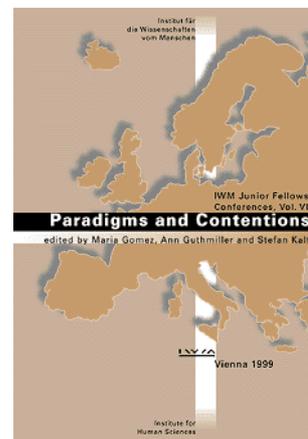


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Bodies that Mean: On (Mis)recognition of the Female Body

Maria M. Gomez

"An ideology really succeeds when even the facts which at first sight contradict it start to function as arguments in its favor."

Slavoj Zizek

The question of recognition occupies a central position in contemporary political and philosophical debates. Recognition constitutes not only the question of the so-called multiculturalism of western societies but the kernel of discourses -in favor or against- the formation of individual and collective identities and their placement as political forces in the scope of a democracy "to come."

There are, however, some conflictual meanings in this notion as it appears in current debates. Such meanings certainly cannot be detached from the contrasting political views in which the notion acquires one meaning or another. I want to contrast the notion of recognition as it is presented in some contemporary discourses with the challenge imposed on it by the critique of ideology.

For feminist purposes, it is not enough to make such a critique since feminisms also envision the transformation of the symbolic order. Thus, my argument will be

oriented towards a critique of the heterosexual/ "ho(m)mosexual"¹ paradigm under the aspects of recognition vs. ideology, in order to explore how this paradigm is inscribed on the female body and to identify some topics that could lead towards a transformation of the "hom(m)osexual" symbolic order.

This text is a work in progress and consequently, should be read as a *bitacora de viaje*, as a map I am creating through my own journey. There are no conclusive arguments and many problems remain open. However, it is a work informed by my conviction that feminist thought challenges, on a different register, the fixed limits of social reality. For that reason, I borrow the expression from Teresa de Lauretis: feminist thought is pregnant with "the uncertainty of my footing in something as delusive as my own passion, and the bewildering mobility of my desire."²

A. Recognition

The contemporary social and political notion of recognition is grounded in the Hegelian definition of self-consciousness, that is to say, in the argument that our sense of who we are emerges, not in the sphere of the isolated individual, but in relation to the other. Under such circumstances, the presence of the other becomes no less than the fundamental condition for shaping our self/ves. But of course, at the same time, it opens a universe of questions about how we understand the act of recognizing and being recognized.

In a general sense, the notion of recognition (*Anerkennung*) is defined in at least in three ways: as appreciation, as acceptance, and as acknowledge. Indeed, the dictionary defines it as the "acknowledgment {of} the existence, legality, or validity of, esp. by formal approval or sanction; to accord notice or attention to; to treat as worthy of consideration; to show appreciation of, reward."³

It seems possible to divide these notions into the legal/political and psychological aspects of recognition. The first stresses the question of acknowledgment; the sec-

¹ I want to use Luce Irigaray's expression "hom(m)osexuality" to replace the notion of heterosexuality. The expression "hom(m)o sexuality" stresses the male oriented character of (hetero)sexuality by using the French word *homme*(man) as a prefix to sexuality and distinguishes it from "homosexuality", that is to say, gay and lesbian sexuality.

² Teresa De Lauretis, *Practices of Love*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, p.4

³ *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary. On Historical Principles*. Edited by Lesley Brown, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993, Vol. 2. Cfr. also, *Langenscheidts Enzyklopädisches Wörterbuch. Deutsch-Englisch*, Edited by Otto Springer, Berlin: Langenscheidt. Vol.I.

ond deals with the question of acceptance and appreciation. In the legal realm the notion of 'recognition' refers mainly to the acknowledgment of paternity or to the "repossession of land by a feudal superior." In international law, for instance, it means "the process by which a State declares that another political entity fulfills the conditions of Statehood and acknowledges its willingness to deal with it as a member of the international community."⁴

In the psychological perspective, recognition means a mental process in which a *person* or a thing is identified as an entity which was previously known or as an entity belonging to a known category.⁵ If this is so, feelings of appreciation and acceptance become dependent on notions connected to "identification" with and "belonging" to certain categories. At this point, the question is under which categories a person is or can be recognized as being worthy of appreciation and acceptance. If recognition presupposes a previous knowledge, what is the status of those who do not belong to any previously known category or identity?

These general questions and definitions need further and more concrete formulation and explanation. However, they bring my attention to the following: first, the legal/political aspect of recognition has been defined as acknowledgment from the male other either through paternity, lordship, or following the same logic of paternity found in the latter two, the approval of statehood from another political identity. In other words and combining notions, acceptance and appreciation for individuals or states are obtained in the Name of the Father.⁶ Secondly, the psychological aspect of the notion of recognition, the mental process of recognizing a person or being recognized oneself recognized, is embedded in the political definition insofar as both acts depend on categories of 'identity' and 'belonging' previously established in the symbolic order.

The current theoretical debate on recognition splits up political and psychological recognition. In both perspectives, however, it is misrecognition which leads the discussion. It is the lack of recognition, in whatever sense it is understood, which makes it a political and/or a psychological problem.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Cfr. Ibid.

⁶ According to Jacques Lacan, the Name of the Father, the Paternal Metaphor is the performative act that shapes social reality. The symbolic order is the giver of identity and it is represented in the Name of the Father. When the child identifies the father with the figure of Law, she is introduced into the order of language breaking the imaginary link with the mother and confronting the authority. Thus, the construction of identity implies the symbolic order, namely, in the Name of the Father.

To introduce the notion of psychological recognition, I will follow Axel Honneth's theory of personal integrity. In his view, "every individual is dependent on the possibility of constant reassurance by the Other...{then}the experience of disrespect poses the risk of an injury which *can cause* the identity of the entire person to collapse."⁷

It is in the notion of respect that Honneth finds a definition for recognition and conversely, misrecognition appears as an experience of disrespect. Indeed, acts against a person's physical integrity deprive an individual of autonomy insofar as they attack her self-confidence and basic trust in the world. The inversion of this type of degradation is love, namely, an emotional attachment that provides confirmation and restores self-confidence.⁸

Exclusion of a subject from the complete equal rights within a specific society endangers the ability of the individual to participate in the institutional order and, in this sense, the subject is not only condemned to social passivity but "to the feeling that she [lacks] the status of a full-fledged partner who possesses equal moral rights."⁹ When the person's moral accountability is denied, this leads to a loss of self-respect. The inversion of this form of misrecognition is precisely the intersubjective process in which the individual "learns to see herself from the perspective of her partners in interaction as a bearer of equal rights".¹⁰ This process restores subject's self-respect.

The third form of misrecognition has to do with the negative social evaluation of an individual or a group's lifestyle. If the form in which a society structures its values degrades an individual's forms of life as deviant or inferior, the subject's self-esteem is endangered.¹¹ The inversion of this type of misrecognition is solidarity, namely the mutual horizon of values, goals, shared burdens, and responsibilities.¹²

Then, love, rights, and solidarity become conditions for self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem and "establish the moral infrastructure of a social life-world in which individuals can both acquire and preserve their integrity as human beings."¹³ However, as Honneth explains, these conditions of interaction are only

⁷ Axel Honneth, "The Fragmented World of the Social" Suny Albany Press, 1995, p. 249.

⁸ Cfr., *ibid.*, p.253-254.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.251.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.254.

¹¹ Cfr. *ibid.*, p.251.

¹² Cfr. *ibid.*, p.255.

¹³ *Ibid.* p.253.

the formal requirements that do not bring by themselves the institutional framework in which they may be realized.¹⁴ This psychological notion of recognition stresses the moral character of intersubjectivity under the notion of personal integrity or dignity.

To contrast this perspective, I will follow Nancy Fraser's argument according to which recognition should be placed in verifiable social relations rather than in individual psychology.¹⁵ She states that even if oppressed people manage to keep their self-esteem intact, the oppression is still wrong and as a consequence what is unjust is not the destruction of subjectivity - which may or may not happen - but the handicapping of participatory parity.¹⁶

Honneth's "psychologization" of recognition brings with it some dangers that Fraser tries to avoid by linking recognition with social justice. For instance, she states that the identification of misrecognition with the internal distortion of the oppressed self-consciousness could easily add injury to insult. To equate misrecognition with prejudices in the mind of oppressors could lead us toward authoritarian gestures to control their beliefs. Furthermore, she emphasizes the normative strength of detaching psychology from recognition since grounding the latter on the former puts into risk the moral obligation of the demands for recognition by mortgaging its normative obligation to psychological facts. Finally, in a direct critique of Honneth, she asserts that his argument about moral protection of social esteem as a condition for non-distorted identity formation drains social esteem of any meaning and leads to the idea that everybody has the same moral right to it.¹⁷

In contrast, Fraser finds in the notion of participatory parity her definition of recognition. Indeed, "to be misrecognized is... to be denied the status of a full partner in social interaction and prevented from participating as a peer...as a consequence of institutionalized patterns of interpretation and evaluation that constitute

¹⁴ Cfr. *ibid.*, p.256.

¹⁵ Cfr. Nancy Fraser, "La justicia social en la época de la política de la identidad: redistribución, reconocimiento y participación" en *Estudios Ocasionales*, CIJUS, Bogotá: Uniandes, Nov. 1997, p.20. All quotes from this piece are from my translation. Fraser's arguments on recognition as a mode of justice are complete only in relation to her reflection on redistribution. Since here I am only considering the problem of recognition, my presentation of her arguments is partial.

¹⁶ Lecture's notes in Nancy Fraser's seminar "Paradigms in Political Theorizing", New School for Social Research, New York, Fall, 1997.

¹⁷ Cfr. Nancy Fraser, "La justicia social en la época de la política de la identidad: redistribución, reconocimiento y participación" *op.cit.*, pp.20-21.

one as comparatively unworthy of respect or esteem."¹⁸ Then recognition exists if participatory parity exists in every social formation.

Beyond this, Fraser proposes a more complex articulation in which recognition is not necessarily linked to identity politics. In her piece, "Recognition and Redistribution," she points out the virtues of a deconstructive option for recognition in comparison to a standard multicultural option.¹⁹ The deconstructive perspective emphasizes the transformation, not affirmation, of existing groups' identities and differences. In this sense, recognition is a task permeated with the need for destabilizing, in the long run, differentiation among existing groups.²⁰

As a consequence, participatory parity is not only the inversion of misrecognition suffered by particular existing identities, but a fundamental element for recognition of all future intersections and formations. Then the conditions which make recognition possible have to be sought in the exploration of the cultural codes that create and "reproduce" the "status injury."²¹ Those cultural codes, namely, "institutionalized patterns of evaluation, interpretation, and communication" endanger participatory parity and produce "fundamental injustice."²² Fraser maintains,

"injustices of misrecognition... are rooted in social patterns of interpretation, evaluation, and communication, hence, if you like, in the symbolic order. But this does not mean they are "merely symbolic". On the contrary, the norms, significations, and constructions of personhood that impede women, racialized peoples, and/or gays and lesbians from parity participation in social life are materially instigated in institutions and social prac-

¹⁸ Nancy Fraser, "Heterosexism, Misrecognition, and Capitalism: A Response to Judith Butler", in *Social Text* 53/54, 1998, p.3.

¹⁹ I understand this notion of "standard multiculturalism," or as Fraser calls it "mainstream multiculturalism," with reference to Charles Taylor's definition of the politics of multiculturalism, that is, "The demand for recognition...is given urgency by the supposed links between recognition and identity, where the latter term designates something like a person's understanding of who they are, of their fundamental defining characteristics as a human being. The thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by *misrecognition* of others..." Charles Taylor "The Politics of Recognition", in *Multiculturalism*, Ed. Amy Gutmann, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1994, p.25.

²⁰ Cfr. Nancy Fraser, "From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a 'Postsocialist' Age". in *Justice Interruptus. Critical Reflections on the 'Postsocialist' Condition.*, New York, Routledge, 1997, p.24.

²¹ I only consider here the problem of misrecognition. Therefore, my argument is partial insofar as it does not treat Fraser's claim of justice as recognition and redistribution.

²² Nancy Fraser, "Heterosexism...", *op.cit.*, pp.3-5.

tices, in social action and embodied habitus, and yes, in ideological state apparatuses. Far from occupying some wispy, ethereal realm, they are material in their existence and effects."²³

On the one hand, she affirms the material character of the harms of misrecognition and also their presence in all levels of social life. On the other hand, Fraser presents the theoretical and political advantages of using deconstruction as an option to overcome injustice in the long run. I would say then that participatory parity is, at this historical point, also an ideal that does not take identities into account, but promises everyone the status of a "full partner" in social interaction regardless of whoever she is or could become.

However, there are some peculiarities of the deconstructive transformative remedy to misrecognition. First, Fraser points to this remedy as a possibility in the long run. This means that the deconstruction of existing identities and differences, in order to open the horizon for new and ever-changing social formations, demands a step-by-step process. Second, she states that for "this scenario to be psychologically and politically feasible [would] require that all people be weaned from their attachment to current cultural constructions of their interests and identities."²⁴ She also affirms that this solution "although cognitively compelling, it is experientially remote."²⁵ However, I think that "materializing" participatory parity as a universal normative condition of possibility for recognition demands a complementary critique of identity formation.

B. Ideological Interpellation

My goal in this section is to identify the levels in which the Althusserian critique of ideology seems to challenge these notions of recognition. Indeed, recognition/misrecognition occurs in and through the presence of the other/Other,²⁶ consequently, intersubjectivity appears either as a space for potential reciprocal relationships where human beings can reach harmony and social justice or as an open-ended space where fractured human beings try to deal with the insurmountable antagonism of their relationships.

²³ Ibid., pp.5-6.

²⁴ Nancy Fraser, "From Redistribution...", *op.cit.*, p. 31.

²⁵ Ibid., footnote 46, p.39. Once again my reference is partial as long as I am not including the complete context of her reflections, namely, the redistribution-recognition dilemma.

²⁶ I use here 'other' in reference to the individual and 'Other' in relation to the symbolic order.

The notions of recognition that I presented above, in spite of their differences, seem to be closer to the first approach to intersubjectivity.²⁷ Althusser's critique of ideology, by contrast, is closer to the second one.²⁸ In the first case, the claim for justice feeds the struggle for recognition. In the second case, justice is displaced by the political moment of decision-making, namely, by one of the forces in conflict to achieve hegemony.²⁹ Thus, recognition becomes a function of what Althusser calls 'ideological interpellation' of the hegemonic force.

If this is so, Althusser's theory is relevant insofar as it constitutes a challenge to these notions of recognition, which posit intersubjectivity as a space for reciprocity or equality. Indeed, any possibility of recognition has to face the vicissitudes of the constitution of self /identities for affirming them or for deconstructing them. If identity is shaped by the gaze of the other/Other, this gaze is, therefore, a powerful - full of power - gaze. It is in the power of the other/Other's gaze where Althusserian theory of the formation of subjects/identities conflates, without a doubt, with the above mentioned notions of recognition.

The subject, says Althusser, is always the subject of ideology. Making a convergence between St. Paul's notion of *logos* and the notion of ideology, he states: "it is in the 'Logos,' meaning in ideology, that we 'live, move and have our being.'"³⁰

But what does the notion of ideology mean? Ideology "represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence."³¹ In other words, ideology is the imaginary, illusory way in which we represent to ourselves the relation which we have with the real conditions of our existence. This means, first of all, that we take this relationship as self-evident - or in Althusser's words as obviousness - as if "how we live, move and have our being" were obvious, and as if being subjects were also part of this obviousness. In the realm of the obvious (ideology) we live our relation to the real conditions of our existence in an imaginary form, as if we were autonomous, as if we were free to determine them.

²⁷ This understanding is closer as well to Habermas and Rawls' theories, among others.

²⁸ In spite of their differences, Derrida, Laclau and Mouffe, and Žižek's theories, among others, are also closer to this view.

²⁹ Cfr. Ernesto Laclau & Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony & Socialist Strategy. Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, New York, Verso, 1985.

³⁰ Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)" in *Mapping Ideology*, Slavoj Žižek ed., New York, Verso, 1994, p.129.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.123,

The subtle effect of ideology is precisely to hide its ideological character and make it appear in the form which "we cannot fail to recognize."³²

However, the imaginary character of the relation which we establish with the real conditions of our existence - that is to say, ideology - has a material existence. It does not consist of the subject's ideas - in the sense of their "ideal or spiritual existence"³³ - but it is inscribed in material actions, practices, and rituals and it is supported by material ideological apparatuses.³⁴ In other words, the materiality of ideology is the materiality of our daily gestures insofar as they belong to a subject "acting in all consciousness according to his [her] belief."³⁵ These gestures, however, belong to an ideological apparatus in which the acting subject is, in reality, "acted" by the system, "set out in the order of its real determination."³⁶

The fundamental function of ideology is to transform individuals into subjects. However, the notion of individuals is an abstraction since there are no subjects outside ideology; "*individuals are always-already subjects*"³⁷ constituted by ideology. We are constructed by ideology even before we are born. For instance, under the "forms of family ideology (paternal/maternal/conjugal/fraternal) in which the unborn child is expected: it is certain in advance that it will bear its Father's Name, and therefore have an identity and be irreplaceable."³⁸

Thus, the question is: how are subjects produced by ideology? It happens through interpellation, a constitutive hailing that is the function of the ideological recognition or misrecognition. Althusser gives us an example: "we all have friends who when they knock on our door and we ask, through the door, the question 'Who is there?' answer, (since 'it is obvious'), 'It's me.' And we recognized that 'it is him' or 'her.' We open the door and 'it's true, it really was she who was there.'"³⁹

In this sense, interpellation is the act by which we perceive ourselves as called and compelled to answer or not to answer that call of the other/Other. In this way, we are constituted as 'good' or 'bad' subjects in the rituals of our daily life since

³² Ibid., p.129.

³³ Ibid., p.128.

³⁴ Cf., *ibid*, p.127.

³⁵ Ibid., p.128.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁷ Ibid., p.132.

³⁸ *Ibidem*.

³⁹ Ibid., p.130.

through this hailing we are (mis)recognized as concrete subjects. However, the success of the ideological interpellation, in its fundamental function of constituting subjects, consists in individuals responding to the hailing as if they autonomously chose to do so. In other words, we live our lives as if we were 'free,' that is to say, as if we could determine autonomously the conditions of our existence. Indeed, subjects "live the relation with their real conditions of existence as if they themselves were the *autonomous principle* of determination of that relation."⁴⁰

Every ideology is determined by one specific interpellation which functions as the axis and organizing principle for the different types of interpellations, such as political, religious, familial, etc. The multiplicity of interpellations coexist and are articulated within an ideological discourse in a relative unity.⁴¹ The key to determining the principle of this unity comes from answering the question about whom the interpellated subject is⁴² and from where she is interpellated.

If the notion of ideological interpellation is compelling as a critique of identity formation, then Fraser and Honneth's theories of recognition have to say something about the lack of autonomy. We act in ideology as if we were autonomous but since there is no subject outside ideology, - except as a metaphor in a scientific knowledge -⁴³ what is at stake is the question of how autonomy is linked to the process of recognition.

C. On (Mis)recognition of the Female Body

My intention now is to comment on the female body as a possible term where the dynamics of psychological and political (mis)recognition conflate with a critique of ideological interpellation. If the subject is an affect of ideological interpellation, why do I place subjectivity in the body and particularly in the female body?

⁴⁰ Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory. Capitalism-Fascism-Populism*, New York, Verso, 1975, p.100.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.101-102.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.101.

⁴³ Cf., Althusser, *op.cit.*, pp.130-131. " In the third Note... {of the "Trois notes sur la theorie de discours' (1966)} Althusser constrains the subject to *ideological* discourse, emphasizing that one can speak of the 'subject of science' or the 'subject of the unconscious' only in a metaphorical sense" Slavoj Zizek, "Superego by Default" in *The Metastases of Enjoyment. Six Essays on Woman and Causality*, Verso, New York, 1994, p.61-62.

I agree with Fraser's critique of Honneth's psychological recognition in at least one aspect, namely, the difficulties of identifying recognition as a non-distorted formation of the self-consciousness. However, my agreement does not have to do directly with her argument against placing the moral obligation of recognition at the mercy of particular psychological theories of self-consciousness formation. My concern is directed mainly at the need to make a distinction between psychological theories of consciousness formation and a theory of the subject.

In my view, it is not the contingent effects of varying interpretations of how individual self-consciousness becomes distorted which put the moral possibility of recognition in jeopardy, but the elaboration of normative demands for recognition out of the frame of a theory of the subject. Indeed, paraphrasing Freud I would say, that to establish the normative conditions of the struggle for recognition without a theory of the subject would put into risk not only the possibility of recognition itself but also would threaten the psychic economy of the subject. It is only by counting on the structure of the subject that normative claims can be actualized.

I want to argue that ideological interpellation challenges theories of recognition to develop their arguments at the level of the structure of subjectivity itself, instead of focusing on the level of individual psychological vicissitudes.

The psychological features that Honneth evokes stress individual and social conditions and the possibilities of a non-distorted formation of the self-consciousness. In his argument, the Hegelian idea of intersubjectivity as the location for the development of self-consciousness is detached from the Hegelian idea of the antagonistic development of processes of recognition, as occur, for instance, in the dialectical of master-slave. Honneth assumes, instead of the Hegelian antagonistic view, a psychological and sociological pragmatism in order to fulfill the theoretical requirements of social justice with the ideal of full human realization.⁴⁴

By contrast, I want to invoke the Lacanian theory of the subject. In his theory of identity formation, the subject is a split (*Spaltung*) subject in spite of her particular/individual experiences. This conception is, in some sense, theoretically compatible with the notion of the subject as the affect of ideological interpellation and with the antagonistic view of intersubjective relationships.

Fraser's argument about recognition opens a different perspective. There are three elements of her position that can be connected, in one way or another, with the critique of ideology: the material character of the injustices of misrecognition,

⁴⁴ Cf., Joel Anderson, "Translator's Introduction", in Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1996.

Fraser's view of deconstructing identities as an option to overcome injustices of misrecognition in the long run, and, perhaps in a more polemic way, her notion of participatory parity.

In fact, it was her reference to the 'ideological states apparatuses'⁴⁵ which prompted my exploration of the critique of ideology. Fraser says that injustices of misrecognition are inscribed in "social patterns of interpretation, evaluation and communication" and that "the norms, significations, and constructions of personhood that impede women, racialized peoples, and/or gays and lesbians from parity participation in social life...are material in their existence and effects." In this sense, she seems to agree with the material character of ideology or the ideological character of (mis)recognition insofar as it is placed, among others, in the 'ideological state apparatuses.'

In Fraser's view, the possibility of breaking apart the dynamics of misrecognition is connected with the transformation, under the normative demand for participatory parity, of the institutionalized patterns that create and reproduce the status injury. It seems that it is possible to transform these cultural codes as a way of breaking with the ideologies that they transport. Since ideology vanishes when its logic is unmasked, the interpretation of the way in which these institutional patterns work represents an effort to break their ideological force.

Fraser privileges the deconstruction of identities over mainstream multiculturalism as a solution for the injustices of misrecognition. The purpose of the deconstructive task is to emphasize the transformation, not affirmation, of existing groups' identities and differences. The notion of participatory parity is the normative ground for such a deconstruction since it constitutes not only the inversion of misrecognition suffered by particular existing identities, but also a fundamental element of recognition for all future intersections and formations.

However, from the point of view of the critique of ideology some problems remain open: how to deal with the assertions that 'there is no subject outside ideology' and 'we are *always-already* subjects?' These two assertions mean that there are no non-ideological discourses, since even the 'subject of science' can be only named as a metaphor. Then all discourses - i.e. the symbolic order- function as a constitutive -ideological- interpellation of identity. But it does not mean that we cannot break the logic of particular ideologies; we indeed are able to do so, as we are able

⁴⁵ Cf., *supra* note 23.

to dissolve the symptoms of the unconscious. However, we can not escape from ideology just as we cannot escape from the unconscious.⁴⁶

Deconstruction of identities appears as a compelling option to break ideologies. The question is: from where can we deconstruct identities? For Fraser, this possibility is permeated by the normative notion of participatory parity as social justice. However, is this deconstructive process enough, on the one hand, to bridge the gap between the universal normativity of participatory parity and the concrete ideological subject, who is present *en personne*?⁴⁷ On the other hand, is this process able to detach the materialization of participatory parity from ideological interpretations?.

At this point, I want to return to the initial question in this section, that is to say, to the relation between the body and the formation of self-consciousness. I will present some arguments to justify placing the body at the center of this discussion.

Perhaps the more compelling argument for connecting the constitution of the self-consciousness with the body is the Lacanian formulation of 'the mirror stage.'⁴⁸ Indeed, for Lacan the self is constituted only through the process of developing a bodily ego. It is only through looking at the other as a mirror that the child is able to project her-self as a whole. The other (mirror) appears to the child as a whole, as a projected "bodily coherence to meet her needs."⁴⁹ Consequently, in an act of anticipation the child identifies (internalizes) her-self with the image of wholeness projected on her by the other (mirror). As a result, "she can perceive a wholeness that she does not experience physically."⁵⁰ Drucilla Cornell's view of bodily integrity sheds light on this relationship between the self and the body. She states,

"the bodily ego is what gives us the ability to organized our perceptions of ourselves as our own... through the bodily ego, the body becomes meaningful as our self, not only as a functional source of delight or a means to an end. Our investment in our bodies is in this sense inseparable from our basic sense of self. The psychical map of the body libidinal delights is both internalized and projected out as the body image through which the self is

⁴⁶ The relation between ideology and the unconscious is explicit in Althusser's work. *op.cit.*, pp.120-122.

⁴⁷ Cf., Zizek, *op.cit.*, p.62

⁴⁸ Cf., Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage", in *Ecrits*, New York, W.W. Norton & Company, 1977.

⁴⁹ Drucilla Cornell, *At the Heart of Freedom. Feminism, Sex & Equality*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1998, p.35.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

*"grounded". I put grounded in quotation marks only to indicate the paradox and fragility of grounding oneself in an image."*⁵¹

1. The process in which the self is constituted as bodily ego, that is to say, the process of grounding one-self as a wholeness in an image, does not stop in childhood but determines the sense of self-identity over time. In this condition the gaze of the other/Other is full of constitutive power for the embodied self.

2. The body is the space in which individual and social objectivities converge. As Susan Bordo observes, the body is a "medium for culture, a powerful symbolic form, a surface on which the central rules, hierarchies and even metaphysical commitments of a culture are inscribed and thus reinforced through the concrete language of the body."⁵²

3. The body is the dwelling of desire, a realm that can - should - be controlled. In other words, controlling the body shapes the way in which desire can be displayed culturally.

4. The body is always a construction of meaning. But meaning, "what matters" in the body and what makes it intelligible is not only or always its being as a social existence, but the meanings that "threaten its existence."⁵³

5. Insofar as ideology is material, and "matter exists in different modalities all rooted in the last instance in the 'physical' matter",⁵⁴ the body can be 'inhabited' by ideology.

These five statements offer some clues to justify the place of the body in the recognition debate. However why do I concentrate on the female body in particular?

From the point of view of ideological interpellation, it is possible to say that the female body constitutes an interpellated subject of ideology. The female body is an interpellated subject in which the different types of interpellations converge under an organizing principle of unity, under the principle of what Adrienne Rich calls 'compulsory heterosexuality,' understood as "a political institution which disem-

⁵¹ Ibidem.

⁵² Susan Bordo, "The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity: A Feminist Appropriation of Foucault", in *Gender/Body/Knowledge. Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing*. Alison M. Jaggar & Susan R. Bordo eds., New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1989, p.13.

⁵³ Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, New York, Routledge, 1997, p.5.

⁵⁴ Althusser, *op.cit.*, p. 126.

powers women"⁵⁵ instead of merely a politically neutral question of sexual preferences.

Indeed, although many ideologies converge in our western societies, all of them seem to share "compulsory heterosexuality" as their organizing principle and interpellative unity. I would say that heterosexuality constitutes the ideology of ideologies, insofar as it crosses the structures that materialize desire through the economic, social, legal and political construction of the female body.

However, does the heterosexual paradigm not equally interpellate both male and female bodies?

I have to answer both affirmatively and negatively to this question. The male body is, in effect, interpellated by the heterosexual logic but the supremacy of patriarchal logic which operates at the center of heterosexual structures functions only if the female body/self is kept powerless or, in other words, only if the control of female body's/self's symbolic meanings remain in the hands of the patriarchal gaze. As an example we could take a look at legislation on abortion, public debates on pornography, or the peculiarities of sexual harassment, among others.

Indeed, the heterosexual ideology is a patriarchal construction insofar as the symbolic order, the space of the law, exists in the Name of the Father. In Freudian terms, cultural work is the result of male sublimation. It is male desire, under the compulsory heterosexual model, which materializes on the female body male intelligibility of what is socially acceptable. The multiple cultural examples of the relation between reproduction and female sexuality is at the top of a list of numerous examples of the given meanings.

If interpellation creates subjects that relate in an imaginary way - as if they were autonomous - to their real conditions of existence, compulsory heterosexuality as the principle of the interpellation of the female body, acts in the patterns that determine what is beautiful, desirable, successful, profitable in it, as well as regulating the way desire can be expressed and lived to be socially acceptable.

Since the female body is socially constructed, that is, it is invested with meaning through compulsory heterosexuality (power/interpellation), its meanings can be deconstructed, namely, the ideology can be challenged if not broken. But it is not enough for the tasks of political transformation or for the purposes of recognition to stop the search for justice in the mere act of deconstruction. Therefore, it is

⁵⁵ Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence", in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale, David M. Halperin eds., New York, Routledge, 1993, p.227.

necessary to return to the question of how to fight compulsory heterosexuality: how and from where to fight its interpellation.

It seems to me that where heterosexual logic dwells we have to put female desire, the power of the erotic and the utopia of a feminist symbolic order. These would be created by what I want to call a 'reversed empowerment,' namely, the affirmation of female desire, "the symbolization of differences within genders...a feminist symbolic order that should be built on processes of identification and differentiation. A person can only be called by an-other if the construction of identities relies on the presence of the other/Other, women can envision themselves as others and can count on their 'dependency' from each other."⁵⁶ If we cannot escape from ideology, then we must create strong interpellations and figure out how to defend the desirability of some of them over others.

⁵⁶ Katharina Pewny, Comment on my presentation of this paper at the Junior Fellows Conference, Institute of Human Sciences, Vienna, December 11th, 1998.