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Staging Ideology and Love in *Good Bye, Lenin!*

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

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The Mise en Scène of Love

Marx and Engels regarded ideology as a superstructure built onto an

economic base, somewhat like the set constructed upon a theatrical stage. People perform their roles in society, oblivious to how stage and props artificially define and delimit reality for them. A century later, Louis Althusser changed the focal length of Marxist ideology. Rather than merely consider the *mise en scène* shaping false consciousness, Althusser emphasized prompters in the wings—what he called Ideological State Apparatuses—that kept the play of capitalism on track. Like stage prompters, Ideological State Apparatuses summon people to fulfill culturally-scripted roles through a process of interpellation.¹ Like pedestrians hailing cabs, Ideological State Apparatuses—family, religion, politics, media, sports—hail the actors or subjects, entering into their psyches and telling them where to go. This continually interruptive process of hailing, either by script or prompt, directs our subjectivities. The stage or screen only deepens the sense of cultural interpellation, because the actor who summons a cab on screen has herself been summoned by prompters that precede her: writers, directors, producers, acting coaches, costume designers, etc. When she hails a cab as though she were a "free" agent, she is therefore acting out, and endorsing, the apparatuses that formed her, and this manifest endorsement of the apparatuses occurs at both the diegetic and non-diegetic level. Althusser calls this compounding effect "the ideology of ideology":

The ideological representation of ideology is itself forced to recognize that every "subject" endowed with a "consciousness" and believing in the "ideas" that his "consciousness" inspired in him and freely accepts, must "act according to his ideas", must therefore inscribe his own ideas as a free subject in the actions of his material practice.

(166)

Althusser's quotation marks in this statement are revelatory: assuming we are conscious subjects who freely act upon self-generated ideas, we are blind to the scripted nature of this very assumption. Each person merely *quotes* the ideology of autonomous personhood, becoming one

among many naïve "actors" in this "*mise en scène* of interpellation" (177). So, just as film audiences want to believe that the erotic chemistry between actors on screen is real rather than scripted, persons embedded in ideological (especially capitalist) matrices want to believe that their actions are the result of autonomous choice rather than collective apparatuses. The scripting of "love" is an especially potent case. Caught in the scripted illusions of self-determined choice, for example, the actors themselves can be summoned by the apparatuses of **[End Page 5]** stage-craft to continue playing the roles of autonomous lovers off-screen, engaging in affairs, often notoriously, with their on-screen lovers. Saying that "love" works through extra-personal constructions is commonplace, but most people assume that the intention itself—to love—is at some level individual, built from the inside out, using scripts and prompts but, at its inception, one's own. Althusser, like most sociological theorists, would disagree. Like the cities and landscapes that the characters of Christopher Nolan's *Inception* (2010) call into being within a sleeping individual consciousness, in whom they inscribe the seed of an idea, the *mise en scène* of love is called into being through a system of scripts and off-camera prompts. Love is made from the outside in.

I wish to focus on a film about love that functions as a foil to Althusser, in both senses of foil: something that reflects as well as deflects. Directed by Wolfgang Becker, the award-winning² *Good Bye, Lenin!* (Germany 2003) refers explicitly to the interpellations made by Ideological State Apparatuses, but it also suggests that love can surmount ideology. Like other critiques of Althusser's determinism,³ *Good Bye, Lenin!* asserts the possibility of agency even within the binds of Ideological State Apparatuses.

The *Mise en Scène* of Freedom

As its name implies, *Good Bye, Lenin!* is about the demise of Marxist-Leninism, its fictional tale set during the fall of one of the 20th century's most famous ideological and physical boundaries: the Berlin Wall.

Staging Ideology and Love in *Good Bye, Lenin!*

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The *Mise en Scène* of Love

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