

POLITICAL SCIENCE COLLOQUIUM

“The Misinterpellated Subject.”

By

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Althusser's well known model of interpellation, whereby a pedestrian gets hailed by a passing police officer (the latter calls out "hey, you there!") and who turns around in response, thus becoming a subject, often strikes people as a totalizing model of subjectivity. It seems that we have no choice but to be the person that the state demands (or recognizes) us to be. Subjectivity in this sense seems like an iron trap that cannot be escaped. Yet upon closer examination, Althusser turns out to offer a few loopholes to this totalizing tendency. He writes that "nine times out of ten" the person being hailed is *really* the person that the state (or cop) intended to hail. That leaves us with a question: what about the one in ten who wasn't intended to be hailed, where the law made an error of recognition? I am calling this person a "misinterpellated" subject. My argument is that in fact we are all misinterpellated subjects. The times when the recognition of the state seems to be reconciled with the identity that is "really us" disguises the fact that the law never knows (or cares) who we are and that every act of state recognition is also a case of mistaken identity. This offers many possibilities for resistance and subversion of this most basic apparatus of political subjectivity. I argue that even as the vast majority of us go about our lives believing ourselves to be subjects of the law, we are also beings who have vast anarchic interiorities, spaces that remain uncolonized and undominated by interpellation. When we believe ourselves to be accurately interpellated, this interiority is effectively overshadowed by a false legal (and liberal) sense of self with major implications for the kinds of politics and social practices this self will engage with. When however we see that every moment of interpellation is also a moment of misinterpellation, the possibilities for that interior anarchism to be externalized and acted upon become far greater with a very different set of political and social practices then becoming possible.

Friday, December 8, 2017

2:30 to 4pm

Light Refreshments will be served!

Open to members and guests of the Department of Political Science.

No recording or videotaping permitted.

Saunders 624, Harry Friedman Room