

Beyond Identification (Upper Level of the Graph of Desire)

'Che vuoi?'

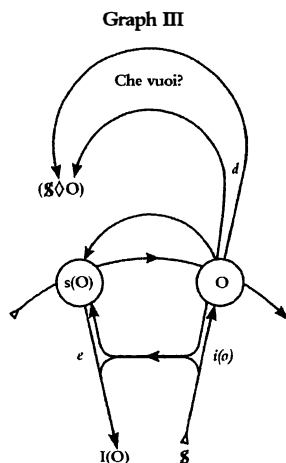
This interplay of imaginary and symbolic identification under the domination of symbolic identification constitutes the mechanism by means of which the subject is integrated into a given socio-symbolic field – the way he/she assumes certain 'mandates', as was perfectly clear to Lacan himself:

Lacan knew how to extract from Freud's text the difference between ideal ego, marked by him *i*, and ego-ideal, *I*. On the level of *I*, you can without difficulties introduce the social. The *I* of the ideal can be in a superior and legitimate way constructed as a social and ideological function. It was moreover Lacan himself who did this in his *Écrits*: he situates a certain politics in the very foundations of psychology, so that the thesis that all psychology is social can be treated as Lacanian. If not on the level at which we are examining *i*, then at least on the level at which we fix *I*.⁹

The only problem is that this 'square of the circle' of interpellation, this circular movement between symbolic and imaginary identification, never comes out without a certain leftover. After every 'quilting' of the signifier's chain which retroactively fixes its meaning, there always remains a certain gap, an opening which is rendered in the third form of the graph by the famous '*Che vuoi?*' – 'You're telling me that, but what do you want with it, what are you aiming at?'

This question mark arising above the curve of 'quilting' thus indicates the persistence of a gap between utterance and its enunciation: at the level of utterance you're saying this, but what do you want to tell me with it,

9 Jacques Alain Miller, 'Les Réponses du réel', in *Aspects du malaise dans la civilisation*, Paris: Navarin, 1987, p. 21.



through it? (In the established terms of speech act theory, we could of course denote this gap as the difference between locution and the illocutionary force of a given utterance.) And it is at this exact place of the question arising above the utterance, at the place of ‘Why are you telling me this?’, that we have to locate *desire* (small *d* in the graph) in its difference to demand: you demand something of me, but what do you really want, what are you aiming at through this demand? This split between demand and desire is what defines the position of the hysterical subject: according to the classic Lacanian formula, the logic of the hysterical demand is ‘I’m demanding this of you, but what I’m really demanding of you is to refute my demand because this is not it!’

It is this intuition which is behind the ill-famed male chauvinist wisdom that ‘woman is a whore’: woman is a whore because we never really know what she means – for example, she says ‘No!’ to our advances, but we can never be sure that this ‘No!’ does not really mean a double ‘Yes!’ – an appeal to an even more aggressive approach; in this case, her real desire is the very opposite of her demand. In other words, ‘woman is a whore’ is a vulgar version of the unanswerable Freudian question ‘*Was will das Weib?*’ [‘What does the woman want?’].

The same intuition is probably at work behind another common wisdom, which tells us that politics is also a whore: it is not simply that the domain of politics is corrupted, treacherous, and so on; the point is rather that every political demand is always caught in a dialectics in which it aims at something other than its literal meaning: for example, it can function as a provocation intending to be refused (in which case the best way to frustrate it is to comply with it, to consent to it without reservation). As is well known, this was Lacan's reproach to the students' revolt of 1968: that it was basically a hysterical rebellion asking for a new Master.

This '*Che vuoi?*' is perhaps best illustrated by the starting point of Hitchcock's film *North by Northwest*. To lead the Russian agents off the right track, the CIA invents a non-existent agent named George Kaplan. Rooms are reserved for him in hotels, phone calls are made in his name, plane tickets purchased, and so on – all this to convince the Russian agents that Kaplan really exists, when in reality it is just a void, a name without a bearer. At the beginning of the film the hero, an ordinary American named Roger O. Thornhill, finds himself in the lounge of a hotel under observation by the Russians because the mysterious Kaplan is supposed to be staying there. A hotel clerk enters the lounge saying: 'Phone call for Mr Kaplan. Is Mr Kaplan here?' Exactly at that same moment, by pure coincidence, Thornhill makes a sign to this clerk, wanting to send a telegram to his mother. The Russians who are overseeing the scene mistake him for Kaplan. When he wants to leave the hotel they kidnap him, take him to a lonely villa, and ask him to tell them all about his espionage work. Of course, Thornhill knows nothing about it, but his professions of innocence pass for a double game.

Where lies the – one might call it – psychologically convincing nature of this scene, based nevertheless on an almost unbelievable coincidence? Thornhill's situation corresponds to a fundamental situation of a human being as a being-of-language (*parlêtre*, to use Lacan's condensed writing). The subject is always fastened, pinned, to a signifier which represents him for the other, and through this pinning he is loaded with a symbolic mandate, he is given a place in the intersubjective network of symbolic

relations. The point is that this mandate is ultimately always arbitrary: since its nature is performative, it cannot be accounted for by reference to the 'real' properties and capacities of the subject. So, loaded with this mandate, the subject is automatically confronted with a certain '*Che vuoi?*', with a question of the Other. The Other is addressing him as if he himself possesses the answer to the question of why he has this mandate, but the question is, of course, unanswerable. The subject does not know why he is occupying this place in the symbolic network. His own answer to this '*Che vuoi?*' of the Other can only be the hysterical question: 'Why am I what I'm supposed to be, why have I this mandate? Why am I [a teacher, a master, a king . . . or George Kaplan]?' Briefly: '*Why am I what you [the big Other] are saying that I am?*'

And the final moment of the psychoanalytic process is, for the analysand, precisely when he gets rid of this question – that is, when he accepts his being as *non-justified by the big Other*. This is why psychoanalysis began with the interpretation of hysterical symptoms, why its 'native soil' was the experience of female hysteria: in the last resort, what is hysteria if not precisely the effect and testimony of a failed interpellation; what is the hysterical question if not an articulation of the incapacity of the subject to fulfil the symbolic identification, to assume fully and without restraint the symbolic mandate? Lacan formulates the hysterical question as a certain 'Why am I what you're telling me that I am?' – that is, which is that surplus-object in me that caused the Other to interpellate me, to 'hail' me as . . . [king, master, wife . . .]?'¹⁰ The hysterical question opens the gap of what is 'in the subject more than the subject', of the *object in subject* which resists interpellation – subordination of the subject, its inclusion in the symbolic network.

Perhaps the strongest artistic depiction of this moment of hystericization is Rossetti's famous painting 'Ecce Ancilla Domini', showing Mary at the very moment of interpellation – when the Archangel Gabriel reveals to her her mission: to conceive immaculately and to give birth to the son

of God. How does Mary react to this astonishing message, to this original 'Hail Mary'? The painting shows her frightened, with a bad conscience, withdrawing from the archangel into a corner, as if asking herself 'Why was I selected for this stupid mission? Why me? What does this repulsive ghost really want of me?' The exhausted, pale face and the dark eyeteeth are telltale enough: we have before us a woman with a turbulent sex life, a licentious sinner – in short, an Eve-like figure; and the painting depicts 'Eve interpellated into Mary', her hysterical reaction to it.

Martin Scorsese's film *The Last Temptation of Christ* goes a step further in this direction: its theme is simply the *hystericization of Jesus Christ himself*; it shows us an ordinary, carnal, passionate man discovering gradually, with fascination and horror, that he is the son of God, bearer of the dreadful but magnificent mission to redeem humanity through his sacrifice. The problem is that he cannot come to terms with this interpellation: the meaning of his 'temptations' lies precisely in the hysterical resistance to his mandate, in his doubts about it, in his attempts to evade it even when he is already nailed to the cross.¹¹

The Jew and Antigone

We come across this '*Che vuoi?*' everywhere in the political domain, including the 1988 American election struggle in which, after Jesse Jackson's first successes, the press started to ask 'What does Jackson really want?'

11 The other achievement of the film is the final rehabilitation of Judas as the real tragic hero of this story: he was the one whose love for Christ was the greatest, and it was for this reason that Christ considered him strong enough to fulfil the horrible mission of betraying him, thus assuring the accomplishment of Christ's destiny (the Crucifixion). The tragedy of Judas was that in the name of his dedication to the Cause, he was prepared to risk not only his life but even his 'second life', his posthumous good name: he knows very well that he will enter history as the one who betrayed our Saviour, and he is prepared to endure even that for the fulfilment of God's mission. Jesus used Judas as a means to attain his goal, knowing very well that his own suffering would be transformed into a model imitated by millions (*imitatio Christi*), while Judas's sacrifice is a pure loss without any narcissistic benefit. Perhaps he is a little like the faithful victims of the Stalinist monster trials who confessed their guilt, proclaimed themselves miserable scum, knowing that by so doing they were accomplishing the last and highest service to the Cause of the Revolution.