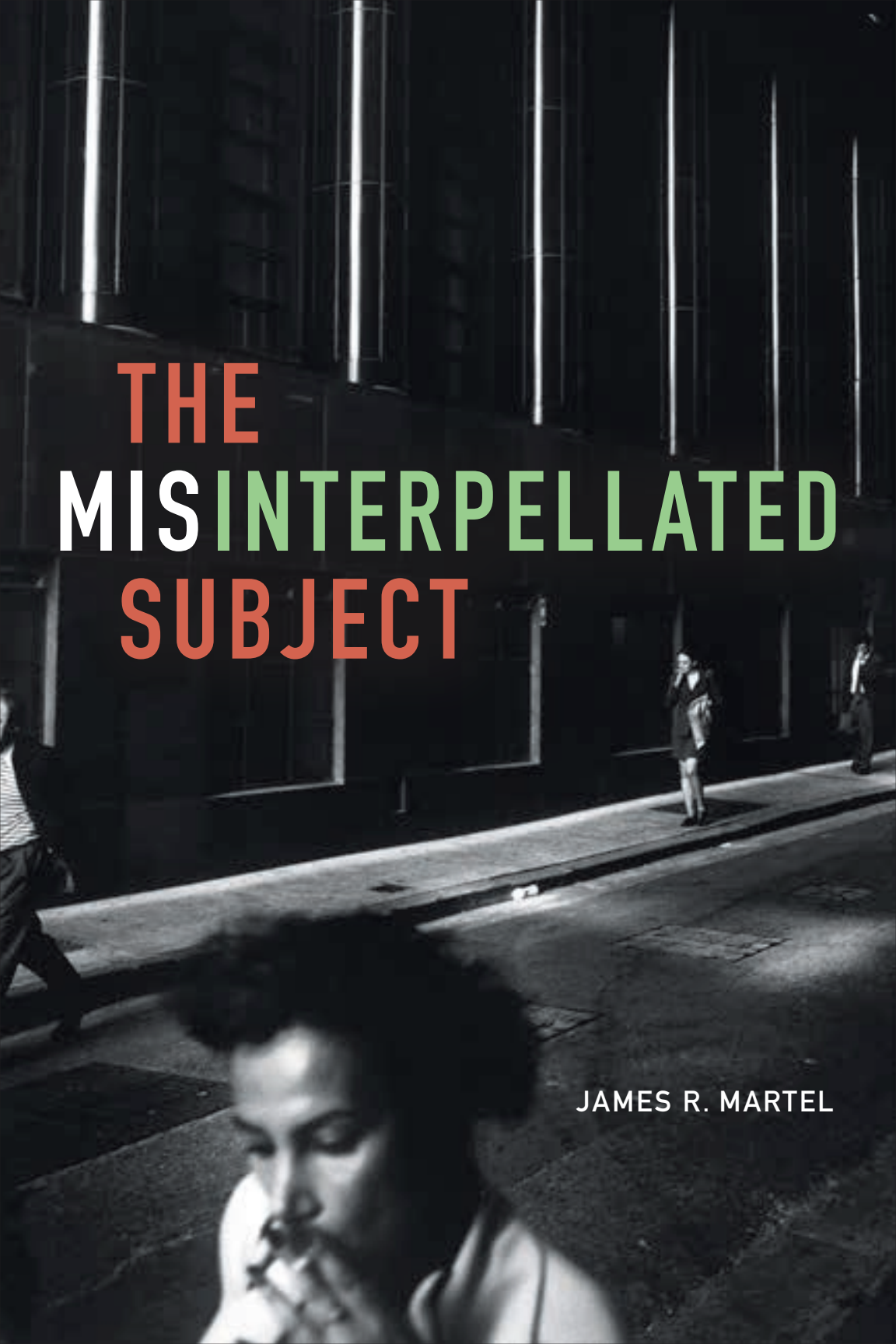
THE
MISINTERPELLATED
SUBJECT
JAMES R. MARTEL

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For Nasser

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INTRODUCTION

Unsummoned! When the Call Is Not Meant for You

Another Abraham

In his parable "Abraham," Franz Kafka offers us a narrative wherein the call that motivated Abraham to attempt to sacrifice his son Isaac was not perceived by the famous Abraham alone but had many other, unintended interlocutors—all of whom also happened to be named Abraham—as well.[1] Kafka tells us that besides the "real Abraham"—that is, the one that we all know about, someone who "already had everything, and yet was to be raised still higher"—there is "another Abraham ["einen anderen Abraham"]" or possibly even several other Abrahams.[2] One such other Abraham, Kafka tells us, "was prepared to satisfy the demand for a sacrifice immediately, with the promptness of a waiter, but was unable to bring it off because he could not get away, being indispensable; the household needed him, there was perpetually something or other to put in order."[3] For yet other Abrahams, "it is possible that they did not even have a son, yet already had to sacrifice him."[4] Whether the call to Abraham was ever intended for these other Abrahams or not, they do not ultimately respond; Kafka writes of

them that "only the suspicion remains that it was by intention that these men did not ready their houses, and—to select a very great example—hid their faces in magic trilogies in order not to have to lift them and see the mountain standing in the distance."[5]

There is one last, final—and clearly lowliest—Abraham who, of all these figures, is the least likely to be intentionally called; this is a figure, it seems, who seems to neither deserve nor understand this call to sacrifice yet he answers the call nonetheless. Kafka describes him as follows:

> But take another Abraham. One who wanted to perform the sacrifice altogether in the right way and had a correct sense in general of the whole affair, but could not believe that he was the one meant, he, an ugly old man, and the dirty youngster that was his child. True faith is not lacking to him, he has this faith; he would make the sacrifice in the right spirit if only he could believe he was the one meant. He is afraid that after starting out as Abraham with his son he would change on the way into Don Quixote. The world would have been enraged at Abraham could it have beheld him at the time, but this one is afraid that the world would laugh itself to death at the sight of him. However, it is not the ridiculousness as such that he is afraid of—though he is, of course, afraid of that too and, above all, of his joining in the laughter—but in the main he is afraid that this ridiculousness will make him even older and uglier, his son even dirtier, even more unworthy of being really called. An Abraham who should come unsummoned! It is as if, at the end of the year, when the best student was solemnly about to receive a prize, the worst student rose in the expectant stillness and came forward from his dirty desk in the last row because he had made a mistake of hearing, and the whole class burst out laughing. And perhaps he had made no mistake at all, his name really was called, it having been the teacher's intention to make the rewarding of the best student at the same time a punishment for the worst one.[6]

This Abraham serves as a model for what I am calling the misinterpellated subject. This Abraham is, as already noted, seemingly unexpected ("unsummoned!"); he is not called (not interpellated), yet he responds nonetheless. He is the one who gets interpellation wrong; he turns a call by authority into farce, or perhaps—considering who is doing the calling—something far more subversive than farce. This Abraham's very presence is a challenge to and an interruption of the intended narrative. Even if his intentions

are good—and we know that they are because "true faith is not lacking to him"—this Abraham seems incapable of doing what is asked of him. He is the wrong person at the wrong place and the wrong time.

Even in the unlikely event that God did intend to call this Abraham ("it having [perhaps] been the teacher's intention to make the rewarding of the best student at the same time a punishment for the worst one"), it seems that the point of such a calling has nothing to do with him. He is either totally unexpected or a pawn for the interplay between the powerful and the desired; he is a bystander at best, an unwanted intruder at worst.

My interest in this parable lies not so much in the intention of the caller, however—that is, in terms of whom God meant to call—and much more with what happens to this subject when she or he actually shows up. What does this subject do at this point (after what must be a highly awkward pause)? Does this other Abraham also attempt to sacrifice his son? Would God show him the same mercy that was shown to the "real" Abraham? Most critically, what happens when this Abraham realizes that the joke is on him? What happens when all the hope and faith this Abraham experiences when he hears the call conflict with his discovery that he was never the intended subject of the call in the first place?

It seems that this other Abraham, for all his fear of being ridiculed or "chang[ing] into Don Quixote," has the potential to cause an unprecedented kind of mayhem; all the schemes of the mighty and the powerful could—and also just as easily could not—be unmade or undone by this unexpected arrival (or, if expected, still not conforming to what that arrival was supposed to produce). His arrival at the scene of interpellation challenges the very notion that God (or whoever the caller may be) is in charge of the situation; here, the knowledge and the authority of the caller are put into question. This has consequences, not just for this Abraham, but for all the others, including the "right" Abraham. Insofar as the call for sacrifice occurs within the context of a script (God calls, God demands sacrifice, God prevents the sacrifice from happening), that script is ruined by the arrival of this unwanted other person; the very idea that the Abraham we all know would willingly sacrifice his beloved son rests on the notion that an all-knowing deity is in charge, is in control of the situation. Once this other, unsummoned Abraham shows up, that order is wrecked; almost anything, it seems, suddenly becomes possible.

As Kafka imagines it, this scene of misinterpellation could have a very anticlimactic ending: this other Abraham might show up, realize his

mistake, and slink off into the distance. But, as I've already started to suggest, misinterpellation always has a radical potential. This book is about that potential, about how people respond to perceived calls (calls to freedom, calls to sacrifice, calls to justice, calls to participation, calls to identity) that are not meant for them, and how the fact that they show up anyway can cause politically radical forms of subversion. What does it mean when the uninvited subject, thinking that she has been called, shows up and refuses to go away? What if the subject turns her fury at being rejected and humiliated into a source of resistance to the power structures that have denied her? What forms of displacement of and challenges to subjectivity are produced by this phenomenon and with what result for the workings of "business as usual"? How does such a subject interact with the ongoing effects of state power and authority (and other related forms of power and authority as well)?

In *The Misinterpellated Subject* I examine this phenomenon in its historical, political, and literary forms in order to think about what misinterpellation can become, and what it has always potentially been: a radical, even revolutionary force among us. In particular, I will focus on the connection between misinterpellation and liberal capitalism insofar as, in our time, calls for subjectivity, poses of authority, and demands for obedience are generally—although not exclusively—issued from within this system.[7] Looking at the way that recognition normally subjectivizes (taken in both the Hegelian and Althusserian sense of that word) human beings, I will examine how the failure to be properly recognized under conditions of liberal capitalism is sometimes highlighted, made too visible to be ignored or papered over. Misinterpellation, which I will argue happens all the time, takes place in forms that are both more and less accidental; generally, it is never even noticed and yet sometimes it changes the world. The stronger version of this claim, which I will try to develop over the course of this book, is that misinterpellation is a principal way that radical change happens in a world dominated by global capitalism and liberal ideology. To the liberal stance of "There is no alternative [to liberalism]" (conveniently shorthanded to TINA), I argue that we don't necessarily need an alternative.[8] Liberalism itself, through its failure (its misfirings, its misreadings and miscallings), produces its own radical response and, through that response—the refusal to meekly slink away—the possibility of an alternative is produced after all. Or, perhaps more accurately, liberalism occasionally enables an already-existent alternative, one that is not itself part and parcel of liberal subjectivity

and authority, to be noticed, to emerge into visibility through liberalism's own internal breakdowns.

Misinterpellation is therefore built into the very system that would oppose and obfuscate it. Whatever magic leaven that has allowed a force as unjust and illicit as liberalism to remain in control for some three hundred years (and counting) is to some extent the same force that produces this radical response. The subversive subjects that misinterpellation produces tend, as I will show both through historical and literary examples, either to be true believers in liberalism, or at least subjects who practice their resistance stealthily and in ways that permit some kind of modus vivendi with the reigning powers (more on that in a moment). The misinterpellated subjects of this book are definitively acting "within" the system that they contest. As I will discuss further, these subjects do not generally initially come with the intention to subvert and revolt; their radical response is the result of an increasingly legible mismatch between what they believe (what they think they have been called to do) and what those in power believe (who they have actually intended to call and why they have done so).[9]

Because misinterpellation comes from deep within the maw of established forms of power, the power of its threat to the status quo is seldom recognized. Accidents, misreadings, and the like seem the stuff of banality, like leaving your keys at home or having your shoelaces come untied. But such accidents, exactly because they are unexpected—generally not only by the dominant forces but at times even by the subjects of misinterpellation themselves—do maximum damage from inside the apparatus of liberal orthodoxy. Ever vigilant to threats from without (communists, terrorists, etc.), capitalism has no way of guarding against the threats that come out of its own phantasms. It is precisely because liberalism not only dabbles in but utterly depends upon untruths, namely phantasms of authority and nature, reason, and orderliness, that it is highly vulnerable to misinterpellation. Insofar as (as Foucault shows us) there is always a epistemological gap between the subject and the disciplinary regime she lives under, a less-than-perfect match even among the most ardent devotees, misinterpellation both constitutes and expands that gap; the mismatch between the claims of liberal agency, autonomy, and freedom, and the actual practices of the international global order produces endless misreadings, misunderstandings, and mistakes. These mistakes come and go all the time without taking root, without producing radical responses. But occasionally they produce effects that are so dramatic that nothing is ever the same again.

In thinking about misinterpellation as a set of accidents or built-in failures of liberal subjectivity, I wish to push things further in the pages of this book. I will try to think about how to make misinterpellation something more than an accident, about how to expand upon and enhance this seemingly occasional phenomenon so that its more visible manifestations happen more often and with broader, deeper, and more sustained radical results. In order to do so, I will look at certain thinkers, particularly Nietzsche and Fanon, who I think have already shown how this is done. The political agenda I am advancing here, then, is to think about a phenomenon that is ongoing and to try to understand why it happens, how it could be multiplied and extended, and, finally, what the results of such subversion are in terms of the kinds of subjects that emerge from this process. I will argue that this subject is an anarchist one and that misinterpellation is itself an inherently anarchist phenomenon exactly because it decentralizes and opposes those highly regulated and singular selves that interpellation tells us that we are and have always been. More accurately, as I'll explain further, I see the subject as having always been anarchist, decentralized, and multiple within herself, but I will argue that it takes a phenomenon like misinterpellation to make that evident to the subject herself. Normally the subject feels that she is what interpellation tells her that she is: unitary, internally harmonious, and in keeping with the larger normative ordering of politics and society. This is one of the reasons that misinterpellation can have such radical results; it returns the subject, in a sense, to being the heteronymous—and hence both highly resistant and deeply interconnected—creature that she has always been, offering a state of noncompliance and complexity that is always hers to draw upon, if she wishes (or sometimes even if she doesn't).

Throughout this book there is a tension between the accidental and the deliberate qualities of misinterpellation; this tension is unresolvable insofar as the accidental subjects that come out of this process are the very "agents" who further its effects. There is no clear division between those who are "in the know" and those who stumble on radical outcomes. As I will show, there are vast overlaps between these states of being insofar as subjectivity itself—the source of both submission and rebellion—is what is in question.

In the service of furthering and deepening the radical potential of misinterpellation, a key claim that I make in this book is that every moment of interpellation—that is, every time a political subject answers a call, acquiesces to authority, and becomes a "proper" subject—is, simultaneously, a

moment of misinterpellation. I will reject the idea that the law or the state—or whatever other authorizing body I may be discussing—ever "knows" who it is calling or that there is a direct and absolute connection between the intentions of the powerful (those who put out the call) and the subjects that are produced in response to that power. As I will argue further, there is always a built-in lack of certain knowledge of who is being called; the subject in question is more of an assumption than a fact (indeed, that act of assumption is the basis of interpellation). Thus, there is always an element of randomness and unknowingness at the heart of the interpellative process. Even when that randomness is not recognized 99.99 percent of the time (or nine times out of ten to use Althusser's more generous figure), that same radical potential lurks in every one of us and at every moment.

Understanding misinterpellation as a source of permanent vulnerability is critical for resisting a system that, for all its problems, seems fantastically good at adjusting to various challenges (leaving the left, among liberalism's other adversaries, often in a state of deepest despair). Thinking in terms of misinterpellation, we see that we have never been the subjects we thought we were. This is the case both in the sense of not being the individuals that interpellation tells us that we are and also in the secondary sense that we are not in fact utterly determined and controlled by those identities we receive. The drama of the moment of recognizing the misfirings of interpellation—as exemplified by Kafka's story of Abraham—attests to the dislocations of subjectivity that occur whenever we are called by authority (I will argue later, there are other forms of recognition or counterinterpellation as well, forms that do not have the same authority structure as the sort I am discussing here). In this way, I seek to think more closely and strategically about how and when liberalism misfires—or is read as misfiring—and how attending to such misfiring can help those of us on the left rethink or enhance our approach to politics, to authority, and even to revolution.

Layout of the Book

In order to explore this question, I divide this book into two parts. The first part of the book focuses on the theory and historical practice of misinterpellation within the context of an ongoing system of interpellated power and authority. This part addresses these questions: How does interpellation work? How has it been resisted in the past and with what results? The second part of the book focuses more on what happens beneath and beyond the

umbrella of interpellation. This part takes a more philosophical and literary approach in order to answer a different but critically related set of political questions: What kind of subject emerges from the breakdown of interpellation? What strategies does this subject employ to maximize her disruption of interpellated identities? What kind of politics does this subject express and with what implication for thinking about questions of contemporary forms of resistance?

Each chapter of the book is organized around a central call. The first part of the book engages mainly with interpellating calls such as Louis Althusser's classic "hey, you there!" and Frantz Fanon's "tiens, un Nègre" ("look, a black person"), although I will consider Lauren Berlant's "wait up!" as an alternative kind of calling in chapter 1. The second part of the book features calls that further misinterpellation, calls that recognize the multiple anarchist subjects that we always have been but do not usually recognize as such.

Throughout the book, I will, as already noted, look at how to maximize the subversion of the kinds of subjects that we are usually asked to be, how, that is, to enhance the decentered and radicalized forms of subjectivity that emerge from the processes of misinterpellation. Turning from calls that interpellate us to calls that scatter and subvert that form of address is a key part of how I try to accomplish that.

In chapter 1, I look at the theory of misinterpellation by examining Althusser's theory of interpellation, as well as interventions to that theory by Judith Butler, Mladen Dolar—especially as Butler reads him—and Lauren Berlant, among other critics. In this chapter, I will attempt to protect the value of Althusser's observation from some of his detractors even as I am myself critical of the way Althusser seems to accept—or at least insufficiently challenge—the validity of interpellation as a process of political subjectivity. Even as he opposes the basis of the systems that interpellation supports, Althusser claims that "nine times out of ten" the person who is the subject of the interpellator's hail is "really" the one who was meant to be hailed. What happens, I ask, if we focus, by contrast, on the one time out of ten, the unintended, unsummoned subject of interpellation (i.e., the "wrong" Abraham)? If we adopt this viewpoint, we see better how interpellation is not a monolithic and fail-safe system; if it fails one in ten times, that imperils the notion that interpellation is "always right"—or even ever right—with implications for the cases when it supposedly "correctly" identifies the subject. Althusser knows this but his analysis of the workings of

interpellation distracts attention from the productivity of its failures, something I try to correct for in this chapter.

In chapter 2, I look at three historical examples of misinterpellation: the Haitian revolution at the turn of the nineteenth century and its response to the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen; the so-called Wilsonian moment involving Woodrow Wilson's promotion of national self-determination at the end of World War I and its effect on those who would become leaders of the anticolonial movement; and the case of Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation and the origins of the Arab Spring in the winter of 2010–2011. In each case, there was a perceived call (very clearly in the first two instances; in a more diffused sense in the latter case) that was interpreted as having universal application but that revealed itself not to apply to the person or persons I am looking at (not for the slaves of Haiti, not for colonial subjects of European empires, not for the modern Tunisian underclass). Yet these people answered the call nonetheless, acting "as if" the call were for them after all.[10]

In looking at this question, I consider forms of resistance at both the elite and subaltern levels (especially in the first two cases; with the case of Bouazizi, resistance came much more definitively from the subaltern level). I argue that although at the elite level (such as with Toussaint Louverture or the leaders of anticolonial movements in the aftermath of World War I) there is a high degree of buy-in to liberal universalism, at the subaltern level, such influences are much weaker but still present.

In seeking an explanation for why these cases represented such a radical break with the status quo (when countless other moments of misunderstood calls, humiliations, and the like produced nothing at all), I turn, at the end of the chapter, to Machiavelli for an explanation as to why there are times that the operations of authority and ideology are maintained indefinitely and why sometimes they are exposed and ruined as with the three case studies in question. In his writings about the religion of the Roman republic, Machiavelli tells us how authority in a society can be produced and bolstered via projection onto externalities (like God, the law, or the state, the process of interpellation itself) and also, if we read him in a more conspiratorial fashion, how that same process can be subverted and resisted.

Chapter 3 is a reading of Fanon as a misinterpellated subject. Fanon, a black Martinican, was raised thinking he was both a French and universal subject, with all the rights and privileges that this identity brought with it. It

was only when he went to France and was seen—and indirectly hailed—as a black man ("tiens, un nègre!") that he realized that he wasn't who he thought he was (or at least he wasn't thought of in the way he himself believed to be true). His knowledge and identity as an "insider"—that is, a Frenchman and universal subject—and his experience of rejection made for a potent and radical response. In this instance, Fanon's dual subject position allows him maximum access and damage to the ideology of race and colonialism that his experience of misinterpellation helped him to ultimately subvert and resist. In this chapter, I treat Fanon both as a prime example of a misinterpellated subject and, at the same time—and relatedly—as a uniquely situated critic of the kinds of identity that interpellation produces. Fanon is, accordingly, a keen observer of the possibilities for the misinterpellated subject to subvert and even topple illicit power structures and identities.

In chapter 4, which begins the second part of the book, I engage in a more literary and philosophical exploration of the misinterpellated subject by looking at the work of Friedrich Nietzsche (a figure who will dominate the rest of the book even if I'm not discussing him directly). As I see it, Nietzsche supplies us with a way to think about a subject who is not just responding to a mistake but who is fundamentally broken off from and deeply resistant to the system that produced her nominal identity. In this way, Nietzsche moves even beyond the misinterpellated subject that Kafka depicts. His subject not only refuses to go away but also allows for an entirely alternative form of subjectivity to emerge (or at least become visible) in the wake of that refusal. This is an anarchic and multiple self that defies the organizing principles of interpellating forms of subjectivity.

Nietzsche does this by supplying us with a series of messianic figures (his own authority in the text, the prophet Zarathustra, and the messianic figure of the overman) who pose as a succession of saviors who do not in fact save us. Instead, they disappoint and abandon us, leaving us very much on our own. Not only do these figures fail to save us but they effectively ruin—at least temporarily—the possibility for salvation. By taking on the pose of the savior and voiding that position with their own failure to act, Nietzsche prevents us from being saved by anyone else either. What emerges in the wake of that disappointment is not the shining, higher beings that we are promised to be but our mundane fleshy selves. As ourselves, we are never the person we want to be when we answer the calls of authority, but we are the ones who show up anyway. This self, the one who shows up to

answer the call, is the one Nietzsche instructs us to love when he speaks of *amor fati*.

Chapter 5 looks at two works of literature, Herman Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener" and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, in order to exemplify what a Nietzschean (and therefore misinterpellated) subject might look like and, in particular in this chapter, how their seemingly marginal or invisible status disguises both a very complicated and very powerful form of subjectivity (more powerful, I will argue, than any other character in their respective texts). I read Bartleby not as a passive figure but as an active underminer of established hegemonies. And, whereas the erstwhile heroine of *To the Lighthouse* is the seductive and magnificent Mrs. Ramsay, I argue that Lily Briscoe, who normally exists entirely in Mrs. Ramsay's shadow, is the true—and misinterpellated—protagonist in that text.

In order to read these texts in this way, I suggest that we need to approach the texts themselves via a misinterpellated form of reading, that is, against the grain, in tension with established authorities and figures in the novel and even with the way the novel seems to insist on being read.[11] When read in such a manner, we experience the way these characters are disorganized, decentralized, and multiply subjected; we read, that is, the anarchy of the subject(s) in and through the text.

In chapter 6, I revisit Althusser's imagined scene of interpellation (wherein a police officer calls out "hey, you there!" to an individual who, responding, becomes a subject) via a turn to yet other literary, and one nonfiction, works: Kafka's *Amerika*, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, and Ta-Nehisi Coates's *Between the World and Me*. In this chapter, I focus on the strategies of failure and refusal in terms of weapons that are available to the misinterpellated subject to enhance and expand her resistance.

In all three texts, I argue that we see a complication and a subversion of Althusser's narrative by offering different readings of the encounter between a police officer and an individual. In the case of *Amerika*, Kafka offers us a subject—Karl Rossmann—who is so failed, so unavailable, that he cannot help but be misinterpellated. In his encounter with a police officer, he cannot play his part, cannot project authority, and so the moment of interpellation is foiled. In the case of Ellison's and Coates's narratives, there is no possibility for such a form of failure. In these cases, the fact that the subjects in question are black means that the police "know" whom they are dealing with—and kill them accordingly—regardless of what the subject does or says. Instead of failure, then, I argue that these latter two books describe and

advocate a practice of refusal, a refusal to submit to the false identities that are placed on black subjects and other subjects of color on the one hand, as well as a refusal to partake in a language of redemption, teleology, and hope that underlies the liberal universal values that are for these subjects a trap rather than a promise. This refusal is not purely negative (just as Nietzsche's no saying is also always a yes saying); it has creative and productive aspects wherein these authors (like Fanon) take blackness not as a fate that they cannot escape, but as a subjectivity of their own devising, and in the face of the demand of liberalism that they be the kind of black subject (obedient, downtrodden, etc.) that it calls them to be.

In chapter 7, I look at a Lars von Trier film, *Breaking the Waves*, to consider ways to maximize the rupturing of the circuitry of interpellation. In this case, I focus on the strategy of turning interior complexity and plurality into being itself a form of resistance to interpellated identity (and, in particular, to its monolithic and unitary quality). The movie features a character, Bess McNeill, who talks to herself with the voice of God. Unlike the other characters in the movie, most of whom obey and fear a stern and universal, transcendent God, Bess engages with a God who is more of an accomplice and a co-conspirator than a punishing deity (although her God can be that too at times). Accordingly, Bess's God works to disrupt the original chain of command that Althusser models between God and the first political subject, Moses. This God comes in to save her from the interpellating deity (Althusser's "God the Subject"), which lies behind the forms of subjectivity that all subjects suffer from in one way or another. This too, I argue, is a form of Nietzschean salvation, and in the process, Bess, unlike any other character in the film, can love her fate and accept her misinterpellation (even as her actual fate in the film is quite horrific). By housing within herself another subject—and not just any subject but God—Bess shows a way to make herself (relatively) immune to being colonized or recolonized by interpellative forms of identity.

Finally, in the conclusion, I look at the forms of address that have been gathered in the preceding chapters, moving from the "hey, you there!" of Althusser to Bartleby's "I would prefer not to" to Orlando's "come, come!" (a character from a different writing of Virginia Woolf that is briefly considered at the end of chapter 5). These various forms of address, I argue, offer us many different modes of engagement, different political possibilities, and different ways to subvert the power of interpellation, what could be called a practice of counterinterpellation. Collectively, these form a network of call-

ings, a set of choices that bring various degrees of resistance and challenge to norms of identity and ideology in terms both of personal and political subjectivity. I argue here once again that attention to these other forms of calling offer an anarchist politics, as well as an anarchist and misinterpellating form of reading to challenge the seeming inevitability and destiny of archism and interpellative authority.

Passivity and Subordination

Before getting into the chapters proper, a preliminary discussion of the question of political passivity as well as the larger question of how to undertake an anarchic reading of subjectivity is in order. In terms of passivity, I do not want to give the impression that prior to moments of misinterpellation, the general populace is either entirely bought into dominant ideology or simply marking time. I want to firmly reject any notion of false consciousness or quiescence as the historical record supports neither of these readings. Such readings, even when put forth by radical thinkers, tend, I think, to reinforce the trap of TINA. If resistance only happens during moments of revolution, and revolutions invariably seem to fail or get corrupted, then, the liberal can argue that there truly *is* no alternative (and so we might as well acquiesce to liberal political and economic power). Seeing that resistance is, in fact, constant and ubiquitous helps us to see that the power and authority of states and other institutions under liberalism are much weaker and more tenuous than they normally appear. Such an understanding also helps us better appreciate the context that misinterpellation comes out of, what comes "before" and "after" this phenomenon.

A key thinker to help challenge the idea of quiescence on the part of subordinated communities is James C. Scott. Two of his books, *Weapons of the Weak* and *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, are particularly useful in this regard. In the latter work, Scott does a great deal of damage to the idea of false consciousness as it is expressed by thinkers ranging from Antonio Gramsci to Althusser himself. For Scott, the tendency to see subordinated communities such as peasants, serfs, and slaves as passive or quiescent constitutes an acceptance of what he calls the "public transcript," the formal and official discourse that occurs between the ruling and ruled classes.

Such a reading of power relations lies in distinction to the "hidden transcripts" that Scott focuses on, especially in the second half of *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (*Hidden Transcripts* is the subtitle of that book). The

hidden transcript takes note of the mocking songs, the jokes, the rituals, the gatherings, the foot dragging, the pilfering, the sabotage, and other acts of resistance that do not necessarily amount to open revolt but that collectively form a long and steady means of countering the hegemonic manifestations of authority at all levels of interaction.[12] This resistance very much includes the level of thought. As Scott puts it, "The obstacles to resistance, which are many, are simply not attributable to the inability of subordinate groups to *imagine* a counterfactual order."[13] As Scott shows, subordinate communities imagine an alternative frequently and well.

Indeed, for Scott, it is particularly at the level of ideology that resistance to dominant power is strongest. This goes in direct opposition to the work of Gramsci and Althusser (more the former than the latter) as they are usually read. Their prime argument is usually taken to be that it is precisely via ideology that groups are dominated; their objective class interests are given over to the interests of their overlords via superstructural operations at the level of culture, education, family, and even political consciousness. For Scott, such views amount to replacing an economic determinism (which is precisely what this turn to ideology was meant to correct for) with an ideological determinism.[14] As Scott sees it, "The concept of [ideological] hegemony ignores the extent to which most subordinate classes are able, on the basis of their daily material existence, to penetrate and demystify the prevailing ideology."[15]

In Scott's account, even the public transcripts, the official records that look like a compendium of subordinate devotion, are not simply accounts of obedience but are themselves the product of what he calls a "dialogue with power that may have a greater or lesser strategic dimension."[16] He details how both sides have a shared interest in portraying the negotiations that mark relations between dominant and subordinate groups as being fairly harmonious. The powerful wish to hide the extent to which their power is vulnerable, the degree to which they are in fact negotiating and jockeying with their own subordinates. The subordinates, in turn, can use the cover of subservience as a way to hide their true intentions, making themselves seem harmless or covering themselves with plausible deniability if any overt efforts should fail.

Clearly, there is a difference between open revolution and the kinds of hidden power struggle that Scott discusses in these books. In Scott's telling, the difference between open and covert resistance is less one of kind and more a matter of degree. There is, for him, a continuum of acts of resistance

and counterideologies that the dominated have been practicing for years, decades, or centuries. He tells us that it is often the case that insurrection starts off as a call for reform within the system (something that is in keeping with the story of misinterpellation that I will be telling in later pages). Yet he argues that this does not indicate a true buy-in to the ideologies that are being resisted on the part of the subordinated community. To give just one—but a critical—example, Scott writes, "Revolutionary actions on behalf of reformist goals, such as an eight-hour day, an end to piecework, a minimum wage, politeness from management, cooking and toilet facilities, were the driving force behind the Bolshevik revolution."[17] For Scott, effectively all forms of resistance, even when they lead to no discernible change for the supplicant or supplicants in their lifetime, can be read as a kind of dress rehearsal for insurrection.[18]

For Scott, then, what looks like a history of perfect passivity, marked only by the occasional—and seemingly inexplicable—open revolts, is in fact the reflection of a long history of intense and often bitter contestation that goes underground and then comes to the surface (often only to go underground again). Power is never as confident as it seems, and resistance is never as hopeless or absent as it is portrayed. What is often portrayed as a "spontaneous" uprising has deep roots in practices of resistance that effectively never cease.

Such an insight is vital to understanding what forms of resistance are possible and where they come from. As Bonnie Honig writes in *Emergency Politics,* what is often depicted and understood as an individual act of resistance—for example, Rosa Parks's not moving from her seat—is actually the result of a mobilized and collective form of counterpower.[19] As Honig also notes, attempts by liberals to portray the individual in question as a sui generis heroic figure serve to neutralize and distract from the actual and collective politics being presented by their act, masking the true threat that such actions pose.

In this way, there is no consensus on the part of subordinated communities that a dominant power is "inevitable," or natural or desirable in any way. As Neil Roberts shows in his study of the Caribbean during the era of slavery, even under the direst conditions, there is always resistance, marronage, and other forms of flight and counterpower.[20] If this can occur even under conditions of slavery, it is clear that no state is ever so dominant as to be in a position to reduce its people to abject powerlessness. To put it in a nutshell, there is no TINA.

Resistance and Misinterpellation

How does this understanding of resistance then square with the story that I am going to tell about misinterpellation, which seems to suggest, on the contrary, that everyone is duped by systems of power until a misfiring of the linkages between the system and its reception produces a break in hegemony? In response to this question I have three points to make. First, as will become clearer in the next three chapters, to think in terms of notions like interpellation and misinterpellation does not commit one to a theory of false consciousness for all the times in between revolutions. I read many of the authors that Scott criticizes as having somewhat more nuanced readings of the situation than he implies, especially Althusser, about whom I do not share all of Scott's reservations. Nevertheless, I take Scott's main point about the porousness of ideology. As I'll attempt to show further in the following chapters, subordinate communities are never dupes. Their use of dominant ideology is, as Scott suggests, generally strategic, used as much to hide other agendas as it is to seek justice within a given system.

At the same time, there is a value to thinking about the role of ideology in allowing dominant systems to perpetuate themselves. If ideology is more of a two-way street than Gramsci or even Althusser might let on, akin to Hegel's master/slave dialectic, it effectively remains a basis for what is ultimately a kind of accommodation. I can imagine an unusually candid capitalist apologist reading Scott's books and thinking, "well, fine. As long as I keep getting my money who cares what is going on under the surface?"

We can see the operations of ideology most clearly by focusing on those moments when it is ripped asunder. If Scott's analysis allows us to see a continuum between the mildest forms of resistance and outright revolt, even he recognizes that there is a line between these forms of resistance.[21] The hidden transcript may suggest a dress rehearsal for the uprising, it may even give a form to that uprising, but the sudden openness of that resistance in moments of outright revolt is itself novel and critical. An actual uprising—assuming it is successful—scrambles and reconstitutes existing modes of understanding and actions. Critically, such a moment represents a definitive breaking of the fabric of ideology; whatever modus vivendi allowed the system of domination to perpetuate itself suddenly breaks down.

The effects of such a breakdown are dramatic and, I think, alter even the subversive practices that have been going on during the long periods

of secrecy and domination that come between uprisings. If, as Scott tells us, the Bolshevik revolution came out of initially reformist demands for accountability and improved conditions, the workers' councils that emerged during the revolution created an entirely different relationship to authority and ideology (before having that authority eventually ceded to the Bolsheviks). In this way, strategic engagement with dominant ideology plays a crucial role in making revolutions possible but it doesn't preclude or overshadow the possibility of a move into other forms of politics that neither the subordinated or dominated communities could have envisioned in their ordinary subordinated conditions. Misinterpellation, in this regard, can be viewed as first the bending and then the breaking of the kinds of arrangements—the structures of address—that permit domination to remain intact for long periods of time. As the mismatch becomes more acute, the resulting radicalization of ideas, actions, and relationships may—but also may not—expand and develop accordingly.

The upshot of this point is that one doesn't have to be a dupe to work with and accommodate a repressive system. Ideology doesn't need to be "real" in the sense that it completely obfuscates and controls subordinate people. It simply needs to help organize and perpetuate a particular form of status quo, something that it does very well.

A second point to make involves making a distinction between the kinds of societies that Scott is addressing—generally peasant, serf, and slave societies—and contemporary conditions of liberal capitalism.[22] Here, the whole question of consciousness—however we define it—is strongly affected by the particularities of liberal capitalism. Contemporary capitalism has its own particular forms of ideology and the kinds of servitude that come with it are perhaps unique or at least different from the forms that Scott mainly studies. One key distinction under conditions of liberal capitalism is the ideology of individualism itself. This ideology is ingenious in that it essentially states that whatever class status a person has, it is her own fault. If she is poor, it's because she is lazy or stupid or just not working hard enough. If she is rich, she must similarly deserve her status (and if she doesn't, liberal ideology clearly states, she will lose her—or, since we are talking about liberalism, more likely his—birthright fairly swiftly; witness John Locke's notion of the "dissolute" landowner who squanders his fortune).[23] As Scott himself notes, if there is any chance of upward mobility, subordinate people are much more likely to buy in to the system. Liberalism produces this buy-in by virtue of its belief in individual merit and also via

the belief it promotes in the fair and nonarbitrary power of the market to determine "winners" and "losers."

If the typical peasant doesn't need to read Barrington Moore to know that he or she is oppressed, and that class and status are based on arbitrary rules that work to their disfavor, the subject of liberal capitalism has a much harder time in being clear about this. Here again, I want to strenuously avoid the concept of "false consciousness" but want instead to note the prevalence under conditions of capitalism of various forms of political fetishism, phantasms of upward mobility, dessert, and the lures and promises of wealth that Walter Benjamin collectively labels "the phantasmagoria."[24] For Benjamin, reality—or at least what passes for reality—itself conspires to make us willing or at least semiwilling subjects of capitalism and the states that serve it. The effects of commodity fetishism produce in us a state of being wherein our desire to belong and to succeed is part of our bondage to the system.

It's not, of course, that the wage earner, the worker, or the member of the "working poor" toiling at McDonald's for minimum wage imagines that she is doing well. She may indeed recognize the degree to which she is suspended in an arbitrary power relation that she is not benefiting from in any way. Yet there are so many countering forces: the practices of commodity fetishism, the blandishments of liberal ideology that collectively serve to give the subject hope. Things like lotteries, media (in the United States, Bravo is a TV channel that, as I see it, is dedicated to the worship of wealth and glamour), Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, popular music, and a myriad of other factors don't so much make life bearable as they offer people a way to live a different and simultaneous life that is much more pleasant.[25] I wouldn't speak in this case of "false" consciousness but just of consciousness, full stop. Our life is flooded with conflicting signals, assuagement, despair, anger, and joy. So, for that matter, is the life of other communities who don't directly live under contemporary forms of capitalism (as Scott's attention to the hidden transcripts attests). Yet, under modern capitalism, domination has become very good at looking like a lot of different things so that it becomes much more difficult—but obviously not impossible—to refuse the status that is conferred by interpellation.

In the United States, it is easy for leftists and liberals alike to call members of the Tea Party "crazy" and "stupid," to argue (as Thomas Frank's *What's the Matter with Kansas?* does) that white working-class people in America

have been duped by the Republican Party into trading their own class interests for feelings of superiority in being white (although that consensus is clearly breaking down with Donald Trump's ascendancy). Undoubtedly racism and other forms of hostility to "the other," however they are defined, are major tools of capitalist power and class oppression. Yet from a Benjaminian position, underneath all the devotion to capitalism, all the self-defeating support for a 1 percent that cares nothing for those who continuously vote for policies that they favor (and pay for) is a yearning on everyone's part for the promises of freedom, equality, wealth, and long (possibly eternal) life that capitalism promises via its mechanisms of interpellation. Benjamin clearly—and correctly—condemns the liberal and the fascist for their beliefs, but he also recognizes that behind and beneath this belief is a desire that is not itself evil; it comes rather from a set of "wishes images," as Benjamin puts it, for a better world.[26] This doesn't mean that we have to be "nice" or sympathetic to rich people and anyone else who oppresses others for their own benefit (the equivalent of that horrible retort to Black Lives Matter that "All Lives Matter"). It just means that their hold on power is far more tenuous then they—and often the rest of us—believe; their authority and power are not based on some truth that they have access to but rather quite the opposite. In this way everyone is similarly cut off from any firm or true forms of knowledge (whether about identity, power, or anything else). We don't therefore need to resort to a theory of false consciousness because to do so is to assume that there is a clear and authentic position from which we can regard the workings of capitalism whereas, in fact, such a position does not exist.

As Scott tells us too (working off of Foucault), both dominance and resistance to capitalism are internal to it. There is indeed no "outside" from which we can judge who is stupid, who is passive, who is false, and who is true. We are all, in the end, fetishists to one degree or other: hence my desire to stop using the term "false consciousness" and start just speaking of consciousness, the way that we experience our location in the midst of the miasma of liberal capitalist phantasm, fetishism, projections of authority, and corresponding forms of resistance.[27] If, under conditions of advanced liberal capitalism—or, in our own time, neoliberalism—the challenges to resistance are that much stronger, a theory of misinterpellation offers a set of strategies that gets at the nexus of consciousness and subjectivity that normally gives liberal capitalism an advantage over its adversaries. It suggests

that even the most compromised among us need not be written off (as "falsely conscious") but are instead as vulnerable to the misfirings—and the radical potential—of interpellation as anyone else.[28]

The third, and related, point to make here—and this is where I bend a bit closer to Althusser than Scott does—is to argue, as I'll show in the next three chapters, that interpellation and the consciousness that it produces work like a circuit and are hence not a unidirectional or hydraulic system. As Katherine Gordy argues in her study of Cuba, ideology is not something that any one group owns or operates; it is a dynamic, a struggle, and a contest but it is also something that ties people together.[29] In this way, the division between "dupes" and those "in the know" becomes, once again, much blurrier, impossible to sustain. Nor in a sense are any of us wholly innocent of the power and lure of interpellation. There is a flow of interpellation, identity, information, and phantasm between the imagined origins of any power system and its peripheries. But this flow goes in two directions; as Scott clearly informs us, the modi vivendi that are created under conditions of capitalism are dynamic and in play, subject to renegotiation. Sometimes—as in our current period—the dominant groups can pretty much call the shots, although even in such cases there is continuous and endless resistance to their power. Other times the record is more mixed and then there are periodic revolutions when all bets are off. But at all times, there is a circularity of reception where the caller and callee are both caught up in the drama of interpellation. The caller imagines the power of the call, and the callee in turn imagines herself as the subject of that call, reproducing the authority of the caller, which otherwise seems entirely exterior to her.[30] This dynamic and charged call and response then is the circuitry of authority and power that constitutes what could broadly be considered as the pathways of interpellation. For this reason, both interpellation and misinterpellation are not merely single moments (Althusser's famous "hey, you there!") but are ongoing and fluid mechanisms, forms of representation and response—as well as the failures of those structures of address—that constitute the scenes of address.

The fact that interpellation itself depends on a kind of response makes it permanently vulnerable to the threat that misinterpellation poses. As I will show further, the dominant powers need us to respond to their calls far more than we need them to call us (actually, we don't need them to at all). For all the power and authority being generated from the capitalist classes and state overlords, there are counterveiling forces. As I will show further,

there are countercircuits and subcircuits. All of this helps explain why the operations of interpellation never work as well as one would think (including for Althusser himself). Interpellation is less of a hydraulic force and more of a hot mess. More accurately, it is structured with regular and predictable forms of address—those apparatuses that gives form and structure to liberal capitalism—but those patterns and regularities disguise the way in which the circuitry itself is random, without origin, and far more vulnerable than it would appear to be.[31] A focus on misinterpellation allows us to question how to make that mess even messier, how to thwart and upset and overturn the operations of the status quo, how to align with subcurrents, and how to use circuit against circuit to maximum effect.

At the end of *Weapons of the Weak*, Scott evinces a lot of pessimism about revolutions. He notes that, almost inevitably, the oppressed groups who participate in revolutions end up experiencing new forms of oppression from new masters. His own energy therefore is directed at small acts of resistance and learning to live with states.

This is one place where I disagree very strongly with Scott (in part because his own analysis shows how states will seek out and attempt to destroy any competitors for political authority down to the most minor details). Rather than accepting the state or learning to "tam[e] the Leviathan," as Scott suggests, I believe that we can think more strategically about the nature of the breakdowns that lead to revolution.[32] If the production of authority is the critical factor in interpellation, the production of anti-authorities, the breakdown of the processes of ideology and interpellation, is vital for any consideration of ongoing resistance.

Accordingly, at the end of the day, this book is neither a defense nor a refutation of Althusser but a complication of his theory. One could read Althusser as arguing that at the level of ideology all subjects are brainwashed, filled with "false consciousness," and willfully obeying masters despite their own objective conditions to the contrary.[33] In such a reading ideology is determinant and that is that. If we stuck strictly to a theory of classical interpellation, we would not quite be able to understand how, if this is the case, resistance sometimes works nevertheless. It would seem that either we believe or we don't; either we get our subjectivity from this source or not. But if we interject the notion of misinterpellation, we get a much more vivid picture. Even as interpellation forms, misinterpellation unforms. Even as interpellation brings subjectivity, it is warped by its own failure, its own mismatch. Hence we get a subject who is continually being subverted at the

same time she is receiving her identity from the state; this is a subject who has the potential to obey and disobey simultaneously. Indeed, following what Jacques Derrida says about J. L. Austin, we could say that the failure of interpellation, along with the intention of the caller, is a constitutive component of its "success" and furthermore—and relatedly—that interpellation needs the misinterpellation that could (and sometimes does) lead to its own undoing.[34]

For these reasons, I think it would be a grave mistake to continue to consider the role of ideology as something that dooms us to a certain political arrangement. When we shift our focus from ideology as a hydraulic force and think about it as a set of human interactions, we can see the myriad ways this ferment of resistance can be expanded, increased, and built upon. We see that there are forms of knowledge and action that can coexist even with the strongest and most oppressive (and obfuscating) forms of interpellation. Hence nothing is foreclosed and human actors are much more uppity and subversive than the official reading of history (the "public transcript") allows for.

The Banality of Resistance

In addition to concern about thinking about people as passive or as "dupes"—a way to overlook the real power that people exercise against dominant systems—a second critical, and related, preliminary issue to consider involves thinking about the relationship between extraordinary and ordinary moments of time, as well as the relationship between extraordinary actors and everyone else. In terms of the temporality of resistance, Jennifer Culbert alerts us to the dangers of thinking of major events as being exceptional and without precedent or connection to what comes before and after. In writing about Arendt's concept of the "banality of evil," Culbert suggests that Arendt herself misses the key import of such a concept. Banality for Culbert means that evil is not simply a matter of spectacular forms of violence, such as the Holocaust, but it also refers to the everyday (hence banal) questions of racism, police brutality, hierarchy, drudgery, microaggressions, and all the other aspects of life that make life "cruddy"(as she puts it, citing Elizabeth Povinelli).[35]

If we only look at events like the Holocaust or the transatlantic slave trade—although both had their own forms of quotidian, and evil, banality—we risk congratulating ourselves at how "good" things are now by contrast

(another version of ignoring the "hidden transcript" that Scott discusses). Everyday indignities are not "evil" by this account and so are not really worth worrying or thinking about (it may be that Arendt's problematic reading of events like desegregation in Little Rock, Arkansas, may reflect a bit of this bias toward the spectacular manifestations of evil).

My interest in misinterpellation follows Culbert's logic. I share her concerns that by lionizing one moment in time, one renders all the "in between" times useless or, once again, passive. Since we tend to live in "in between" time ourselves, such a view would strip us of any sense of an ongoing possibility of revolt, much as the idea of the power of ideology reinforces a sense of the impossibility of resistance. This question has great resonance for how this book's argument is actually undertaken: although in the chapters that follow I will be looking at the more spectacular events—the Haitian revolution, the Arab Spring, and so on—I do so in order to reveal an architecture that is no different than what happens every day under the aegis of interpellation. I look at the "one time out of ten"—the exceptions that cannot be ignored when misinterpellation is undeniable, when it is highly visible and easy to spot—in order to think about the nine times out of ten, all the other times when it *is* deniable (or misrecognizable, to use Althusser's own term).[36]

There is a risk to this strategy.[37] The risk is the flip side of what Culbert examines with Arendt; it is that in looking at spectacular moments, I treat them as fundamentally different than other moments, ignoring their connection to more quotidian—or banal—moments in the process (and not just textually in terms of the amount of time spent on them, but conceptually as well). One of the key underlying ambitions of this book is to anarchize the way we think about time and agency, that is, to get us away from thinking about the big moments (the events) and big players (the revolutionary leaders) and think instead about the steady stream of resistance and subversion that constitutes politics, what might be called the misinterpellation of everyday life or, perhaps too, the banality of resistance.

In terms of thinking about time and its relationship to politics, like many US-based leftist political theorists, I am a product of an Arendtian-Wolinite school of thinking whereby we are taught to think of politics as only really occurring during wonderful glorious moments like the Paris Commune and the late 1960s. During the rest of the time, by implication, nothing really happens, at least politically speaking. While I would never abandon the vision I get from this tradition about what politics could (or should)

look like, I think it's time for leftists—at least the ones who come from this tradition—to begin to think more broadly about what politics is, that is, to retrieve, as Culbert and Scott do, from the ordinary course of time, a politics of resistance that is always happening. To anarchize time means that every moment is the same as every other moment. No moment is special, not even moments like the Paris Commune. That moment (what Alain Badiou calls "18 March 1871") is unique in terms of what happened during that period of time but there is nothing about the temporality of that occasion—the materiality of the moment—that made the Commune any different than any other point in time; its eventfulness is not teleologically given by its particular temporality and any moment could be equally disruptive, even moments that have already happened and are now past.[38] In looking at spectacular examples—as I will—I seek to render the ordinary spectacular or the spectacular ordinary, to blur the line between these states and not give everything over to the exceptional. In this way temporality in general, and not just "special moments," is available for radical politics, everywhere and every time.

Similarly, there is a risk, in thinking about agency, to lionize the hero or even the antihero.[39] Rather than thinking about vanguardism or exceptional actors, I want to think about everyday acts of resistance, banal—because quotidian—and unnoticed (sometimes even by the resister herself). This is the essence of the misinterpellated subject: she is the one that no one wanted but she showed up anyway. Yet here too the examples that I look to—the life and work of Fanon; literary antiheroes like Bartleby, Lily Briscoe, and Karl Rossmann; and Ellison's narrator—risk making it seem like these are the *only* possible subjects who can successfully overcome their interpellation (so that it could never have happened to other characters in those texts, even as they are clearly affected and even radicalized by their encounter with the subjects that I focus on). There is a romance to the antihero no less than to the more standard and conventional form of heroism.

The point of this book is to argue that we are all misinterpellated and so what I say for Bartleby is equally true for you and me and everyone else. Rather than saying that everyone is special, I wish to argue that no one is. We are all failed as subjects, all deluded, all broken by interpellation (although our respective failures take on unique and different aspects for each of us and also, as I'll argue further, take on different valences for different groups). The purpose of the figures that I am looking at is not to make us admire them but to see that what is the case for them can be the

case for everyone else as well, or may actually be the case already (at least potentially).

In selecting my examples, I tried to emphasize therefore the disappointment and wretchedness that afflict the actors in question (especially with the literary examples). I ultimately seek to deglamorize and deromanticize the stories that I am telling. The misinterpellated subject is someone whom no one wants to be: an uninvited, undesired, broken, and failed subject. The bad news is that we are all that person. The good news is that being that person can be the basis for a radical and anarchist politics that the subject is already fighting for even if she doesn't always (or even ever) know it. As already noted, in thinking not just about the one time out of ten but the nine times out of ten as well (the numbers are completely arbitrary) I wish to locate and enhance the failure for all subjects, the failure, that is, that we already have accomplished.[40]

In thinking about anarchizing the way we engage with time and agency, I will confess to feeling all the romance and the heroizing tendencies that these stories evoke and even to deploying these genres to tell these tales. I am as fetishistic as the next person (you are a fetishist too, I'm afraid). A braver author might try to evoke banality itself in the text, sticking to the purely quotidian and the mediocre (in her reading of Arendt, Culbert includes a reading of a story by Octavia Butler—one of my favorite authors—which is as Culbert puts it "one of her least interesting stories"; here, the banality of the story itself enhances and captures the banality of evil that she is looking for in the everyday).[41] If the stories I tell evoke a romantic or heroic affect, my hope is that they will work like a Trojan horse (but here I am giving away the big secret); we may read them and find them exciting and possibly tragic, but taking them in, considering them, we allow their antiheroic and banal premises to undermine those very same glamorizing effects. My wager is that the power of the stories I tell does not get us to simply respond archically and fetishistically, but rather—and also—to see ourselves in these figures, not as heroes, but as failures. In thinking about Kafka's adage about a hope that is "not for us," I seek to have the reader experience—in a way that is legible to her—her own failure.[42]

A Yet More Minor Literature

If Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari call for a "minor" literature, perhaps it could be said that this book asks for a "yet more minor" literature, a mode

of reading that seeks not the end of the subject or even signification per se, but just the failure of those things (that is, the recognition of a failure that has already been accomplished).[43] In looking at the literary and filmic examples that are examined in part II in particular, I seek out examples of that failure in the margins of texts and novels and films (and sometimes too peripheral characters who exist at the dead center of texts, depending on the work in question). This is a style of reading that could be applied to any text. The method is simple: look for the losers and the outcasts, the one whom nobody wants to know or be. It is not a matter of seeing those losers as being secretly great and superior but rather of having their exclusion bring into question the very categories by which they are being excluded. When the differences among heroines, antiheroines, and everyone else become impossible to maintain or understand, then we are thinking (and reading) along the lines of misinterpellation; we are seeking—and finding—the disruption to dominant narratives that coexists in every story that we tell.

Just as critically, to read in the mode of misinterpellation means to avoid the stealth teleologies and patterns of understanding that usually accompany more "archist" modes of reading. The ideas of sacrifice and, in particular, of tragic loss and suffering are all forms of literary genres that reinforce the sense of destiny and inevitability that come with interpellated forms of subjectivity. In the same way that Kafka's parable about Abraham renders the moment of sacrifice into something completely different and unexpected, so in general does a misinterpellated reading reject standard conventions of loss and sacrifice for some perfect, golden—or at least glamorous—future. As we will see in chapter 6, Ellison and Coates both decisively oppose any notion of tragic loss or heroization for the subjects that they consider. The concept of tragedy assumes a kind of inevitability, a built-in destiny that cannot be resisted. The subjects of such a destiny are always fated, always called in ways that they cannot avoid. They exist under the spell of a "big plan." Things happen to them "for a reason." In reading about these characters and their fates we duplicate this way of thinking, tying their story into larger beliefs in progress and teleology, into archist forms of time and subjectivity. But a misinterpellated form of reading will always oppose such a view; it will seek to undermine the certainties of fate and destiny that come along with such a sense of subjectivity and to render the tragic into something far more complex, contingent, and anarchic.[44]

As already noted, in thinking about reading in this mode, over the course of this book I will be trying to build up a vocabulary of the kinds of calls that

are put out by misinterpellated subjects. To Althusser's emblematic "hey, you there!" (the call of the interpellator), I will look to Berlant's "wait up!," Woolf's "come, come!," Bartleby's "I would prefer not to," along with several other forms of calls to those who find themselves on the wrong end of interpellation. These other forms of calling do not demand that we be a particular form of subject. Instead, they welcome multiplicity, complexity, anarchism, and resistance. As may be appropriate for a book that seeks to think about anarchizing subjectivity, there is no one "correct" alternative form of calling to oppose the call of the interpellator. Rather, there is a myriad of choices, all of which come with their own baggage, their own pluses and minuses (and zeros).

I will be speaking a lot about failure in this book but it is critical to note that by failure, I am referring to the failure of subjectivity, not of politics.[45] In fact, I think we will continue to fail politically—that is, to remain captive to capitalism and neoliberalism—so long as we do not realize that we are failed as subjects. The failure of the latter must precede a more "successful" form of politics. A failed subject is not a pile of useless mush; she is an incredibly dynamic complex and heterogeneous being. This being is the not-hero of my book; she serves as the unmaker of the heroes we all wish to be (all that we are interpellated to be). She is an anti-egoic force. Like the messiahs that Nietzsche offers us—one who serves to save us from messiahs—this not-hero just might serve to save us from heroism, from thinking that some time and some person and some place is unique and better than all the other times and persons and places, thereby depoliticizing the moments we live in and the people that we are. When we stop thinking exclusively in terms of heroes and tragedy, romance and loss—that is, once again, when we read these texts through a misinterpellating lens—an enhancement of the politics we all practice in a daily and banal way potentially becomes more potent, more evident, more subversive, and more powerful.

Misinterpellation and Anarchism

There are other explanations besides misinterpellation for how resistance breaks out after periods of apparent quiescence. Alain Badiou, for one, has his theory of the "event," which bursts out of the realm of impossibility into possibility by the sheer force of its coming into being. Before an event (the French revolution, the Paris Commune, the Chinese Cultural Revolution

and even the Resurrection of Christ are key events in his view), Badiou tells us that whatever it comes to inaugurate simply doesn't—and can never—exist. Then, suddenly, the changes an event brings can and do exist in a way that can never be undone. I'm not sure this theory of misinterpellation is completely at odds with a theory of the event but it's certainly the case that misinterpellation does not look for the break that comes ex nihilo.[46] Nor, as already noted, does misinterpellation represent a unique and isolated moment in time. Misinterpellation always comes out of interpellation; new practices come out of the "dress rehearsals" of resistance and subversion that precede them. Even if the moment of the event is radically unlike that which it precedes, to think of the moment of rupture as special and unique—that is, to think of the moment of time itself as bearing some special quality that makes it different from every other moment in time—is akin, once again, to thinking of Rosa Parks or other political resisters as sui generis; it masks once again the ongoing collective threat—and hence the real power—posed by such moments.

There is also the Leninist model of slow and steady planning by a vanguard party that then inspires and causes revolution among others. I know and respect many people who hold to this view and I think that there has been some new and exciting work in Leninist thought—work by thinkers like Jodi Dean and Sylvain Lazarus—that challenges the old vision of elite-level domination.[47] Yet I remain skeptical about a party-based model of left politics. As Arendt's classic work *On Revolution* suggests, when revolutions happen—for reasons that I will set aside for the moment—they are massive, unscripted, and unpredictable. More accurately, they do follow patterns but it is not those set down by parties but rather by decades and centuries of resistance as Scott shows us. It is only later that a party shows up and announces that it has been "leading all along." Surely there are parties that are always ready to make claims for speaking for "the people" and in that sense they may precede the revolutions that they become associated with (temporally speaking), but their success has, I think, less to do with the way that they prefigured that revolution than with the way they manage to make themselves the spokesperson and representatives for a movement that is much broader, more diffuse, and more anarchic than anything that could have been "led." Furthermore, I would say that parties are themselves often agents of interpellation; they seek to put out calls and, for this reason, they are not part of the politics of misinterpellation I describe here (although their actions, of course, can produce misinterpellating responses of their own).

There are, as already noted, some exceptions to this understanding of Leninism. Jodi Dean, in a recent work, argues that the party is explicitly *not* in possession of some special knowledge, that it holds the place of the "Big Other," to use her Lacanian parlance, in order to prevent other aspirants from taking on that role (hence not unlike the role I ascribe to Nietzschean messiahs, who save us from salvation by occupying and ruining the position from which authority is thought to derive).[48] I definitely see the possibility of some kind of alignment between her theories (and those of a few others) and my own.

Yet, more generally, rather than aligning with Badiou or Leninism—at least with the more orthodox or standard versions of these theories—as already noted several times, a theory of misinterpellation is, in my view, largely and mainly consistent with anarchist theory and practice. The very model of call and response that sets up a theory of interpellation is inherently "archic," that is, tied up with ruling and statecraft, with authority asserted from above and beyond. Misinterpellation comes from an anarchist perspective; it comes out of collective patterns of behavior, a form of steady and ongoing resistance to interpellative authority. It pays attention to alternative calls, calls that come from within and beneath and among the communities and individuals in question. These calls form other sources and models of authority that may rival or displace archist forms of interpellation.[49] In this regard, I see misinterpellation as a key aspect of anarchist power, a product of endless ferment and resistance to a system that might seem utterly dominant but that is characterized by numerous and endless forms of vulnerability and dysfunction. Human actors do not need to wait for parties or events to take up the charge of revolt; misinterpellation makes that ability available to all of us at all times. In this way, misinterpellation can be seen as stemming from—and being connected to—what could be called the anarchism of everyday life, to the banal and ordinary forms of resistance that are usually overlooked but that collectively form a potent challenge to various forms of dominant orthodoxy.

Who Are "We"?

A final word about nomenclature: I've been talking about "us" and "we" a lot but, of course, as innumerable other scholars have noted, this we is a problem. As I'll be discussing, "we" are divided by many things, perhaps especially race, class, ability, sex, sexuality, and gender (in all of their variations). As

I'll discuss further in chapter 6, anarchism has had a lot of problems with negotiating this "we." This pronoun is often used to overwrite many critical and unbridgeable differences within this and other movements. There are too many assumptions about the audience, about their identity, about their equivalence to other subjects, and even about the way they can be thought of as separate entities. In my reading of things, all of these ways of thinking are antithetical to anarchism since assumption and projection, as I'll argue further in this book, is a hallmark of archism. But this doesn't mean that anarchists of today don't make these assumptions anyway. I take Foucault's claim that "we need to cut off the king's head" quite seriously, and I think this adage applies even—perhaps especially or at least most poignantly—to anarchism in many ways.[50]

How then can we even start to talk about "us" or "we" when such terms are so redolent of overwriting, of assumption, of archism itself? The "we" I have in mind is an assortment of failed subjects who hold on to all of the differences and cleavages that they've had all along (including all of the histories and divisions that come with those cleavages). The we I am thinking about is not an alliance but a conspiracy, a form of resistance based on a common rejection of the practices of law, politics, and economics—with an accompanying form of subjectivity—that are visited upon all of us but that some of "us" suffer from far more than others. Some of "us" in fact don't suffer at all and that is part of the problem of "we." As noted, the one thing that "we" all have in common is that we are all failed subjects, we are all misinterpellated. If that failure can become more visible, then "we" can start to act less like a family, with clear roles and hierarchies and much hidden misery and conflict and more like a conspiracy, a shifting and ongoing network of resistance that fights for some things in common and also some things that are different (including from each other).

The anarchism I am suggesting here, however, is not simply limited to the usual collective and social setting where we think politics tends to happen. There is a deeper "we" afoot, a "we" that resides in each person, that reflects overlapping and heterogeneous sources of identity. Just as Plato tells us that to understand the city we must first look at the soul, in this book I try to look at the anarchism of the soul or subject as a necessary complement to the anarchism of the city or community.[51] This more intimate and personal "we" is no more harmonious or coherent than the we that forms the city. It too has its discords and disagreements, antagonisms and cross-purposes, as I'll show further.

Thinking of these two forms of "we" in tandem offers a way, as I say in the conclusion, to think of human beings as being anarchist "all the way down" from the interpersonal to the intrapersonal level. To think from such a position, offers no, or at least less, refuge to the often occult archisms that construct—and dominate—us at so many levels (on the level of the personal, the collective, even the temporal and spatial). It gives us over to the many ways that misinterpellation is continually unforming us as subjects, offering the widest and most contingent possible understanding of "who we are." Such a viewpoint can be immensely powerful, as I will show, but it does not guarantee a happy ending. Some of the stories and texts that I will be looking at have distinctly awful endings. Actually a focus on misinterpellation doesn't guarantee anything. Guarantees are part of the patter of liberalism, a way of assuaging present injustices in the name of universalism and reason. All you get from paying attention to misinterpellation is a chance not to be predetermined by the teleologies, phantasms, and projections of liberalism. But that is quite a bit and this book is an attempt to think more pointedly about that possibility.

NOTES

Introduction

1 When I taught this text to my class in the Kent Summer School for Critical Theory, it was suggested that all the different Abrahams in the parable are all aspects of the one "real" Abraham that God intended to call, that the diversity of responses represented the diverse aspects of Abraham's interior life even as one privileged part of him did just what the "real" Abraham was supposed to do.

2 Kafka, "Abraham," 40 (German), 41 (English).

3 Kafka, "Abraham," 41.

4 Kafka, "Abraham," 43.

5 Kafka, "Abraham," 43.

6 Kafka, "Abraham," 43–45.

7 In this regard, I think that whereas the move from liberalism to neoliberalism is dramatic and critical, in terms of misinterpellation at least, what is true for the historical practice of liberalism is just as true for neoliberalism. If, as Wendy Brown argues, neoliberalism has made a new *homo economicus*, this subject too is a form of interpellation and, as such, is similarly subject to misinterpellation. See Brown, *Undoing the Demos*.

8 This term, much beloved by economic conservatives, was often used by Herbert Spencer and later popularized by Margaret Thatcher. More recently, Donald Trump has a newer version of TINA; he constantly repeats "there is no choice" as if the repetition itself were a basis for removing any chance of thinking or acting differently than he does.

9 Sarah Burgess suggested something further too: that the structure of address itself, that is the form of the claims being made, might themselves contain some radical potential.

10 I am grateful to Sarah Burgess for the idea of acting "as if."

11 I owe Bonnie Honig this insight and also the idea of this mode of reading serving as another version of Deleuze and Guattari's "minor literature."

12 In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, a book that I see as being highly related to Scott's work, Michel de Certeau discusses "la perruque" (the wig) which is an action

undertaken by the underling, which seems to be on behalf of the owner/boss but is in fact entirely for itself. One example he offers is a personal love letter written on company time and via company technology. See Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 24–28.

13 Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 81.

14 Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 317.

15 Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 317.

16 Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 95.

17 Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 77.

18 One example Scott provides of the strategic use of dominant ideology is that of prisoners who, through their grievances to the prison system, seek to expand their own power (or, conversely, to diminish the arbitrary power that the prison guards have over them) by a seemingly obsessive concern for the minutiae of the laws that govern them. One could read this as a weird subservience on the part of the prisoners or one could read it as an oppressed group using the only tools at their disposal, employing the ideology of the state as a weapon against it. In the case of prisoners, this course of action is, of course, only moderately successful. It depends on the willingness of the state to follow its own rules (or, by the same token, its reluctance to admit that its laws are a sham—an admission that would weaken a liberal state's authority by revealing it to be nothing but tyranny).

Scott also gives the example of a more successful example of struggle when he discusses how "quietly and massively, the Malay peasantry has managed to nearly dismantle the tithe system so that only 15 percent of what is formally due is actually paid." *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 89. Examples such as these offer that there is a power (or counterpower, depending on how one wants to define things) that makes real change possible even under the veneer of compliance and passivity (as Scott notes, the Malay authorities play along with the charade of tithing, once again, in order to deny the degree to which they have been outmaneuvered by their own populations).

19 See Honig, *Emergency Politics*, 128.

20 See Roberts, *Freedom as Marronage*.

21 In thinking about accommodation versus outright opposition, Georges Sorel makes a critical distinction between the "political strike" and the "general strike"; the former is a negotiation with a power that does not ultimately threaten that power system while the latter represents a real break with existing power structures (and Walter Benjamin very famously takes up that same distinction as well in his "Critique of Violence"). See Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, and Benjamin, "Critique of Violence." Most of what Scott analyzes comes closer to the former than the latter (although, as he also tells us, the former can also lead to the latter, something Sorel himself does not account for).

22 Sometimes these two states overlap, as my example of the Haitian revolution will further illustrate. It is therefore not a matter of modern versus premodern societies. I'm definitely with Latour in saying that "we have never been

modern" (certainly not modern in the way we think that we are). See Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*.

23 See Locke, "Of the Conduct of the Understanding," 32.

24 See, e.g., Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 25 (in the *Exposé of 1939*). See also Cohen, "Benjamin's Phantasmagoria," 207.

25 I forthrightly confess to being a former fan of Bravo television programs myself. I don't want to suggest I do not feel the draws of the fetishism I am criticizing (I don't think anyone can fully escape it and people who say they do are sometimes the biggest fetishists of them all). Sometimes I loved the *Real Housewives* shows uncritically and with great relish (and zero irony); sometimes they made me almost physically sick with their full-bore and maniacal commodity fetishism. Sometimes (actually often and quite horribly) I felt both sensations at once.

26 Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 4 (*Exposé of 1935*).

27 I don't think that anyone really uses the actual term "false consciousness" anymore—perhaps with a very few exceptions—but many of us subscribe to some version of the idea nonetheless.

28 By the same token, it offers that no one, not even the most ardent leftist, has access to some truth that makes them invulnerable to the lures and seductions of capitalism and interpellation. I also will argue further in the book that often our class, race, gender, and other markers of identity give us very different and far-from-uniform outcomes in terms of how we respond to interpellation and misinterpellation.

29 See Gordy, *Living Ideology in Cuba*.

30 For all of this circularity of authority, I will argue that for people of color—as Fanon shows quite clearly—interpellation can be a de facto dead end.

31 I am grateful to Sarah Burgess for pointing this out to me.

32 Scott, *Art of Not Being Governed*, 324.

33 Scott points out E. P. Thompson's critique of Althusser, for example, in *Weapons of the Weak*, 42.

34 This insight comes from Bonnie Honig.

35 Jennifer Culbert cites Povinelli in a paper that she presented at the Western Political Science Association in 2015. The paper is entitled "The Banality of Evil: Cruddy Stuff That Happens on the Bus."

36 In my earlier book *Textual Conspiracies*, I argued for the idea of "recognizing misrecognition," that is to say recognizing the way that we do not recognize our own reality. In thinking of Althusser, I would add a new version of that phrase, recognizing the way that we misrecognize specifically the workings of interpellation (or, to put it another way, recognizing the way that we fail to see misinterpellation).

37 George Shulman pointed this out to me. I look forward to his new book on the crisis in genre, which explores some of these questions as well.

38 Badiou, *Communist Hypothesis*, 209.

39 I am indebted to George Shulman for this insight.

40 In speaking of "already" being failures and the like, I do not mean to invoke the often-used term "always already." Like many scholars of my generation (and many of those who are younger too) I've often used that term but I have to confess to never quite liking it. Now I understand a bit better why. To say that we are already failures doesn't mean that we are always already failures because our failure is meaningless unless it becomes apparent to us, expressed in actual time rather than as an ongoing potential. Rather than a kind of timeless now (which is what the term "always already" has generally evoked for me), I am interested in a much more ordinary and, indeed, banal form of time (the same kind of time I think Nietzsche is interested in). In order to make our misinterpellation more than a potential or occasional accident, we have to think about actual moments, ruptures in the fabric of the false endless temporality that liberalism offers us (and which I worry that "always already" often reproduces in the guise of opposing liberal temporality).

41 Culbert, "Banality of Evil."

42 Benjamin, "Franz Kafka," 798.

43 See Deleuze, Guattari, and Brinkley, "What Is a Minor Literature?"

44 I see Bonnie Honig's book *Antigone, Interrupted* as an example of reading a nominally tragic figure through a misinterpellating lens. Honig reads Antigone not as the tragic heroine that she usually is considered to be but as a conspirator, in particular with her sister, the much-overlooked Ismene. In Honig's treatment, Antigone is a political figure who turns mourning itself into a political and subversive act.

45 For a good understanding of this other kind of failure, see Halberstam, *Queer Art of Failure*.

46 This insight comes from Sarah Burgess. In a previous book, I did try to think about the "event" of the Haitian revolution and misinterpellation as being somewhat overlapping categories. See Martel, *One and Only Law*. It's not quite true that for Badiou an event comes out of "nothing" insofar as we always have the option for Badiou of being faithful to the events that have already occurred. See Badiou, *Ethics*, 47.

47 In my view there are a number of people who write about parties—not always without ambivalence—in ways that do not necessarily fall into this category. One is Alain Badiou, who, in his reading of Maoism, sees Mao himself as a pivotal figure who used social movements outside of the party in order to destabilize the party and render it unable to completely trump the society it claimed to represent. See Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*. Relatedly, there is Sylvain Lazarus, who rethinks Leninism itself via what he calls Lenin's "saturation," a change implicit in the end of the formal practice of Soviet communism. See Lazarus, *Anthropology of the Name*, 25. Another writer who makes an important contribution to this version of Leninism is Jodi Dean, whose recent work on crowds and the party offers that the role of the party is to stand in for the Big Other (in Lacanian terms) and thereby disable other candidates from taking on that role. Here, the party doesn't so much "represent" the people as

it prevents others from representing them instead. See Dean's *Crowds and Party* and also the end of *The Communist Horizon*. Another writer is this vein is George Ciccariello-Maher. See his *We Created Chávez*.

48 See Dean, *Crowds and Party*.

49 Among anarchist writers, Scott himself lends some support to a reading of misinterpellation as a viable explanation for why revolutions happen. At one point in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, he discusses how uprisings may involve some form of misreading. He asks: "How is that subordinate groups . . . have so often believed and acted as if their situations were not inevitable when a more judicious historical reading would have concluded that it was? It is not the miasma of power and thralldom that requires explanation. We require an explanation instead of *misreading* by subordinate groups that seem to exaggerate their own power, the possibilities for emancipation, and to underestimate the power arrayed against them" (79).

In speaking of misreading, Scott is anticipating—I think anyway—the possibility of misinterpellation itself. His notion of misreading helps us to understand why, under conditions of dominance in general, revolts nevertheless still occur. Here again, we can see the workings of ideology and the way that it can be resisted and upturned. The kinds of political authority that normally are associated with liberal capitalism are essentially a shell game; if every worker actually stopped working (Benjamin's—and also Rancière's—theory of the General Strike in a nutshell), this power would completely collapse. Misreading is a way for would-be insurrectionaries to be able to bridge the gap between the general impression of the impossibility of resistance and the fact that, once they begin, insurrections can take on a life of their own, benefiting from precisely all of the hidden forms of resistance that Scott catalogs in his books. Misreading allows what cannot be done to be done and, once it is done, it becomes much less impossible.

50 Foucault, "Truth and Power," 121. Actually though, I think even this metaphor can lead us to falsely believe that "cutting off the king's head" is all we have to do. As I will try to show the archism of the king goes deep within each of us so it's not just heads that we have to worry about.

51 Formally, of course, Plato seeks to overcome the anarchy of the city and soul alike but I read him, through the excellent work of thinkers like Jill Frank, as perpetuating a conspiracy in the text against such an (interpellating) outcome.

1. From "Hey, You There!" to "Wait Up!"

1 Althusser, "Ideology and the State," 116.

2 Althusser, "Ideology and the State," 116. The imagination of this scene is clearly context specific and also specific to the type of person who imagines themselves in this position. When I was teaching Althusser at the Kent Summer School in Critical Theory, one of the students in the class, Silindiwe