or a desire” (Ferretter 2006, 79). Thus, it is in desire that hope or want intersect: “Althusser’s view, ideology misrepresents reality because people want it to do so” (Ferretter 2006, 79). In other words, the need to identify arises from a sense of inadequacy and

incoherence which is rectified by ideology in Althusser's view and in Lacan's by language. Similarly, Amerongen argues that "Ideology, like language, covers up the individual's confusion about his self and locates the fragmented and contradictory subject in a position of pseudo-coherence and responsibility for his own actions" (Amerongen 1980, 83).

Language is therefore indispensable to the study of ideological interpellations. Referring to the interpellative address, Judith Butler argues that "the subordination of the subject takes place through language, as the effect of the authoritative voice that hails the individual" (Butler 1997, 5). Amerongen similarly argues that ideology and language work together to create self-consciousness while "at the same time" ideology "reinforces the imaginary nature of the ego, reproducing the phantasmagoric relationship" that is centered on "the social system as a whole" (Amerongen 1980, 83). Language functions in collusion with ideology to constitute subjectivity, a fact supported by Lacan, who argues that the child's passage from the Imaginary to the Symbolic Order presupposes the mastery of language. In a way, as Ferretter explains, the Symbolic Order is analogous to ideology from an Althusserian perspective because without them society cannot function and they "determine the subjectivity of the developing individual" (Ferretter 2006, 136).

In the following sections, relying on the theoretical framework provided by Althusser underpinned by Lacanian psychoanalysis, I intend to account for the changing perceptions of the characters with respect to each other and their self-knowledge.

Discussion: Interpellative Encounters in "The Hitchhiking Game"

In this section I aim to focus on instances of interpellative encounters in order to demonstrate their significance in subject formation. As will be discussed, interpellative encounters are more auditory in nature than visual, a point that has also been raised by Butler. According to

Butler, interpellation is “a visual rendering of an auditory scene—a mirror stage or, perhaps more appropriately, an ‘acoustic mirror’ (Butler 1997, 112). ‘Acoustic mirror’ is an apt term regarding “The Hitchhiking Game” because, except for the first interpellative encounter, the girl responds to auditory stimuli that contribute to an emerging sense of subjectivity. Having said this, the purpose here is to analyze the pivotal interpellative moments in the story in light of both visual and acoustic mirrors.

The first interpellative encounter occurs at the moment when the girl pretends to be a hitchhiker standing by the road, thumbing for a ride. This is a gesture that positions the young man and the girl in a different paradigmatic relationship. When the car comes to a halt, the young man leans in close to the window, and, like a stranger behind the wheel, asks about the hitchhiker’s destination. This moment marks the inception of their role-playing game. Before this moment, we are told that the girl has been bashful about her body, lacking confidence compared to other women: “She often longed to feel free and easy about her body, the way most of the women around her did” (Kundera 1999, 81). The fact that she can slip into a persona becoming a seductress without any inhibition is tantamount to creating an alternative reality which is centered on an idealized image. The function of this ideal-I or ‘imago’ “is to establish a relationship between an organism and its reality—or, as they say, between the *Innenwelt* [inner-world] and the *Umwelt* [outer-world]” (Lacan 2006, 78).

As the girl-cum-hitchhiker gets into the car, she metaphorically leaves behind her older self, marking a moment of transformation for both the girl and the young man. After the initial interpellative encounter, their relationship constitutes a specular situation, generating a dialectic of reinforcement. This dialectic of reinforcement determines the girl’s actions, which in turn compels the young man to adhere to his role defined in advance by the first interpellative encounter. The

problem arises when doubts begin to creep into their minds as they entertain second thoughts about the reality and veracity of their role-playing. In other words, the imaginary becomes so real that it first overshadows and then supersedes it. What initially seemed to be a dissimulation soon spirals out of control, approximating a simulation. To the young man, the girl is first a paragon of innocence and purity. Semiotically speaking, she is a sign in harmony with her meaning. The obfuscation of meaning occurs when this sign no longer abides by its perceived meaning. This is initially accepted within the dynamics of the game. However, the more the sign diverges from its intended meaning, the more the young man is confronted by a simulated situation. Simulation, according to Baudrillard marks “the transition from signs which dissimulate something to signs which dissimulate that there is nothing” (Baudrillard 1988, 170). The “nothing” is the certainty regarding the nonexistence of innocence and purity that at the beginning of the story were attributed to the girl.

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What supports this sense of certainty is simply the fact that role-playing comes so naturally to both of them, especially to the girl; a fact that aids in blurring the distinction between identity and role-playing. From an Althusserian perspective, the girl adopts an imaginary relationship toward the reality of herself and her connection with the young man. She readily assumes her new role because her transformation is supported by the recognition bestowed upon her by the young man, which solidifies her position as a hitchhiker. The warm cocoon of reciprocity created in the cramped space of the car, at first, proves reassuring to both of them. From a Lacanian perspective, being summoned as a hitchhiker and subsequently endorsed in this role by the young man is comparable to the child’s misrecognition or misperception of itself in the mirror. The child easily relates to its specular reflection because it has a reassuring influence. This is why the girl feels so comfortable with her role as a hitchhiker. The unity and harmony that come with this role are

comparable to the image reflected to the child by the mirror, which leads the child/girl to readily identify with it. In the child's case, the specular image, the not-self, is accepted because of its transformative power and reassuring effects that contradict the helplessness and disharmony felt by the child. This can explain why the girl so easily takes to her role as a hitchhiker. In the case of the girl, being recognized as a hitchhiker is equivalent to the idealized image that belies the girl's lack of confidence in her sexual self-concept. However, there are unforeseen ramifications to this specular misidentification. The girl's effortless adoption of the new persona makes the young man wonder whether the girl is not role-playing but revealing her true self that has been unveiled through the game. These thoughts torment the young man as he begins to suspect the truth about her.

The role adopted by the girl is also bolstered by an inner desire to live an alternative self, while what facilitates this process is her familiarity with such roles, which have been widely available in "trashy literature" (Kundera 1999, 88). It is important to note that specular recognition ensures the continuation of the game because their role-playing is grounded in reciprocity. Interestingly, once removed from the force field of the game, the young man and the girl revert to their older selves: "out of the car," the young man "was, of course, himself again" (Kundera 1999, 91), and "the girl, when she found herself alone, also threw off her role" (Kundera 1999, 92).

The degree to which the young man and the girl seek to adjust their newly formed subjectivities *vis-à-vis* each other speaks volumes about the interdependency of their role-playing. Though on a larger social level their subjectivities have already been shaped, the cramped space of the car, sealed off from outside influences, enables the birth and development of alternative subjectivities. While the older selves are not completely erased or obliterated, they are overlaid with newer ones. This is what the young man, to his dismay, observes:

He looked at her and tried to discover behind her lascivious expression the familiar features that he loved tenderly. It was as if he were looking at two images through the same lens, at two images superimposed one on the other with one showing through the other. These two images showing through each other were telling him that everything was in the girl, that her soul was terrifyingly amorphous, that it held faithfulness and unfaithfulness, treachery and innocence, flirtatiousness, and chastity. . . . Both images continued to show through each other, and the young man understood that the girl differed from on the surface from other women, but deep down was the same as they. . . It seemed to him that the girl he loved was a creation of his desire, his thoughts, and his faith and that the *real* girl now standing in front of him was hopelessly *other*, hopelessly *alien*, hopelessly *polymorphous*. He hated her. (Kundera 1999, 99-100; emphasis in original)

The young man's confusion and frustration stem from his inability to pin down the meaning of the girl. As Merrill argues, there are not two people but three individuals engaged in the game: "there is the boyfriend, the pretty hitchhiker, and the girlfriend" (Merrill 2013, 84). Merrill interprets this as a triangulation brought about by imitative desire, meaning that, as far as the girl is concerned, "she simultaneously plays the roles of imitator and model" (Merrill 2013, 85). At this point, the girl, taken as a sign, no longer represents the unity of the signified (purity and innocence) with its signifier (chastity and modesty). The conflation of the image of the hitchhiker and her own self is not something that happens instantaneously. It is a gradual loss of faith in his appraisal of reality and his knowledge of the girl.

From the start of the game, there is a continual and persistent undermining of the sense of reality as the young man and the girl transition from the car to the restaurant and then to the room. The three spaces each chip away at the young man's earlier judgment and knowledge of the girl, making him readjust his conduct in accordance with his impression of her. For example, in the restaurant, when sitting face-to-face with her, he realizes that "it wasn't just the *words* that were turning her into a stranger, but that she had *completely* changed—the movements of her body and her facial expression—and that she unpalatably and faithfully resembled a type of woman he knew all too well and inspired some aversion in him" (Kundera 1999, 93; emphasis in original). All these

transformations originate from the first interpellative encounter, which placed the young man and the girl in a different mode of interaction prompting a new sense of subjectivity.

The next interpellative experience happens in the restaurant. Through her newly gained confidence, the girl can shamelessly be sexually provocative under the guise of the anonymous hitchhiker, which is noticed not only by the young man but also by other men present in the restaurant. When she walks by a table to go to the restroom, a man “addresses her in French: ‘Combien, mademoiselle [How much miss]?’” (Kundera 1999, 97), blatantly propositioning her. The girl’s reaction to this comment is noteworthy: “she thrust out her breasts and fully experienced every movement of her hips” (Kundera 1999, 97). Thus, the call from the man prompted the girl to respond accordingly. The girl is obviously comfortable in her new role, which from the young man’s perspective is now her only true identity—a quality that is revealing itself. This is why the young man is increasingly convinced that she is not role playing but truly being herself:

Wasn’t she becoming herself only through the game? Wasn’t she freeing herself through the game? No, sitting opposite him was not a strange woman in his girl’s body; it was his girl, herself, no one else. He looked at her and felt growing aversion toward her. (Kundera 1999, 93)

Acting this way, the girl risks being misinterpreted, as there is always the danger of being judged through interpretive frameworks influenced by toxic masculinity. Filled with hatred, the young man begins exhibiting misogyny and a desire for verbal and physical violence. Enraged by the girl’s shameless disregard for decency and modesty, he cannot contain his contempt for her. To him, she is a whore, a mere object of desire who can be treated with violence and disrespect. According to Merrill, this metamorphosis is caused by the imitative desire that acts on its own (Merrill 2013, 85). However, I want to argue that the imitative desire works in tandem with interpellation, as the story demonstrates.

Having finished their dinner, they head for their room. While climbing the stairs the young man grabs the girl's breast, a gesture that does not go unnoticed by some "intoxicated men" (Kundera 1999, 100). The girl tries to free herself but the young man yells at her to "Keep still!" (Kundera 1999, 100). Seeing this, the men react to the young man's obscene move "with general ribaldry" and address "several dirty remarks to the girl" (Kundera 1999, 100). The men's call constitutes another instance of interpellation that bolsters the young man's misogyny and urge for violent domination. Despite the fact that the yelling and remarks are meant for the girl, they serve to further (en)gender their subjectivities by creating a camaraderie among men at the expense of the girl. The call, as a result, emboldens the young man to maintain his façade of virility and machismo while reducing the girl to a mere object of gratification.

The final part of the story coincides with the culmination of interpellation as a subjectivizing/objectifying process. The young man, following his already-shaped identity, orders the girl to strip naked and dance. Again, the command places the girl in a specific gender-oriented role based on which she is expected to behave in a certain way. The hitchhiker-cum-whore, whose layers of identity are peeled away through a degrading process of undressing, is now nothing but a body to gratify the intensely aroused erotic desires of the young man. As demonstrated so far, throughout the story, the girl has been required to align herself with an image reflected by a visual/acoustic mirror. As a coy mistress, she exudes charm and modesty, while as a brazen hitchhiker, she flirts tantalizingly. Ultimately, as a slutty seductress, she is expected to act provocatively. Through these encounters, she has adopted identities that have been necessitated by interpellative addresses, and by responding to them, she unwittingly positions herself in specific semantic and social relationships.

When the girl starts to strip naked, she assumes that the game will be over because “since she had stripped off her clothes, she had also stripped away her dissimulation and that being naked meant that she was now herself” (Kundera 1999, 103). For the girl, the whole game of role-playing was dissimulation while for the young man it was the contrary. Confronted with this new reality, the young man falls back on “the ideas he had about” whores that “came from literature and hearsay” (Kundera 1999, 103). Once more the young man reacts by resorting to an image he has received from outside. Though not completely a specular one, it helps the young man to adjust his conduct accordingly. He acts like a “vulgar and lascivious” man who uses “words she has never heard from him before” (Kundera 1999, 104). At this point, the game has reached a critical phase, where the girl has no right to speak. She must be as compliant and submissive as possible. Once she addresses the young man “by his first name,” she is harshly forbidden from “address[ing] him so intimately” (Kundera 1999, 104). Just as the girl is reduced to her body, and thus brutally dehumanized, she is denied the right to interact on equal terms with the young man.

Reduced to a mere object of sexual pleasure, the girl’s body is subjected to a mortifying examination: “He wanted to see her body in all positions and from all sides, as he imagined other men had seen it and would see it” (Kundera 1999, 105). Here the young man identifies himself with other men wanting to follow suit. His reductive gaze is devoid of any appreciation which only serves to intensify his urge to penetrate her. After the violent intercourse, which is totally lacking in emotional reciprocity, the girl facing the young man’s disdainful indifference, breaks into sobs, calling the young man’s name and repeating pitifully “I’m me, I’m me, I’m me” (Kundera 1999, 106). By reiterating that “I’m me,” the girl desperately attempts to gain a modicum of recognition; for having been thus objectified, she is emptied out of any substance, indicating “her uncertain hold on her identity” (Salmon 1999, 72).

At this juncture, stripped of respect and worth, the girl is nothing but a hollow shell. The intersection of language and interpellative address becomes noticeably clear at this point in the story. It is no coincidence that the girl's faltering speech occurs with the dissolution of her subjectivity. Unlike the Imaginary Order where the child, through the mirror stage, (mis)identifies herself with the specular image and receives a rudimentary sense of subjectivity, here, the girl faces a blank wall where no reassuring reflection can grant her any sense of subjectivity.

The girl's wish to liberate herself from the restrictive self-consciousness about her body and to achieve greater desirability ends ironically in her loss of self-image. Through the interpellative encounters that shaped the girl as a sexual subject/object, she sought to enhance her sexual self-concept. In other words, her sexual subjectivity, which was initially underdeveloped, thrived considerably through the role-playing game and the concomitant interpellative addresses. However, the girl's heady sense of self-confidence resulting from her enhanced sexual self-reflection proved tragically ineffective and destructive. The reason is that her very entry into the game was motivated by a misguided perception of desirability predicated on faulty generalizations. The girl generalized a sense of desirability without considering the individual preferences or exceptions that might otherwise exist.

Conclusion: (En)gendering Subjectivity, Interpellation and Corporeality

Althusser's formulation of ideology is fundamentally different from earlier theories of ideology that used to view it primarily as an abstraction or a set of false beliefs. The hallmark of Althusser's definition of ideology is his conception of it as a material existence. By emphasizing the materiality of ideology, Althusser argues that ideas and beliefs are formed through material practices. He thus redefines ideology as a concrete reality that operates through interpellation on a mundane, daily, and even corporeal level. According to Althusser,

The existence of the ideas of [an individual's] belief is material in *that his ideas are his material actions inserted into material practices governed by material rituals which are themselves defined by the material ideological apparatus from which derive the ideas of that subject*. (Althusser 1971, 169; emphasis in original)

Commenting on the *modus operandi* of ideology, Elizabeth Wingrove in "Interpellating Sex" believes that the quotation above can be broken down into ways ideology can be discussed: "as a physical motion (bodily action), as a patterned series of actions (practice), as the coordination of multiple practices (ritual), and as an established matrix of intersecting and overlapping rituals (apparatus)" (Wingrove 1999, 876-877). All of these dimensions are distinctly present in the story. For instance, bodily actions are an integral part of the story, including the moment the girl gets a free ride in the young man's car, to her sensual strut to the bathroom in the hotel and performing a striptease in the room. As for next dimension, the entire action of picking up the girl demands following a preestablished set of practices and rituals that materialize in terms of predefined roles. The young man's role is to "play the tough guy who treats women to the coarser aspects of his masculinity: willfulness, sarcasm, self-assurance" (Kundera 1999, 87). The assignment of roles is reciprocally determined: they originate in the first interpellative encounter between the driver and the hitchhiker. As for the girl's role, "[i]t was a role out of trashy literature. The hitchhiker stopped the car not to get a ride, but to seduce the man who was driving. She was an artful seductress, cleverly knowing how to use her charms" (Kundera 1999, 88).

Bodily actions, practices, and rituals constitute a combinatory system that amounts to an apparatus: a network of overlapping rituals which, in the case of this story, are informed by specific gendered performativity. In fact, the players of the game feel compelled to ritualistically fulfill the roles assigned to them as they commence the game, which interferes with the primary plan of their trip. What was supposed to be an opportunity to enjoy a long-awaited holiday is aborted by the intrusion of the game, as the girl's repulsively flirtatious behavior motivates the young man to

deviate from the itinerary. The young man decides to act impulsively because he has always wanted to free himself from the compulsion of pursuing regimented routines. The desire for “lightheartedness” (Kundera 1999, 88) makes the young man go to a different destination that has literal and figurative significances:

The sportscar was moving away not only from the imaginary goal of Bystricia, but also from the real goal, toward which it had been heading in the morning: the Tatras and the room that had been reserved. Fiction was suddenly making an assault on real life. (Kundera 1999, 90)

As implied above, interpellation as a representation of the materiality of ideological practices resonates strongly with gender studies, where sexual interpellation is often discussed in terms of the power differentials involved. Patriarchal and masculine notions of sexuality act as ideological tools because they shape our perceptions and assumptions about ourselves and others. In this story, both main characters are subjected to these assumptions as they try, in Butlerian terms, to align their gender performativity with a certain sexual identity comprising anticipations, repetitions, rituals and bodies (Butler 2006, xv).²

Finally, the story’s conclusion highlights both the corporeal and linguistic aspects of interpellation. The reduction of the girl to her corporeality and the breakdown of language are not, therefore, coincidental. Insofar as the girl’s body is discursively constructed, it is plausible to equate ideological materiality with the specific corporeality that is emphasized at the story’s end. It is also interesting to note how the characters’ trajectory of interactions starts from idealistic perceptions and culminates in corporeal dynamics. Mapping Wingrove’s “four ways” (1999, 876)

² In *Gender Trouble*, Butler argues that performativity entails “the anticipation of an authoritative disclosure of meaning” through which “that authority is attributed and installed: the anticipation conjures its object” (2006, xv). For Butler, performing gender is also the fulfillment of a similar expectation “that ends up producing the very phenomenon that it anticipates” (2006, xv). So, beside the dynamics of anticipation/expectation gender performativity involves “a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body” (2006, xv).

according to which interpellation works involving bodily actions, practices, rituals, and apparatuses, onto the story, reveals how the girl and the young man, of their own accord, acquiesce to unfree relations by which they achieve self-identity. This is what is conceptualized as the ideological constitution of the subject through interpellation.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares that no conflict of interests exists pertaining this paper.

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