

Ideology and its Pleasures: Althusser, Žižek & Pfaller

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Introduction

Althusser famously explains the constitutive effects of ideology in terms of a process of “interpellation” by which an ISA (Ideological State Apparatus) addresses and calls upon the individuals who become its subjects. To be specific, Althusser asserts that individuals are constituted as subjects by misrecognizing themselves in response to this process of interpellation – a misrecognition that, rather than merely a matter of individuals fitting themselves to the terms in which they are called, involves a misinterpretation, even resistance to, the terms in which they are addressed: “Ideology ‘transforms’ individuals into subjects by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing” (Althusser 163). Althusser emphasizes that ideological misrecognition is conducted not at the level of ideas – of how subjects come to think about themselves – but rather at the material level of what we may call their ideological practices, which are a matter of how subjects act and interact in response in response to being interpellated: “**THESIS II:** Ideology has a material existence” (155).

A much commented upon weakness of Althusser's account is its failure to explain how exactly individuals come to "interiorize" the constitutive effects of interpellation (Žižek *Sublime* 43). Both Žižek and Pfaller attempt to overcome this weakness by invoking a psychic structure of disavowal, in which people "see through" the ideological beliefs that they enact in their ideological practices but even so *irrationally* – we may even say "perversely" – enact them. Žižek makes the important additional point that, paradoxically, this "leftover stain of...irrationality, far from hindering the full submission of the subject to the ideological command, is the very condition of it" (43). Or as Pfaller puts it, it is precisely the gap between what people know and the beliefs upon which they act that ensures their ideological subjection.¹ To put it in a nutshell, it is people's imbrication in a perverse structure of disavowal, specifically their enacting ideological practices despite "seeing through" them, which enables their subjection to ideology.

Despite their post-Althusserian similarities, Žižek and Pfaller differ at three key points. Firstly, Pfaller differs from Žižek by allowing the existence of what, in Gramscian terminology, we might call ideology in the "good" (or, what Gramsci calls "highest") sense of the term – "happy" ideological practices through which subjects playfully act out the beliefs-of-others, which they "know better" than to endorse. In Pfaller's terms (also adopted by Žižek), such subjects are "interpassive" in so far as they delegate to naïve others the beliefs that, despite not sharing them, they enact. Pfaller distinguishes this "good" ideology – what he calls an ideology-of-belief – from a "bad" ideology-of-faith, through which people's object-libidinal pleasures are displaced by narcissistic self-esteem.

In this article I suggest an account of ideology that draws upon but also reaches beyond both Pfaller's and Žižek's accounts. I begin with a little more detail of the differences between Althusser's and Gramsci's accounts of ideology, with a view to introducing what (by Althusserian lights) is Gramsci's objectionable concessions to idealism – concessions that we find in both Žižek and Pfaller's revisions of Althusser. I include this historical material out of a perhaps overly pessimistic conviction that, even today the radical consequences of Althusser's account of ideology

are not widely enough, let alone fully enough, appreciated (Krips). Those who know their Althusser well may want to skip this section.

Althusser and Gramsci

As Althusser tells it, the early Marx of *The German Ideology* conceived ideology as mystificatory ideas that, to the benefit of the ruling class, “misrepresent”, and thus cover over, the exploitative nature of the economic practices in which the working classes are led to participate. Althusser sets himself against this (what he calls) “idealist” conception of ideology by reconceiving ideology in materialist terms, as a set of practices through which people support their own exploitation. It follows that ideology takes on an *objective* material existence, namely as people’s material ways of supporting of their own exploitation – a support that, Žižek points out, may be totally at odds with their *subjective* intellectual opposition to being exploited. In Žižekian terms we may say that people are not stupid in the sense that they are unaware of being exploited. Instead they are perverse in the sense of letting it continue despite being aware of it.²

Althusser’s reconceptualization of ideology leaves us with a key question: namely, which material practices to count as ideological, and how (if at all) they differ from the economic practices that Marx locates in what he calls “the base”?³ Althusser answers this question by taking ideological practices to be support for, and thus secondary to, economic practices (Althusser 128). Specifically, Althusser conceives ideology – for example, the socially normative activities of the bourgeois family – to be social practices that are necessary for the *reproduction* of the human labor power that is a necessary component of the economic processes of production (128). In this way, Althusser claims to “[re]think what characterizes the essential of the existence and nature of the superstructure *on the basis of reproduction*” (131, italics original). Specifically, he equates ideology with practices that, rather than function

as part of the economic processes of production, contribute to the social practices that are necessary for the reproduction of the economy. Althusser's redefinition of ideology raises a second key question: why on earth do people act upon the ideological practices? Why, more to the point, do they support their own exploitation? Althusser's answer is that the ideological "super-structures" are, as Stuart Hall puts it, "unconscious" – not in the traditional Freudian sense of being literally hidden from sight, but rather in a weaker structuralist (but also Lacanian) sense, namely that, as the taken for granted, common-sense structures of people's lived practices, they are, so to speak, "hidden in plain sight"; overlooked, *qua* escaping attention, not because they are covered over, but rather because they are familiar to the point of transparency. As Althusser puts it: subjects "live 'spontaneously' or 'naturally' in ideology' so that the ideology takes on the "'obviousness' of the 'transparency' of language...ideology never says 'I am ideological'" (160, 161, 165). Stuart Hall makes this same point nicely: "Ideology is now understood not as what is hidden and concealed, but precisely as what is most open, apparent, manifest...It is precisely its 'spontaneous' quality, its transparency...which makes common sense, at one and the same time, 'spontaneous', ideological *and unconscious*" (Hall 325).

Here, then, Althusser radically rethinks the relation of ideology to the function of concealment. That is, contrary to traditional Marxist analyses, Althusser takes it that ideology functions NOT by putting forward credible misrepresentations – "beautiful lies" – which conceal from people the facts of their economic exploitation by their rulers. Instead, the concealment of ideology is a matter of the ideological practices themselves being "objectively invisible" in the sense that, even as people act upon them, they escape attention by being taken for granted. Thus, for Althusser, it is irrelevant whether people are fooled by the ideological lies – ideology sustains its grip either way, by functioning as what Gramsci (see below) calls the "implicit theoretical principles" that structure what we do. It is in this sense that we may say, with Althusser, that ideology is *misrecognized* at the level of people's practices, rather than merely *misrepresented* at the level of their ideas.

Traditionally, Althusser's rigorous materialist account of ideology, which locates anything worth saying about ideology within the realm of material practices rather than ideas, is contrasted with Gramsci's account, which, by introducing the relation between what people do and what they think, indulges in what Althusser takes to be an unacceptable (because idealist) point of view. But the accusation of idealism seems hyperbolic. On the contrary, Gramsci agrees with Althusser that, if the term "ideology" is understood in the conventional idealist sense of mystifying ideas that misrepresent reality then it is not a useful concept. Gramsci also agrees with Althusser in distinguishing between this conventional "bad" idealist sense of ideology and a materialist sense, which grounds ideology in material practices. Gramsci insists, however – and here he diverges from Althusser – that, in this materialist sense, ideology has positive features that make it essential to the formation of social groups. To be specific, he writes: "the name ideology is given both to the necessary superstructure of a particular structure and the arbitrary elucubrations of particular individuals. The [latter] bad sense of the word", he adds, "has become widespread...[with the result that] every ideology is [taken to be] 'pure' appearance, useless, stupid, etc." (Gramsci 376). In sum, Gramsci contrasts the conventional "bad" sense of ideology, with ideology in a "good" more materialist sense, which plays a positive solidaristic role in "structuring historical blocs" and in particular "organize[ing] human masses, and creat[ing] the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc." (377).

Gramsci elaborates this idea in the context of addressing what he calls "the fundamental problem facing any conception of the world, any philosophy...that has produced a form of practical activity or will in which the philosophy is *contained as an implicit theoretical 'premise'*". He immediately adds that, in talking of any such "philosophy", "one might say 'ideology'...but on condition that the word is used *in its highest sense*", namely as that which fulfills the function of "preserving the ideological unity of the entire social bloc which that ideology serves to cement or unify" (328, italics mine).⁴ In this last quotation, like Althusser, Gramsci distinguishes a material form of ideology that, in the form of *an implicit theoretical 'premise'*, is a structuring principle of people's practices,

although, in marked contrast to Althusser, he classifies this as a “good” sense of ideology “*in its highest sense*”.

In sum, whereas Althusser totally dismisses, indeed expunges, any reference to ideas from his account of ideology (“Disappeared: the term *ideas*” (Althusser 159)) Gramsci makes a more modest move. To be specific, he distinguishes between, on the one hand, a “good”, ontologically robust concept of ideology, in which the ideological ideas are incorporated as implicit theoretical premises of material practices, and, on the other hand, a “bad” purely idealist conception, in which ideology merely consists of ideas that cover economic exploitation, rather than being materialized at the level of people’s practices.⁵ Pfaller, we will see, makes a similar distinction between “good” and “bad” senses of ideology: in particular a “good” ideology involves acting upon what he calls “the illusions of others”, whereas a “bad” ideology is based upon “faith”.

But, in addition to the distinction between “good” and “bad” forms of ideology, there is a second aspect of Gramsci’s conception of ideology, which will be important to our argument here: Gramsci makes a second break from the austere materialism of Althusser’s account of ideology that excludes ideas from the domain of ideology. In particular, Gramsci allows that ideology – even what he calls “ideology in the highest sense” – is the site of disavowal. In particular it is the site of a gap between “thought and action” – thought that, in Pfaller’s sense, involves the “illusions of others” (Gramsci 327). To be specific, Gramsci indicates that “a social group that has adopted an [ideological] conception which manifests itself in action...[may] for reasons of submission and intellectual submission, adopt a conception which is not its own but is borrowed from another group, and it affirms this conception verbally and believes itself to be following it” (327).

As we will see, both Pfaller and Žižek adopt a similar idea of a gap between “thought and action”, although – and this is a key difference – they modify, indeed in a sense *reverse*, the Gramscian scenario. To be specific, both Pfaller and Žižek, like Gramsci, allow that subjects may

borrow the *thoughts* of others – *knowledgeable* others – and make those thoughts their own by (as Gramsci puts it) “intellectually submitting” to them (327). But, by contrast with Gramsci, Žižek and Pfaller insist that subjects also borrow the *actions* of others, albeit *naïve* others, whose actions are based upon what the subjects know to be stupid beliefs – actions that the subjects enact, even as they keep them at a distance by using their own “better knowledge” to disavow the beliefs upon which the actions are based. This, in turn, makes for another difference between Gramsci and Žižek and Pfaller. Gramsci takes “bad ideology” to be the “better knowledge” that people borrow from their “betters”, which has the “bad” effect of undermining the effectiveness of the “good” homegrown ideology (what Gramsci calls “good sense”) that helps consolidate social being. Pfaller and Žižek, by contrast, take the gap between the “better knowledge” that people may borrow from their betters and the homegrown “common sense” ideology upon which they act to be, paradoxically, *a condition of the effectiveness of the ideology* (rather than having the bad effect of undermining it). To put it in a nutshell, Pfaller and Žižek take ideology to be sustained by a contradictory relation between thought and action, whereby the borrowed ideological beliefs, upon which people act *but do not share*, are in contradiction with the “better knowledge” that people also borrow from others *but which they take as their own*. This means, Žižek argues (against Gramsci) that people are not fools who endorse the idiotic beliefs of others (although, as we will see, in Barthes’s terms, they may well be dupes).⁶ Instead, they know very well that they are being exploited in the interests of the ruling class, *and* are perfectly able to “see through” the transparent attempts by the ruling class to misrepresent, with a view to concealing, the exploitation.

The question, then, is how this gap between people’s thoughts (what they know) and their actions (based upon what they know to be idiotic beliefs) is possible? To put it in a nutshell, why do people act upon what they know to be an idiotic belief? Žižek answers the question beautifully (and here I expand the quotations that I gave earlier):

Althusser speaks only of the process of ideological interpellation through which the symbolic machinery of ideology is

internalized...but we can learn from Pascal that this ‘internalization’, by structural necessity, never fully succeeds, that there is always a leftover, a stain of traumatic irrationality and senselessness sticking to it [what I have called the gap between thought and action], and that *this leftover, far from hindering the full submission of the subject to the ideological command, is the very condition of it* (Žižek *Sublime* 43).

Žižek’s statement here contains a crucial ambiguity: Is the “traumatic irrationality and senselessness” that attaches to the interpellation a consequence of interpellated subjects not knowing – being unable to know – precisely what the ISA wants of them? (In Lacanian terms we may say that this “not knowing” is a consequence of subjects projecting onto the ISA’s desire their own unconscious desires, which, because they are unconscious, they cannot know.) Or is the “traumatic irrationality and senselessness” a consequence of a gap between, on the one hand, the beliefs upon which subjects are led to act in response to the ISA’s interpellative command, and, on the other hand, their own “better knowledge”? The latter gap is not so much a matter of a difference in truth-value – after all, the belief upon which they act may well turn out to be true or at least fit with what they know – but rather upon the classic gap between *doxa* (popular opinion) and *episteme* (what the subject knows), which reflects a difference in rational credibility rather than of truth-value. I resolve this ambiguity in the next section.

Žižek v Pfaller

In this section I examine in more detail Žižek’s and Pfaller’s revisions of Althusser’s concept of ideology. As I indicated, Žižek and Pfaller both follow Althusser in locating ideology in the realm of practices rather than ideas, but, unlike Althusser (and more like Gramsci) they focus upon how ideology is sustained by the complex relations between ideas and practices, and in particular between people’s beliefs, actions, and knowledge. To be specific, for Žižek – and here I put his position in Pfaller’s terms – a subject’s ideological practices are a matter of him or her acting on beliefs, BUT rather than the beliefs in question being beliefs

that the subject shares, they are the beliefs of *others*, that is, beliefs not of the authoritative big Other (what Althusser calls “the Subject”) but rather beliefs of what Pfaller calls “naïve observers”. As such, although the subject acts upon the beliefs in question, she or he *disavows* them (Althusser 167; Pfaller *Pleasure* 234). I indicated, this is a matter not so much of knowing the beliefs in question to be false – on the contrary, like *doxa*, they may well turn out to be true – but rather, as Žižek puts it, “holding the beliefs at a distance” (Pfaller *Pleasure* 2-4, Žižek *Plague* 20, and see too Žižek *Sublime* 33).

In brief, in Pfaller’s terms, for Žižek, ideological practices are practices through which subjects act upon the “beliefs of others” – what Pfaller also calls “the illusions of others” – that the subject “knows better” than to believe for him – or herself (Pfaller *Pleasure* 1-3). As such, the beliefs in question are NOT *subjective* beliefs of the subject in the familiar idealist sense that the subject consciously affirms them; instead, they are “*objective*” beliefs of the subject in the sense that he or she acts upon them despite knowing better than to do so.

I indicated in the quotation at the end of the last section, that for Žižek it is precisely this “traumatic irrationality and senselessness” in the form of a gap between the ideological beliefs upon which subjects act and their “better knowledge”, that, paradoxically, is the condition of their full submission to ideology. Or as Pfaller puts it, in the case of what he calls “the ideology of belief”, it is the gap between belief and knowledge that is responsible for the grip exercised by ideological belief upon what people do despite, indeed precisely because, they know better than to share the belief. Pfaller points out that this phenomenon is not only characteristic of ideological beliefs. For example, in the case of the superstitious belief that throwing a pinch of salt over one’s shoulder neutralizes the bad luck that comes from spilling the salt, it is paradoxically the very *idiocy* of this belief – we all know better than to believe it – that is a contributing factor to its enactment becoming an object of what Pfaller (following Huizinga) calls “sacred seriousness” to the point that acting upon the belief becomes a compulsion (Pfaller

Pleasure 1-4; 94-106). How is this possible? How can knowing better than to share some belief make it compelling to enact upon?

Pfaller rejects the traditional explanation that people act upon ideological beliefs because they are persuaded of their content. Instead, he avails himself of Freud's theory that despite the fact that, indeed precisely because, it enacts beliefs that people know better than to share, actions that are substitute for repressed instinctual impulses take on a compulsive quality. Pfaller then hypothesizes that any compulsive belief, of which ideological beliefs are instances, must be substitute actions in exactly this Freudian sense. Then, in a harmlessly circular explanation (in which the *explanandum* functions as evidence for the *explanans*), Pfaller explains the compelling nature of actions that enact ideological beliefs to be a consequence of the actions functioning as substitutes in Freud's sense.⁷

Thus, rather than defining ideological beliefs in terms of their content, he defines them as a category of beliefs that constitute what Freud calls "the unwritten laws" that enact compulsive actions (Freud *SE* /X 119). And it is from this alone, rather than from their content, that it follows that the beliefs in question are "ambivalent" in the sense that, although people act upon them compulsively, they know better than to share them. This reverses the conventional approach for explaining the grip of ideological beliefs. That is, instead of explaining why the contents of ideological beliefs, which people knowing better than to endorse, are nevertheless persuasive enough to be acted upon, the Freudian approach, which Pfaller uses, explains why a failure to endorse ideological beliefs enables, rather than impedes, their compulsive enactment.

In sum, Pfaller begins his Freudian explanation by suggesting that everywhere compulsion reigns, it is possible to uncover the presence of an unconscious instinctual impulse, for which the compulsive act is a substitute, and to which it is symbolically connected (Pfaller *Pleasure* 112). The substitute fulfills two conflicting functions: first, as a distortion of the unconscious impulse, it both conceals the impulse, and second, it

provides the impulse with a means of being realized. Pfaller calls the conflict between these two functions “an unconscious conflict”, because, as he puts it, “one of the adversaries”, namely the realization of that impulse, is itself unconscious (101). Pfaller uses the Freudian term “ambivalence” to describe the unconscious conflict between positive (expressive) and negative (concealing) tendencies within the substitute action (100-101). Pfaller compresses this argument in the following succinct statement: “An action becomes compulsive, however, the moment when negative tendencies...and positive tendencies conducive to it unite because of an unconscious conflict” (103).

It is important to distinguish the unconscious conflict that Pfaller mentions here, which is between the substitute act’s two functions, from another conflict that the substitute act generates, namely between the suspended illusion that the substitute enacts and the “knowing better” by which the subject distances himself from the illusion. As we will see, the former conflict plays a key role in explaining the compulsive nature of the substitute act, whereas the latter conflict plays a key role in determining the quality of the experience of pleasure that the substitute act produces in enabling a return of the repressed. Unfortunately, we will see, Pfaller does not always distinguish clearly between these two conflicts, a failure that has consequences for his explanatory projects.

Pfaller adds that *any* “compulsive act [that] resolves a defensive conflict by replacing [*qua* substituting for] an act [that] corresponds to a suppressed wish that is to be fended off...can be understood as the *displacement* of the former” (146, italics mine). Pfaller immediately goes on to explain: “the concept of displacement...designates a certain method of representation by means of signs” (146). In Lacanian terms, the relation of displacement between the unconscious instinctual impulse (or “wish”) and what replaces it – in Freudian terms, its “substitute” – is a matter of a chain of signifiers, or, as Freud would put it, a chain of associations, that connect the ideational representative of the unconscious instinctual impulse to the conscious representation of its substitute. This is the basis of Pfaller’s claim that the substitute is

symbolically connected to the unconscious instinctual impulse for which it substitutes (or we may say, that it “displaces”).

Here I make my first major intervention into Pfaller’s account. We have seen that Pfaller, following Freud, takes the relation between an unconscious instinctual impulse and a substitute conscious activity to be a matter of a chain of associations that connect them, and therefore a symbolic relation. Famously Jakobson takes the associations in question to be grounded in pre-existing “objective” relations of contiguity and similarity (Laplanche and Pontalis 123), and (surprisingly) Pfaller seems to follow Jakobson on this point: “the substitute act attained through displacement would have to resemble closely the substitute act” (Pfaller *Pleasure*, 144); and again (this time accompanied by a citation to Jakobson): “The relation between an object and its substitute, an act and its substitute act, is established on the basis of a frequent or even singular past contact” (146, see n 24) .

I reverse this Jakobsonian account, by taking the associations to be set in place by the relation of substitution, rather than vice versa. But how then are we to explain the relation of substitution? For Freud, the pleasure that comes from a substitute activity is created by a transfer of object-libido from the unconscious instinctual impulse to the substitute, by a series of displacements of the libido along a chain of associations: “an idea’s emphasis, interest or intensity is liable to be detached from it and to pass on to other ideas...related to the first by a chain of associations...[This involves] cathartic energy able to detach itself from ideas and to run along associative pathways...The ‘free’ displacement of this energy is one of the cardinal characteristics of the primary process” (Laplanche and Pontalis 121). There is a key ambiguity in this statement: does the cathecting energy run along pre-existing chains of association (as Jakobson suggests), or is the chain formed by the passage of energy within the neural network forcing a series of connections between ideas?⁸

I suggest that the transfer of object-libido from idea to idea forges the chain of associations rather than the other way around. But what,

then, determines the path taken by the transfer of libido? Answer (and here I revert to Freud's early work in the *Aufbau*) it is the subject's idiosyncratic history of facilitating synaptic connections between neurons. Thus, we may say, the psyche functions like an inductive machine, for which repeated past facilitations of synaptic connections facilitates present (and future) connections.

Explanations, explanations...

What does this theory explain that is of interest to us here? Pfaller claims that a substitute act's ambivalence explains *not only* the compulsion to perform it, *but also* its "greater amplitude of intensity" or pleasure (Pfaller *Pleasure* 103). Pfaller immediately adds, however, that in many cases this enhanced pleasure belongs to the category of what Deleuze calls "sad passions", which, although involving a certain satisfaction, are overlaid with unpleasure – or, as Pfaller puts it, is not "perceived as pleasure". For example, to cite a case dear to Pfaller's heart: subjects who substitute watching a TV-show with the activity of taping the show on a VCR "are unaware of the fact that they have succeeded in satisfying themselves through this game [even to the point that they] continue to complain that they are never able to watch their videos" (29).

First let us examine Pfaller's explanation for the compulsive quality of substitute actions, and, in particular, for explaining "the paradox of plays...[in which] players are entirely absorbed in the 'sacred seriousness' [of the game that they are playing] although at all times they know that it is 'only a game' [in particular, know better than to believe the stupid premise upon which it is based] (103). Pfaller takes his explanation from Freud's theory of ambivalence. Freud observes that an addiction to autoerotic pleasures, such as the oral pleasure of sucking the maternal breast or its anaclitic substitutes, delays the infant in taking up more "mature" forms of getting satisfaction, such as the pursuit of desire. As a result, if only as a "natural" step in his or her development, the infant initiates a project of keeping in check these "immature" pleasures – for example pushing away the (m)Other, or weaning him – or herself from the bottle. The child-that-the-infant-becomes retrospectively justifies this

project by blaming his pursuit of autoerotic oral pleasures upon the unbearable, insatiable demand of the (m)Other. “The most anguishing thing for the infant is...when the mother is on his back all the while, and especially when she’s wiping his backside. This is...the demand that never lets up” (Lacan X53-54). Subsequently, it is through transforming this demand of the (m)Other into the (m)Other’s desire, to which the child responds with a desire of her own, that the infant attains the status of a fully developed desiring (what Lacan calls “separated”) subject.⁹ In the process--at least retrospectively – the infant comes to experience the autoerotic pleasures, which she never succeeds in totally leaving behind, to be “childish,” “inappropriate,” even disgusting. In short, she distances herself from, and, in the technical Freudian sense, represses the autoerotic impulses: “When I was child, I spake as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child; now that I am become a man, I have put away childish things (Corinthians 13-11).

The repression of the autoerotic, through which the infant ensures her entrance to full “separated” subjectivity, continues into the infant’s later life in the form of opposition to the traces of the autoerotic that continue to haunt her. For example, consider the case of repressing the autoerotic scopic pleasures of watching TV by a moralistic imperative not to “waste” so much time watching TV. Or a different example, which belongs to the domain of playing games from which Pfaller draws many of his examples: a subject’s autoerotic pleasures in sadistic violence and homoerotic contact find an outlet in playing a game of soccer even as the violence and sexual bi-play are restricted to what, for the most part, are relatively innocuous activities of covertly kicking opposition players in the shins and ecstatically “jumping” team members after a goal has been scored. By substituting for, *qua* taking the place of, repressed autoerotic impulses, such substitute activities not only contribute to the repression of the activity for which they substitute, but also provide a hidden channel for the return of the repressed activities along with the pleasures that they create. In Freudian terms, they constitute “compromise formations”. Another example: the audience for a soccer game delegate their dubious but compelling autoerotic pleasures to the players, who (whether or not they enjoy it for themselves) commit violence and embrace each other

on behalf of the audience (if not for themselves), thereby saving the audience the trouble (and opprobrium) of doing so themselves.

Unfortunately, when Pfaller comes to explain how substitute activities come to take on a compulsive dimension, he confuses the two conflicts that I distinguished earlier: first, the unconscious conflict between the two functions of the substitute act (namely its function as return of the repressed and its contrary defensive function); second, the conflict between the suspended illusion that the substitute enacts and the better knowledge that suspends the illusion. The confusion between these two conflicts is evident in Pfaller's argument that the "better knowledge", by which we intellectually distance ourselves from the beliefs/illusions-of-others that we enact in our substitute activities, does *not weaken* the grip of the activities, but instead paradoxically, "is the condition for [the substitute activities'] *amplified affective affirmation*" (104, italics mine).¹⁰ Why? Because, he argues, "In a conscious conflict, opposing aspirations are subtracted from one another...In an unconscious conflict, on the contrary, subtraction never occurs. Instead, the powers [the motivations] are simply added together" (102, and see too 149). Here Pfaller shifts invalidly between the first and second conflicts that I mentioned above, by offering both of them indiscriminately as the reason for the compulsive nature of substitute acts, and in particular for what he calls their "*amplified affective affirmation*".

But close attention reveals that it is only the *unconscious* conflict that explains the compulsive nature of the substitute acts. As Freud puts it in his essay "Repression" (1915): "the instinct presentation develops in a more unchecked and luxuriant fashion if it is withdrawn by repression from conscious influences. It ramifies like a fungus, so to speak, in the dark and takes on extreme forms of expression [which] is the result of an uninhibited development of it in phantasy and of the damming-up [of libido] consequent on lack of real satisfaction" (Freud *General* 107). So, to make my point bluntly, while I accept Pfaller's argument that the compulsive nature of substitute acts is a consequence of their

ambivalence, I reject his equating the ambivalence with the conflict between “better knowledge” and the suspended illusion of others.

Pleasures and their discontents

Now let’s turn to exploring the relation of pleasure to substitute activities, in which the latter two conflicts do indeed have a role to play. In so doing, I will be making extensive use of what Pfaller calls “interpassive” activities. In general terms, Pfaller defines “interpassive activities” as substitute activities that involve the delegation of enjoyment. So, for example, the TV watcher, who substitutes watching TV shows with taping them on a VCR, delegates his pleasures in watching the TV to the VCR, which, as Pfaller puts it, “enjoys on his behalf” (Pfaller *Pleasure* 18, 22-25; *Interpassivity* 19). This is not to say that the agency (or as Pfaller calls it “the medium of consumption”) to which the pleasurable activity of watching the shows is delegated, actually watches – let alone enjoys – watching the shows. Even the most avid tapers of TV shows “know better” than to share such a foolish belief. Nevertheless, they may well *act as if* they believed it, even to the extent of making pathetic justifications, *not for the belief itself* (which is beyond redemption) but rather for their own acting upon it: “By taping my favorite shows I can watch them at times that suit me, and so can watch even more of them”. By acting upon this belief, which they themselves do not share, they may be said to act upon a belief-of-others, which, because the belief in question is foolish, is the belief of what Pfaller call “a naïve other”. As such, it is not only the pleasure that is delegated to another agency – say a machine, like the VCR. It is also the belief that is delegated – not to the same agency to which the pleasure is delegated, but rather to a (possibly purely fictional) naïve other (Pfaller *Pleasure* 30; Pfaller *Interpassivity* 7).

To forestall a misunderstanding, it is perhaps necessary to point out that interpassively delegated enjoyment is *not* the same as – indeed, is a sort of converse of – vicarious enjoyment. That is, in the case of vicarious enjoyment, a subject enjoys on behalf of another agent. In the case of interpassive activities, by contrast, another agency enjoys on behalf of the subject, may indeed impoverish the subject’s enjoyment by

functioning as the subject's proxy for enjoyment (on the point see Pfaller *Interpassivity* 34-42).

But there is more to say about this initial example of interpassivity: namely that it involves a double substitution plus a repression. To be specific, not only is the activity of taping a TV show on a VCR a substitute for the act of watching the show, but also the activity of watching the show is itself a substitute for an ordinary instinctual act of voyeurism which is repressed by the double substitution. And like the ordinary instinctual act, the act that substitutes for it (namely the act of watching the TV-show) is absent—a past reality, perhaps, but, because it is substituted by the VCR-taping, and like the missing premise in an enthymematic argument, it takes on the status of fiction, which exists only as an element around which the doubled structure of substitution takes shape.

Another example: the use of administrative procedures to punish a criminal attack. In the first step, the victim's ordinary instinctual impulse to undertake a retaliatory act of violence against her attacker is substituted by a desire to punish him. But, like the missing premise in an enthymematic argument, her personal act of punishment is absent. Instead, it is delegated to an interpassive administrative procedure, which administers the punishment on her behalf. As such, her act of punishment takes on the status of a fiction, which exists only as a missing intermediate step within a doubled structure of substitution. And at the same time, her active contribution to the punishment is restricted to the act of complaint by which she triggers the administrative procedures to which she delegates the act of punishment. In short, she does not actively punish her attacker. Instead, by delegating the punishment to the administration, which punishes him on her behalf, she punishes him interpassively. Note: this does not mean that she derives no pleasure from the proceedings, but, we will see, the question of her pleasure, specifically the question of how she experiences that pleasure, depends upon factors that we have not so far discussed.

I have distinguished four components in the overall interpassive process: (1) the originary instinctual impulse; (2) the activity that, by functioning as a displacement of this instinctual impulse, is a substitute for it; (3) the delegated, second-order substitute for this first order substitute, and (4) the act of delegation, by which the second order substitute takes over for the first order substitute. In what follows, for clarity, I will use the term “interpassive act” for the act of delegation (4), which lurks in the liminal space that opens up between the first-order and second-order substitute activities. Its interpassivity resides in the fact that its activity is limited to the one-sided act of delegation, which is erased behind the first-order and second-order substitute interactions.

Armed with examples of interpassivity, I turn now to the more general project of explaining the complex relation between pleasure and substitute activities. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud relates pleasure not to the *quantity* of “free” unbound libidinal energy, but rather to its *rate of flow* through the channels of the mind: “the factor that determines the feeling [of unpleasure and of pleasure] is probably the amount of increase or diminution in the quantity of excitation *in a given time period*” (Freud *Beyond* 4). In other words, the faster the flow rate of libido, the less the pleasure, and vice versa. If we follow Freud in thinking of the flow of libido in fluid dynamic terms then we may reframe this tentative suggestion as the hypothesis that, rather than it being the absolute flow-rate of libido that determines pleasure, it is the evenness of the flow. Since increase in flow rate above a certain threshold creates turbulence, this hypothesis preserves Freud’s suggestion that a major increase in the flow rate of libido will decrease pleasure, but it also incorporates Freud’s earlier suggestion (from his essay *On Narcissism*) that it is *tensions* within the libidinal field that create unpleasure (Freud *General* 66).

This hypothesis also fits well with Lacan’s suggestion that for Freud, the pleasure principle, which governs the workings of the drive through which the “mature” (fully separated) subject produces pleasure, is a “principle of homeostasis”, according to which it is the *evenness* of libidinal flow that is responsible for pleasure, whereas, conversely, it is

the *turbulence* of flow that gives rise to unpleasure (Lacan XI 31).¹¹ Specifically, Lacan suggests that the production of pleasure depends upon harnessing together counter-directed libidinal currents into a stable circular configuration that Lacan calls “the circuit of the drive...a movement outwards and back [of libidinal flows that are associated with opposing instinctual impulses]” (174, 177). For example, the scopic drive depends upon harnessing the libidinal current associated with an “active” voyeuristic impulse-to-look together with a libidinal current associated with a “passive” counter-directed exhibitionistic impulse to be-looked-at. Like the counter-directed currents of water in a whirlpool, the counter-directed libidinal currents in the drive are harnessed together to form a stable, non-turbulent – indeed laminar – circular configuration, which is centered upon an empty location within the libidinal field to which Lacan gives the name “*objet a*” or “object of the drive”, of which, Lacan says, “*la pulsion en fait le tour*” (168). Lacan summarizes this in the following terms: “Everything Freud spells out about the partial drives shows us...that circular movement of the thrust that emerges through the erogenous rim only to return to it as its target after having circled something that I call the *objet a*” (194).

Pfaller argues that substitute activities also generate a surplus “mischievous pleasure”. How does this surplus pleasure come about? Pfaller argues that “the illusion of the other...generates (object libidinal) pleasure from the *self-contempt* of its actors” (Pfaller *Pleasure* 138, italics mine). To be specific, rather than taking pride in his or her sensible actions, the actor has self-contempt for acting upon what she or he knows to be a foolish belief, but at the same time manages to recover a measure of pleasure from, as we might say, “playing the fool” or what Pfaller refers to earlier as “mischievous pleasure” (32-33).

At first sight there seems to be an obvious counter example to this account. From the beginning of his Presidency (it is reported) Trump was in receipt of numerous injunctions by friends and advisors against indulging himself in the invocatory pleasures of speaking in public – enjoining him not to “speak his mind” directly, but instead to engage in a mediated speaking by vocalizing what he reads from the teleprompter.

Trump's response has been an interpassively delegated substitute activity, tweeting, by which he delegates to the big "T" (Twitter) the circulation of tweets as a substitute for his own forbidden activity of direct public speaking. Trump is, of course, aware (as we all are) that the circulation by Twitter of a tweet, is not the same as him speaking. *But even so* he acts as if he speaks through the tweets. In short, for Trump the suspended illusion of the other, upon which he acts but knows better than to believe, is that, to all effects, he is speaking through the tweets that he sends out for circulation in his name. Of course, it may be objected that, because (we are told) Trump composes the tweets himself (or has this function been taken over long ago by a Whitehouse aide?) "his" tweeting is not really an interpassive substitute for his speaking. But this objection fails to take into account that the form of the tweet reflects the conventions of Twitter more than it does the forms of Trump's speech (although that too is changing, as Trump's speech takes on the formal structures of the medium to which he has come to delegate his public communications.)

Following Pfaller, we conclude that the first installment of pleasure, which Trump creates by delegating his public speech to Twitter, reside in the pleasures of the return of the repressed activity of speaking. So far so good. But what about what I called the "surplus pleasure"? Pfaller, we have seen, claims that the surplus pleasure produced by interpassively delegated activities come from "self-contempt". But, it seems fair to object, whatever attributes Trump might possess at a psychic level – arrogance, self-esteem, etc – they do not seem to include much in the way of self-contempt, nor we may add contempt for the tweets that he produces, let alone for tweeting as such.

In reply to this objection, it may well be pointed out that Pfaller is not using the term "self-contempt" in the usual strong sense of contempt that a subject has for himself because of some unfortunate character trait. Rather it is a secondary spin-off from the interpassive subject's distancing of the idiotic belief upon which he acts – a special form of contempt that the subject has for himself for acting upon a contemptible (qua foolish) belief: "The contempt that actors or players feel towards

their 'foolish' games...is simultaneously self-contempt" (138). But this secondary form of self-contempt too seems implausible in the case of Trump, who, it seems, revel in his tweets, not only for the global interest that they garner to his greater glory, but also for the consternation that they spread among his "expert" fact-checking critics.¹² In short, it seems that, in the case of Trump tweets, Pfaller's explanation for the origins of the surplus pleasure of interpassivity fails.¹³

How then can we explain the bonus "mischievous pleasure", which Pfaller associates with openly playful belief formations. A Lacanian approach provides an answer. To be specific, following Lacan, I suggest that the bonus pleasure may be explained by the theory of surplus Jouissance, which Lacan develops in Seminar XX, according to which the play with signifiers is a source of a surplus "feminine Jouissance" that "goes beyond the pleasure principle". Freud's emphasis in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* upon an instinct for repetition – what he calls the death instinct – pushes us in the direction of a similar explanation. Rather than pursuing this explanation in more detail, however, I turn to what I take as the central problem in Pfaller's account of the relation of pleasure to interpassivity.

There seems to be two sorts of cases in which pleasure is experienced through interpassive activities. The first, which, Pfaller implies, is in the minority, includes both the lazy academic who delegates to a photocopier the hard but pleasurable work of keeping up to date with the literature, and the lazy TV watcher, who delegates the task of enjoying the programs that he watches to the laugh-track, which enjoys the program on his behalf. In this first sort of case, Pfaller claims, subjects have direct experience of the "mischievous pleasures", which arise from their successful acts of delegation, as well as the pleasures that accrue to the substitute activities because they function as returns of the activities for which they substitute. (29, 32-33).

In the second sort of case, by contrast, which includes the VCR taping of TV shows, there is "an impossibility of experiencing them as pleasurable", so that the pleasures that accrue to the substitute activities,

by virtue of their functioning as disguised returns of the repressed, are reduced to what Pfaller (following Deleuze) calls “sad passions”, the experience of which is unpleasurable (29,195-198). (Note that although, Pfaller assures us, the pleasure produced by the majority of interpassively delegated activities is not experienced pleurably, this is not so for other sorts of substitute activities. As Pfaller also points out, in the case of perversions and overt gaming activities, pleasures are experienced openly rather than transformed into sad passions. The key question, then, is what is the difference between these two sorts of cases that makes for the different ways in which pleasure is experienced. In search of answers let us look at other cases of activities that function as substitutes for repressed instinctual impulses – games, for example, or the ceremonies of the obsessive. Pfaller argues that such activities enact what he calls “suspended illusions” from which the agents of the activities distance themselves, even as the activities themselves take on the dimensions of a compulsion. It follows that any such substitute activity will be structured by a disavowal: namely that its agents do not believe in the suspended illusion, but even so, against their “better knowledge,” act as if they did. I then distinguish two cases: (1) the perverse case, such as the games that people play, in which the agents *recognize what they are doing, namely acting against their “better knowledge”*; and (2) the neurotic case, such as the obsessive’s ceremonies, in which the actors fail to make this recognition, and thus may be said to repress what they are doing. In the perverse case, I claim, the pleasure, which is produced by the substitute because it functions as a return of the repressed instinctual impulse, is experienced as pleasurable; and by contrast, I claim, in the neurotic case the pleasure is not experienced as pleasurable. (Note: it will be important in my argument to distinguish two levels of repression in this last example: first, a strong repression of the originary instinctual impulse, which the substitute activity masks even as it provides it with a distorted means of returning; second, a weak repression, which dismisses or at least overlooks the extent to which the unwritten laws that structure the substitute activity are enacted. Laplanche and Pontalis offer a nice discussion of such weaker forms of repression, in which, rather than

falling outside of consciousness, the repressed is subjected to weaker forms of negation (Laplanche and Pontalis 390-394.)

What theoretical explanations can we offer for the different ways in which the pleasure of a substitute activity is experienced in what I have called the neurotic and the perverse cases? Pfaller offers the following explanation: In neurosis “when a certain amount of sexual energy [object libido] is drawn from an object [thereby repressing its ideational representation] then this same amount of libido can be stored in...the ego. [This] object-libido can be transformed into ego-libido” (Pfaller *Pleasure* 204). Pfaller then adds that through this transformation of object-libido into ego-libido “the manner in which pleasure is experienced is transformed...joy turns into self-esteem” (204).¹⁴ On this basis, Pfaller concludes that, in neurosis, there is an accumulation of ego-libido, and it is this, he claims, that steals our joy. As Pfaller himself puts this final step in the explanation: “displacement [of libido] to the side of ego-libido...destroys the ability to experience happiness” (205).

I agree up to point with Pfaller’s argument, but with some important corrections. For starters I disagree with Pfaller that in what I am calling neurotic cases of substitute activities “a certain amount of sexual energy [object libido] is drawn from an object”. On the contrary, I claim, in neurotic cases of substitute activity exactly the reverse phenomenon takes place: instead of a drawing back of ego-libido from the substitute activities, there is a draw-backing of object-libido. Why? Because in so far as substitute activities are “repressed” in the weak sense of being dismissed/overlooked, it is their ego-libidinal charge that is drawn back, since it is through their ego-libidinal charge that they enter consciousness. The result of this drawing back of ego-libido from the substitute activity is that the liberated ego-libido retreats to the ego, and *ergo*, there is a hypercathexis of the ego, which (and here, for a moment, I agree with Pfaller) results in a joyless self-esteem that swamps the pleasure, which the subject gains from the returns of the repressed. But, and here too I disagree with Pfaller, the reason for this joylessness is not because (as Pfaller implies) there is something intrinsically joyless about self-esteem: “self-esteem...finds it difficult to feel its happiness” (205). Nor

is it because (as Pfaller also says) ego-libido has a special “aptitude for accumulation” or because “displacement to the side of ego-libido...destroys the ability to experience happiness” (205). Rather it is because, as Freud indicates, the hypercathexis of the ego, like any excess accumulation of libido (whether object-libido or ego-libido) is the cause of unpleasure.¹⁵ And conversely, of course, in cases of perverse substitute activities, no such repression takes place, and as such the experience of pleasure is uncompromised.

In short, Pfaller is correct that it is the excess accumulation of ego-libido and the consequent outpouring of self-esteem that causes pleasure to be experienced unpleasurably, but he is wrong to blame this upon the inherently joyless nature of self-esteem or upon the fact that transformation of object-libido into accumulation of ego-libido makes “joy turn into self-esteem” (204). Instead, the villain that robs us of our joy (or at least of the experience of it) is the damming up of libido (whether object-libido or ego-libido).

This explanation provides an answer the question of why in some cases (the perverse cases) but not in other cases (the neurotic cases) are subjects aware of the extent to which they enact the foolish beliefs that structures their substitute actions? Answer: whether a substitute activity falls into the neurotic or perverse category depends upon the extent to which the agent of the activity recognizes what Žižek calls “the symbolic power of the mask”, that is, recognizes that, despite his “better knowledge”, he acts upon the suspended illusion. To be specific, if he does recognize this then we approach the perverse form of substitute activity, such as we find in games that we take seriously despite recognizing the stupidity of their conventions; and, I have argued, it is in exactly this sort of case that the pleasure of the activity is experienced pleasurable. Conversely, if the recognition fails, then we approach the neurotic form of substitute activity, such as we find in the obsessive’s ceremonies, and consequently lose access to our pleasures.

The question then arises: what determines whether a substitute activity by an agent falls under the category of the neurotic or the

perverse. From our theory of substitute actions, it follows that the determining factors are precisely not the technological means of producing the substitutes, but rather the agent's highly idiosyncratic history of neuronal facilitations. For example, depending upon an agent's history of making associations, her photocopying may end up as neurotic rather than playfully perverse. We may generalize this conclusion by pointing out that, for any technological prosthetic device that confers an interpassive dimension upon the substitute activities that it enables, whether the substitute activities are experienced pleasurable depends upon their user's idiosyncratic histories rather than the technology. It follows that Pfaller's treatment of interpassivity must be purged of the technological determinism that divides interpassive technologies into those which, like photocopying and canned laughter, are fun use, and those which are not.

From Religion to Ideology

Finally, I return to the topic of ideology. Based upon his theory of interpassive substitute actions Pfaller distinguishes two forms of ideology: (1) an ideology-of-faith, and (2) an ideology-of-belief. For my purposes, I narrow the definitions of "faith" and "belief" that Pfaller takes from Mannoni (Pfaller chapter 2). In particular, I take "faith" to be unconditional personal convictions – "illusions of their own" – upon which subjects are committed to acting. As such, faith operates with a commitment to closing the gap between what subjects take themselves to know and what they take themselves to be doing; (2) I take "belief", to be what Pfaller calls "a suspended illusion" upon which subjects act despite it not being an "illusion of their own". As such, although they act upon it, they know better than to believe it for themselves. Thus, by contrast with faith, belief operates by opening rather than closing the gap between what people know and what they do. In short, belief is "an illusion of others kept at a distance through better knowledge" (Pfaller *Pleasure* 121).

Pfaller argues that, because of its ambivalence belief has “proved to be compulsory for its actors – more so than faith is for the faithful”. He then goes on to make the historical claim that belief “appeared as a universal early form of ideology” which, because of the compulsion to act upon it, was even better placed to play a solidaristic role than an ideology based upon faith, which, Pfaller claims, only “appeared as a later form [of ideology] typical only of certain cultures [including our own]” (121). Pfaller offers this history of ideology not as an accurate account of the past. Rather, it is what Foucault calls “a history of the present” – a story about the past which has the conceptual function of providing a stage upon which a current conceptual division is exhibited to advantage.

In the light of this history, Pfaller raises the key question of “what causes the transition from belief to faith-like forms of ideology. The transition occurs, he claims, “as a result of a tension internal to belief [specifically its ambivalence, which means that] we can...speak of a ‘dialectic of belief’”, and, he adds, “correspondingly with this dialectic...belief would gradually evolve into the self-esteem of faith” (122). In support of this claim, Pfaller offers his version of Freud’s account of the evolution of religion, that we find in his essay “Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices”. Following Freud, Pfaller claims that, historically, religion began as enactments of belief, which the religious acted upon *despite* “knowing better”. Pfaller argues that it is precisely this ambivalence between the practices of the “faithful” and their “better knowledge” that explains the practices’ compulsory quality. Pfaller then adds that, because the beliefs that were enacted by the practices were foolish, the practices themselves offered a weak, easily undermined defense against the repressed instinctual practices for which they substituted, especially “as new temptations surface[d]”. As a result, Pfaller says, citing Freud, “The defensive conflict must be constantly renewed – not only because new temptations surface...but also because the achieved [defensive] solutions increasingly prove to be unfit forms of defence” (Freud *SE IX*, 127). Consequently, the religious rituals undergo a process of what Pfaller calls “miniaturization”, so that, as Freud puts it, “the petty ceremonials...gradually become the essential thing and push

aside [even further] the underlying thoughts [repressed instinctual impulses]...[and] tend to become increasingly 'foolish' and 'senseless' in appearance" (128). As a result, we reach the situation in which the high Church of England finds itself today: personal conviction of God's existence, indeed any theological knowledge at all, has become irrelevant – reduced to "counting the number of angels on the head of a pin" – but ritual practices have multiplied, swollen in importance, despite their increasing distance from any justification: "all smells and bells", as we say.

This diffusion of ever more formal rituals, and correspondingly their increasing distance from any "better knowledge" that might justify them, ends up undermining the system. Pfaller asserts that it at this point of *reductio ad absurdum* that "a switch" takes place, away from the increasing ritualization of the religious belief system towards what Freud calls a process of "reform", which he describes "aim[ing] at re-establishment of the original balance of values" (126, Pfaller *Pleasure* 128). At this point Pfaller intervenes into Freud's narrative. He insists that, rather than the restoration of an "original balance of values", the process of reform that Freud has in mind here is a switch to a system of faith in which the once-upon-a-time-believer-now-man-of-faith is committed to closing the gap between knowledge and action/belief in the direction of knowledge rather than ritual; a switch that Pfaller exemplifies by that other English church, Hume and his anti-ritualistic "invisible religion" in which no ritual practices are permitted that are not justified by good sense (132).

I suggest contra Pfaller that, when Freud says that the religious reform "aim[s] at re-establishment of the original balance of values", we take him at his word. In particular, I argue contra Pfaller, that the reform that Freud has in mind *cannot* be a religion-of-faith, since, as both Pfaller and Freud indicate, faith is a *later* form of religious practice rather than an "original". Instead, I suggest, the reform that Freud has in mind when he talks of returning to an "original balance of values" is a return to a pre-miniaturized form of belief in which the gap between belief and knowledge is not so wide that rituals are irrelevant (Hume's "invisible

religion”) nor reduced to purely formal gesturings so divorced from knowledge that their “foolishness” has become magnified to the point of absurdity (the high Church of England). In short, for Freud, the switch is not forward to faith but instead backwards to an earlier form of belief, in which some sort of “balance” existed between theology and ritual—not a “balance” in the sense of a synthesis, of course, but rather a balance in which ambivalence, *qua* a tension between belief/ritual and knowledge, is restored to the point that the ritual enactments of belief take on a compulsive quality despite (indeed precisely because of) being in tension with “better knowledge”. Of course, this reformed religion is open to the same self-destructive dialectic of belief that brought it to the point of reform in the first place, but, I argue, it is precisely in the succession of dissolutions and installation of such reforms (with of course changes in content permitted) that resides religion’s hope of ever-lasting.

This Freudian history of religion illustrates that the gap, which is constitutive of belief – namely the gap between the twin poles of, on the one side, ritual and, on the other side, “better knowledge” – can be closed in two ways: (1) it can be closed around the pole of ritual, which ends up with a degraded form of belief in which a purified, “stand alone” system of rituals transcends the harsh judgement of “better knowledge” (the heavily ritualized high Church of England), or (2) it can be closed around the pole of better knowledge (Hume’s “invisible religion”).¹⁶ I suggest that in so far as both of these developments – namely the degradation of belief into pure ritual that Freud takes as the trigger for reform, as well as Pfaller’s version of Freud’s “reform” religion, namely the shift towards an anti-ritualistic rational religion – involve the dissolution of ambivalence, they are, in Pfaller’s sense, *shifts away from belief into faith*, but undertaken in opposite directions: They mark, on the one hand, a shift towards faith in ritualistic forms (knowledge as *connaissance*), and, on the other hand, a shift toward faith in “better knowledge” of a propositional kind (*savoir*). And contra Pfaller, neither of these switches constitutes what Freud himself presents as the moment of “reform”, namely a *regressive* shift back to full belief, which “work[s] retroactively” for “a re-establishment of the original balance of values” (Freud *SE IX* 126).

This brief excursus into Freud's history of religion and Pfaller's expurgation of it raises the question of whether, as Freud hints but Pfaller denies, there is space in religious life for a happy ending, in which happiness is not only present but also experienced as happiness. In terms of the argument that I have been running here, this question comes down to whether religion can be sustained as what I called a perverse substitute activity, in which ambivalence between ritual and better knowledge is preserved along with an element of play? Pfaller says no. Even in the case of playing games, he contends, faith will eventually triumph over belief. To be specific, Pfaller contends that even when we treat a game with "sacred seriousness" – even as we enjoy playing it – we will grow tired of devoting ourselves to its "foolishness". Against this pessimistic diagnosis, I suggest, that what Freud calls "reform" heralds the possibility of breaking the hold of faith and reestablishing belief – not permanently, of course, since inevitably belief will degrade again into one of the forms of faith (either high church smells-and-bells or Hume's rational religion), but at least for long enough to provide a temporary respite from the joyless horrors of faith. *And*, by being open to renewal, this respite offers not only an alternative to endless faith, but also, by incorporating an element of play, a path to true happiness.

For the reader concerned with the rosy theological implications of the last conclusion, let me hasten to assure you that my point in dwelling upon the history of religion is political rather than theological: namely that religion provides a template for investigating the question of whether our fate includes the possibility of using ideology constructively (Gramsci) or whether instead we are destined to be being used by it (Althusser). Following Pfaller, I divide ideologies into two main categories – ideologies-of-belief and ideologies-of-faith. I take ideology-of-belief to be characterized by a double ambivalence: First a strong ambivalence due to what Pfaller calls an "unconscious conflict" between a repressed instinctual impulse and the defenses against its return. This strong form of ambivalence, which is common to both ideology-of-belief and an ideology-of-faith, is (Pfaller argues) responsible for the compulsive nature

of the ideological substitute practices, and ultimately, in a collectivized form, lays down the conditions for an ideologically induced solidarity. Second, a weak form of ambivalence, characteristic of ideology-of-belief but not of ideology-of-faith, which takes the form of a gap between, on the one hand, the suspended “illusion-without-owners” that an ideologically interpellated subject enacts in his or her practices, and, on the other hand, the “better knowledge” by which the subject suspends the illusion. I have argued that it is the perverse *recognition* (rather than neurotic repression) of this weak ambivalence that enables the pleasurable experience of pleasure.

The question, then, is whether it is possible to sustain a happily perverse ideology-of-belief, or whether (as in Pfaller’s account of religion) it is inevitable that we end up mired in either an unhappily neurotic ideology-of-belief or (perhaps an even worse fate) an ideology-of-faith in which self-esteem displaces pleasure. In the context of examining this question, Pfaller notes that in our society today, “we do not acknowledge the illusions without owners” (Pfaller *Pleasure* 282). In claiming this, he does *not* mean that we, in our culture, deny the existence of illusions without owners, but rather that we “dismiss” them. By this he means not only that we intellectually distance ourselves from them by using our “better knowledge” to “see through” them, but also that, in so far as we organize our activities in accord with such illusions (as we continue to do, despite intellectually distancing them) we do not acknowledge, indeed repress, that we are doing so.

Freud alerts us to this fact of everyday life: “For instance, to take the case of the bed ceremonial: the chair must stand in a particular place beside the bed; the clothes must lie upon it, folded in a particular order; the blanket must be tucked in at the bottom and the sheet smoothed out; the pillows must be arranged in such and such a manner, and the subject’s own body must lie in a precisely defined position. Only after all this may he go to sleep” *A propos* of Pfaller’s last point, we add that it is not only the compulsive adherence to such rituals that is the issue, but also that as subjects today, we conceal from ourselves—neurotically repress—how dependent we are upon such rituals and the beliefs-of-

others that they enact (even as we distance ourselves from them) (Freud *SE IX*, 119). (In Lacan's terms, in so far as we do this – distance ourselves from the beliefs, which we refuse to recognize that we enact in our daily rituals – we are the “non-dupes who err”).

The political point of this is that, for better or worse, in so far as such beliefs-of-others and the rituals in which they are embodied, take on a collective dimension they take on a solidaristic role of holding together the social fabric—and in that sense, we may say, take on an “ideological” dimension in the conventional sense of the term. But at the same time, Pfaller argues, in so far as we refuse to recognize our dependence upon them, we lose touch with the pleasures that they nevertheless offer. Worse than that, in so far as we repress that dependence, they take on a neurotic quality—a primary source of what Freud calls the “discontents of civilization”.

To make matters even worse, Pfaller points out, we willingly enact another sort of ideology into which, Pfaller argues, the ideology-of-belief tends to degenerate: namely an ideology-of-faith (Pfaller *Pleasure* 265-268). This either consists of what Freud calls “unwritten laws” that are realized in pure (high Church) rituals, which, by transcending the criticism that “better knowledge” throws at them, discredit--or at least make irrelevant – our “better knowledge” (*SE IX*, 118). Or it consists of personal convictions – “illusions *with* owners” – which, having owned up to having them subjects use to justify the practices in which the illusions are realized (Hume's “invisible religion”). In both cases, Pfaller argues, the weak ambivalence that characterizes belief is lost, and as a result contact with the pleasures that the practices produce is lost too. In short, the concerns raised by an ideology of faith are that, as Pfaller makes the point, the shift to an ideology of faith creates a “massive loss of pleasure” (282).

The upshot – and here I agree with Pfaller – is that if we are to avoid not only this loss of pleasure but also the mad (neurotic) discontents of civilization, and at the same time achieve the solidarity that is necessary to the formation of the social then there is only one form

of ideology that will do the job: namely the perverse form of ideology-of-belief. Thus – and here I agree with Pfaller – the political project for today is to work towards a society that is organized not by a joyless ideology of faith in which narcissistic self-esteem replaces pleasure, but rather by an ideology of belief *in its non-neurotic perverse form*, which manages to preserve what Huizinga points out that we, in our society today, have lost: namely the “ludic element of culture” (282).

My main point here is that discarding Pfaller's rather gloomy prospect for religious belief (namely its inevitable decay into faith) in favor of Freud's more optimistic gesture toward religious “reform,” may provide a means of thinking in new ways about the possibilities of realizing Pfaller's political project. To be specific, by exploring an analogy between what Freud says about the reform of religious practice (namely as the renewal of belief rather than, as Pfaller claims, a degeneration into faith) it may well be that we can gain some new insight into the possibilities for a positive change in the ideological forms of society today. Although, at the same time, it is important to bear in mind that, because of Freud's taken for granted assumption of an analogy between obsessive ceremonies and religious practices, it may well be that, by using his theory of religious reform as a model for political change, we skew things in the familiar direction of a civilization bedeviled by neurotic discontents.

· Another well-known weakness in Althusser's account, which I do not have the space to discuss: in so far as he gives an account of how individuals acquire subjectivity, it seems that the individuals in question cannot be subjects already, but, in apparently direct contradiction of this he says that “*individuals are always-already subjects*” (Althusser 164). Žižek and Pfaller both offer ways out of this difficulty.

· This Žižekian formulation has the provocative consequence of rendering redundant a whole tradition in political activism, namely the sixties politics of consciousness-raising—a consequence that, no doubt, goes some of the way to explaining the hostility with which Žižek's ideas have been greeted. Althusser, of course, would reject this Žižekian formulation, not because of a hankering for consciousness-raising—on the contrary, he would agree totally with the political bankruptcy of consciousness-raising—but rather because, unlike Žižek, his theoretical concerns are purely with what people

do, independently of what they may or may not believe or know. I return to this point below.

³ This raises the key question of how, from an Althusserian perspective, to reconstruct Marx's famous distinction between the "base" and "superstructure"—a distinction that Marx drew in terms of the difference between a material "base" of economic practices and an immaterial "superstructure" of ideological ideas.

⁴ Note the ambiguity in the phrase "ideological unity": is the unity itself ideological in the sense that it is an ideological construct, or is the unity independently constituted and the ideology merely a means of consolidating it?

⁵ Gramsci is a little less doctrinaire in his materialism than Althusser, in so far as, when it comes to defining ideology, he does not dismiss the realm of ideas *tout court*, but instead focuses upon ideas as the "necessary structuring principles" of practices.

⁶ In his inaugural *Collège de France* lecture (1977), in what amounts to a pun on the title of Lacan's Seminar XXI (1973-4), "*les non-dupes errent*", Barthes tells us that *les dupes non-errent*. In saying this he means that the fools (the ones who err) are not the dupes who enact the ideological lies even while "seeing through" them. Rather, the fools are the "*non-dupes*", who, because they "see through" the lies, think that they are somehow inoculated against their effects. In short, the dupes have the advantage of playing with the lies. They see though the lies but even so, *and in full knowledge of what they are doing*, act upon them; whereas the non-dupes err in thinking that, by seeing through the lies, they are immune to their effects, unaware that they continue to act upon them (Friedlander 125).

⁷ Michael Scriven argues that, although this sort of epistemological circularity renders an explanation useless as a potential predictor, it is a harmless characteristic of many explanations (Scriven).

⁸ Jakobson implies that the chain of associations between ideas being determined by preexisting relations of similarity and contiguity between the items signified by the ideas (or, for that matter, by preexisting material relations between the signifiers of the ideas, as in the relations between signifiers created by punning (Pfaller 146)

⁹ The subject's desire, as Lacan reminds us, is the desire of the (m)Other (Lacan *XI* Chapter 16).

¹⁰ Pfaller notes a similar paradox in the behavior of obsessives: namely that obsessives' commitment—indeed compulsion—to acting out their rituals is quite consistent with, indeed, Freud suggests, seems to be a consequence of, their admitting that they have no adequate reason for performing them: "I know that I take my tidying up activities too far but I don't seem able to stop myself; indeed, paradoxically, the very stupidity of my activities seems to be an impediment to my stopping them" (Pfaller *Pleasure* 27-29).

¹¹ In confirmation of this hypothesis we may note that, despite the release of tension that it creates, the process of catharsis, which involves a rapid release of tension, will be unpleasurable, because the rapid change in the rate of flow of libido in a cathartic release of libido creates turbulence in the libidinal flow, although the end-point of the catharsis may, of course, be pleasurable, because the flow will have been reduced to "normal" speed at which it is no longer turbulent.

¹² One could try to rescue Pfaller's argument by claiming that Trump's arrogance is merely a cover for a wounded ego, covertly bleeding from self-contempt, but this seems to be an ad hoc shift with little going for it other than saving Pfaller's argument.

¹³ Specifically, it seems that the origins of Trump's pleasure from tweeting is an exhibitionistic pleasure arising from the attention that his tweets garner, and, doubling this, a pleasure at showing up the alleged experts--the self-proclaimed "fact-checkers"--for failing to understand that what he says are not lies but instead ironic exaggerations. An interesting complication: Trump surely knows better than to believe the global-warming sceptics, whose opinions he nevertheless broadcasts and even enacts. Following Freud, then, we may speculate, that broadcasting these beliefs is a sort of distorted return of the repressed pleasures of the passive arm of the invocatory drive: namely hearing rather than speaking. We may take the object of this invocatory drive to be the Voice of the Other (what Lacan calls the soundings of the Shofar (Lacan *X*245)) with which Trump attempts to align his own utterances even as he attempts to hear it in the shitty remarks of his experts that he rebroadcasts.

¹⁴ Here Pfaller calls upon two Freudian ideas: Freud's early idea that the "strangulation" or "damming up" of libido is experienced as unpleasurable, as well as the concept of secondary narcissism in which the fixing of object-libido onto the ego-object transforms object-libido into ego-libido (or at least into libido that is indistinguishable from ego-libido) (Laplanche and Pontalis 13, 94; Freud *General* 64).

¹⁵ Freud's explicitly indicates that the excessive accumulation – or as he calls it "damming up"-- of libido in *either* form--either ego-libido *or* object-libido – results in unpleasure. For example, he writes: "the mechanism of disease...in the transference neuroses...is to be connected with the damming -up of the *object*-libido (Freud *General* 66, italics mine); and of course, the neurotic "unhappy" form of being-in-love involves a "marked sexual overestimation" of the beloved, which in turn implies a damming up of object-libido upon the "love object" at the expense of an "impoverishment of the ego in respect of libido" (69).

¹⁶ The Humean alternative is the anti-ritualistic, rational religion of my youth, in which, by dismissing the implausible remarks in the Bible as either anachronistic or as no more than colorful metaphors, scientifically and rhetorically trained priests trimmed down the Bible in order to make it fit with the latest scientific theory. Thanks to well-meaning friends, my later brushes with religion veered more to the high Church side.

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