The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics, No. 70 (2025), pp. 159–173

From a Marxist Aesthetic to a Critical-Aesthetic Citizen Subject

Josefine Wikström

Abstract: This article proposes a shift away from the pursuit of a unified Marxist aesthetics towards an understanding of aesthetics as a constitutive dimension of modern subjectivity, specifically through Étienne Balibar's concept of the "citizen subject." Rather than deriving Marxist aesthetics from positive criteria, the argument proceeds in two movements. First, it reconstructs Kant's transcendental aesthetic subject, in which aesthetics functions not as a theory of taste but as the a priori conditions of sensibility that ground experience and cognition. Second, it examines Balibar's historicization of this subject, showing how the modern subject emerges as a contradictory "citizen subject," simultaneously free and subjected, shaped by the political rupture of the French Revolution and the universalist paradoxes it inaugurated. Through close engagement with Balibar's critique of several misreadings of Descartes (from Heidegger onwards) and with his account of the emergence of modern citizenship, the article argues that the transcendental aesthetic subject embodies what Balibar calls an "intense universality" marked by continual political struggle and indeterminacy. In conclusion, the article reflects on the implications of this figure for Marxist aesthetics today. Ultimately the article suggests that any Marxist aesthetics must take as its point of departure a historically constituted, dialectically split, critical–aesthetic citizen subject capable of a reflexive and sensuous critique of contemporary social forms, such as art, culture, and education.

Keywords: *Citizen Subject; Intense Universality; Aesthetics; Social Form; Art*

From a Marxist Aesthetic to a Critical-Aesthetic Citizen Subject

Josefine Wikström

My main concern in this article is to move away from an overarching idea of a Marxist aesthetics to aesthetics understood as an aspect of a modern concept of the subject; specifically, in relation to the concept of the citizen subject as outlined by the French philosopher Étienne Balibar. Rather than posit or reconstruct a Marxist aesthetics from positive criteria, I will advance in two basic steps. Departing from a brief discussion of Kant's transcendental aesthetic subject, I discuss Balibar's re-writing and historization of the transcendental subject as a "citizen subject," elaborating on the notion of an "intense universalism" that he argues it carries.[1] I end by discussing whether and how such a subject can be understood in critical aesthetic terms. This short essay should thus be understood as a preliminary and speculative attempt to initiate a conceptualisation of a Marxist aesthetics, approached primarily from the standpoint of the idea of a citizen aesthetic subject. In doing so, it implicitly seeks to criticise the view that a Marxist aesthetics can be derived from positive criteria.

To bring the concept of the subject into the territory of Marxism and to aesthetics necessarily implies a return to the decentring of modern Western philosophers' concepts of the subject that took place with post-structuralist French philosophy in the 1960s—a decentring that continues to this day. Within this moment, Louis Althusser, together with Jacques Lacan and Michel Foucault, were the key thinkers who provided the ground for the critique of transcendental, phenomenological, and other concepts of the subject present in modern philosophy.[2] As I will show, the concept of the citizen subject emerges from within and in critique of such discourse, yet also tries to recuperate the claims to universalism within a modern concept of the subject by historizing it. As Warren Montag and Hanan Elsayed comment, whereas Althusser suppressed the history of the subject into a formal structure, Balibar, in contrast, by putting the doublet citizen subject together, tries to think the subject from *within* history.[3] By introducing Balibar's notion into the discourse and question

of aesthetics, I hope to find a way to think Marxist aesthetics in relation to a dialectical and universal subject.

The Aesthetic Constitution of the Transcendental Subject

A conception of aesthetics as central to the constitution of the transcendental subject was famously elaborated by Kant. The term derives from Kant's presentation of "transcendental aesthetics" in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), in the first part of the Transcendental Doctrine of Elements, where aesthetics is distinguished from questions of taste and art. Here, aesthetics is dedicated to "the exposition of space and time as pure forms of intuition, [which] condition the possibility of objects of knowledge in general."[4] In this section, Kant makes clear that transcendental aesthetics is concerned with the conditions of objects of knowledge and thus of experience: "I call a science of all principles of *a priori* sensibility the **transcendental aesthetic**."[5] In an oft-cited footnote, he also contrasts such an understanding of aesthetics with Alexander Baumgarten's concept of it:

> The Germans are the only ones who now employ the word "aesthetics" to designate that which others call the critique of taste. The ground for this is a failed hope, held by the excellent analyst Baumgarten, of bringing the critical estimation of the beautiful under principles of reason, and elevating its rules to a science. But this effort is futile. For the putative rules or criteria are merely empirical as far as their sources are concerned, and can therefore never serve as *a priori* rules according to which our judgement of taste must be directed, rather the latter constitutes the genuine touchstone of the correctness of the former. For this reason it is advisable to again desist from the use of this term and to save it for that doctrine which is true science (whereby one would come closer to the language and the sense of the ancients, among whom the division of cognition into *aistethêta kai noêta* is very well known).[6]

Unlike Baumgarten's conception, aesthetics is here understood as integral to all processes of knowledge production and, consequently, as central to Kant's idea of the transcendental subject. For Kant, the latter is characterised by its capacity to synthesise space and time into experience through intuitions and concepts. Aesthetics is therefore fundamental to his conception of what it means to be a subject. In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790), Kant's Third Critique, he further develops this argument, demonstrating—as Peter Osborne has shown—that aesthetics must be understood as an essential component of the transcendental subject. In that section, as Osborne puts it, Kant develops "the meaning of 'aesthetic' […] beyond the sensible (spatial and temporal) apprehension of the objects of 'outer' and 'inner' intuition to include

reference to the feelings accompanying the relations of reflection constitutive of the internal cognitive structure of subjectivity itself."[7] Contrary, then, to what is often argued, the aesthetic in Kant's Third Critique has nothing to do with artworks but only with the aesthetic constitution of the subject.[8] This is something that Romantics such as Novalis and Schlegel later developed alongside their notion of critique, irony, and reflection.[9] From this standpoint, aesthetics is a part of the transcendental subject's cognition (capacity to produce an experience) and the feelings produced when such a subject makes reflexive judgments.

Balibar's Citizen Subject

How, then, might the transcendental subject of aesthetics be thought in relation to the present? In one respect, the entire trajectory of modern critical philosophy, from Kant onwards, can be understood as a sustained engagement with the problem of the subject.[10] Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845) constitutes one of the earliest and most decisive attempts both to develop and to displace Kant's conception of the transcendental subject. There, Marx critiques the materialist position, exemplified by Feuerbach, for its reduction of subjectivity to a merely sensuous immediacy, and the idealist position, epitomised by Hegel, for its abstraction and lack of mediation. Neither, he argues, apprehends the notion of human practice [*Praxis*] as simultaneously sensuous and objectively mediated.[11]

As noted above one of the most sustained critiques of the transcendental subject has emerged from within structuralist and post-structuralist philosophy, particularly as these traditions developed in post-war French thought. As Balibar and John Rajchman have observed, by traversing the traditional academic boundaries of philosophy—most notably through its engagements with psychoanalysis, politics, and cultural theory in dialogue with the classical modern philosophical tradition—French philosophy of this period generated novel modes of critique and reconfigured conceptions of subjectivity itself. Thus, they write, "we find a 'new' Nietzsche, a new Spinoza, a new Bergson, Marx, Freud, Machiavelli, even a new Kant, themselves brought together in ways that departed from Hegel's or Heidegger's great narratives of a history of spirit or history of metaphysics."[12] Another commentator argues that, with post-structuralist thinking, a critique of the phenomenological, Cartesian, and Kantian subject produced a break in philosophies of the subject:

> With the rise of these later thinkers—the most important are Jacques Lacan, Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida—the focus of theoretical

> attention shifted. It turned away from individual human consciousness and its dilemmas, away from belief in the potential self-transparency and sovereignty of the Subject or self and toward the more objective and supposedly determining structures of language, collective myth or ideology, and social institutions.[13]

Contemporary critiques of the subject from the 1980s onwards, including those from the standpoint of categories such as gender and race, were made possible because of this turn in French philosophy.[14] As Balibar and Rajchman put it: "It is hard to imagine, for example, what the current study of humanities or social sciences in English-speaking countries would be without it."[15]

As a product of this French philosophical moment, and more specifically as a disciple of Althusser, it is unsurprising that much of Balibar's work has been preoccupied with the concept of the subject and its manifold deconstructions and reconstructions in relation to social formations, such as the capitalist mode of production, racism, and the nation-state. This trajectory is first evident in 1968 with *Lire le Capital*—which Balibar co-authored alongside Althusser, Jacques Rancière (also a student of Althusser), Roger Establet, and Pierre Macherey—and subsequently in 1988 with *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, co-authored with the sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein, in which the explorations of subjectivity are extended to the intersections of race, class, and critique of the nation-state.[16]

Beyond this work, Balibar has, over the past thirty years, devoted sustained attention to rethinking the modern notion of the subject, most prominently in his 2011 collection of essays *Citoyen Sujet et autres essais d'anthropologie philosophique* (Citizen subject: Foundations for philosophical anthropology). A central aim of this project has been to reconceptualise the concept of the subject as it has been theorised in post-Kantian twentieth-century philosophy. One of the earliest contributions to this endeavour—also republished in the aforementioned anthology—was his essay "The Citizen Subject." Originally published in French in 1988 in the journal *Topoi* and framed around the question "Who Comes After the Subject?" posed by his colleague Jean-Luc Nancy, the essay has continued to attract sustained attention from both scholars and the wider public. The context of this essay, written in the late 1980s—shortly before the fall of the Berlin Wall and the now infamous declaration of the end of history—was to situate the modern subject within a theoretical and philosophical milieu where such a subject was understood to have come to its end. Nancy's aim, as stated in the issue's introduction, was to pose philosophies of the modern so-called originary subject found in Descartes, Kant, and Husserl against post-phenomenological deconstructive ideas of the subject and against the metaphysics of foundation. By addressing the question to his French colleagues—all part of French thought after the Second World War and thus all engaged in various deconstructions of the subject, amongst them, Alain Badiou, Maurice

Blanchot, Gilles Deleuze, Derrida, and Rancière—Nancy wanted to address the question of the subject anew. He writes:

> I asked the question: "Who comes after the subject?" to settle on one of the principal rupture lines. The critique or the deconstruction of subjectivity is to be considered one of the great motifs of contemporary philosophical work in France, taking off from, here again and perhaps especially, the teachings of Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Husserl, Heidegger, Bataille, Wittgenstein, from the teachings of linguistics, the social sciences, and so forth. […] The question therefore bears upon the critique or deconstruction of interiority, of self-presence, of consciousness, of mastery, of the individual or collective property of essence. Critique or deconstruction of the firmness of a *seat* (*hypokeimenon, substantia, subjectum*) and the certitude of an authority and a value (the individual, a people, the state, history, work). My question aimed in the first place to treat this motif as an event that had indeed emerged from our history—hence the 'after' and not as some capricious variation of fashionable thinking.[17]

Balibar's "answer"—in the form of his long essay "Citizen Subject"—to this question has, since its first publication, played a significant role in the public debate around refugees, the status of the EU, and, in the last decade, around Brexit, as well as within many academic fields such as political science, international studies, law, and philosophy.[18] Setting aside the fact that the online art journal *e-flux* published the essay itself in two parts in 2016, there has been little to no reception of this essay and its concept in the fields of aesthetics and art theory. I will thus begin with a close reading of the essay to then venture some conclusions with regard to the initial question of how Balibar's critique might inform any project to construct a Marxist aesthetics today.

The Citizen Comes After the Subject

In line with Nancy's proposal—not merely to discard the "originary" concepts of the subject in modern philosophy—Balibar rethinks the entire question of the subject in his essay. He does so primarily by examining the earliest critiques of Kant's notion of the transcendental subject within modern philosophy, particularly from Heidegger onwards. One of the essay's central arguments is a critique of the way in which the modern subject, from Descartes onwards, has been understood in post-Kantian philosophy as fully sovereign and self-governing. Balibar advances this argument, on the one hand, by drawing on Althusser's concept of the subject as simultaneously subjected and subject, as articulated in his influential essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (1970), in which Althusser contends that a subject

> in fact means 1) a free subjectivity, a centre of initiatives, author of and responsible for its actions; 2) a subjected being, who submits to higher authority, and is therefore stripped of all freedom except that of freely accepting his submission. This last note gives us the meaning of this ambiguity, which is merely a reflection of the effect which produces it: the individual is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i.e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection, i.e. in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection "all by himself". There are no subjects except by and for their subjection. That is why they work all by themselves.[19]

On the other hand, Balibar draws on the historical conjuncture of the French Revolution and the invention of the citizen subject in 1789. Doing so, he proposes an idea of the modern subject as both subject and subjected, what he calls a citizen subject, which, as we shall see, is contradictory, split, and holds what he terms an intense universality. At its core, the essay wants to show how modern concepts of the subject, as initiated by Descartes and furthered by Kant, are more dialectically constituted than the critics, primarily Heidegger, want to bring forth. Though Balibar, too, isn't satisfied with the Kantian subject, he tries to recuperate the universalism present within it, partly by drawing on the historical dimension and the emergence of the citizen that took place around the same time.

The essay begins with a critique of how Descartes's I think (*ego cogito*) in post-Kantian philosophy has been wrongly understood as a self-determined sovereign subject grounded in a founding substance and in an anthropological idea of humanity. Balibar traces this distortion partly to Kant and *The Critique of Pure Reason*, in which the latter projects the transcendental subject onto Descartes's texts. According to Balibar, the misreading of Descartes is primarily reproduced in Heidegger (in his books on Nietzsche of 1939–46), where he "proposes Descartes as the moment when the 'sovereignty of the subject' is established (in philosophy), inaugurating the discourse of modernity."[20] At the same time, Balibar points out, Heidegger identifies this ego with the Subject—*Hypokeimenon* in ancient Greek, most often translated into "that which is acted upon"—yet without acknowledging the paradoxical aspect of such a move: being subjected and being sovereign simultaneously. Rather, for Heidegger, Descartes's ego is the foundation of the modern subject understood as the subject of thought. "This supposes that man, or rather the *ego*, is determined and conceived of as subject (*Subjectum*)."[21] This is wrong, according to Balibar, since the term subject is not mentioned literally in Descartes's *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1639), nor is there a concept of it there.[22] Balibar writes:

> The fact is that it would be difficult to find the slightest reference to the "subject" as *subjectum* in the *Meditations*, and that in general the thesis that would posit the ego or the I think / I am (or the "I am a thinking thing") as subject, either

> in the sense of *hypokeimenon* or in the sense of the future *Subjekt* (opposed to *Gegenstandlichkeit*), does not appear anywhere in Descartes.[23]

What Balibar finds instead in the *Meditations* is not the subject of thought and of knowledge but rather a subjected subject. As Montag and Elsayed write, commenting on Balibar's essay:

> the only subject found in Descartes' work (and we are speaking of the concept, the word itself is hardly to be found there) is the subject subjected to divine sovereignty. It is this subjection that alone precedes and makes possible the existence of a thinking thing capable of certain, that is, indubitable knowledge and that retains an identity through time.[24]

The central term in the *Meditations* is not subject but substance, which, Balibar writes, Descartes gives a new signification. The *ego cogito*—the I think—is not a subject but a thinking thing that the soul knows itself to be. And the question of substance is not the substance of the subject but is rather—introduced in the third meditation—the establishing link between the "thinking thing" and the infinity of God.[25] Substance, Balibar writes, becomes in Descartes "a relational concept" between the finite and the infinite, between the soul and the body. Substance in Descartes, therefore, cannot be a unifying term, but must instead be thought of as relational. The thinking thing, Balibar argues, is thus a *nexus of substances* which is not represented in a subject/subjectum. Rather than a univocal sovereign subject, this substance is subjected to a divine sovereignty, specified by Balibar as God or later as the absolute monarch, such as Louis XVI. Countering Heidegger, Balibar writes:

> Descartes's "subject" is thus still (more than ever) the subjectus. But what is the subjectus? It is the other name of the subditus, according to an equivalence practiced by all medieval political theology and systematically exploited by the theoreticians of absolute monarchy: the individual submitted to the ditio, to the sovereign.[26]

Descartes's subject is thus a nexus of substances politically subjected to the absolute monarch or to God, rather than a self-governing autonomous subject.

This leads Balibar to the second part of his argument. The misreading of the Cartesian subject as a sovereign subject of thought and of action misses the "irreducible division of the subject"[27] on which it is historically and politically based. It is here that we can see how Balibar draws on the work of Althusser's concept of the subject as subject/subjected: someone free of initiatives and responsible for their own actions *as well as* someone who gains those actions from accepting to be submitted as a subject.[28] But, in contrast to Althusser's structuralist approach, which formalises this doubleness of the subject, Balibar historicises this moment by looking retrospectively to the invention of the

notion of the citizen that emerged with the French Revolution. It was then, Balibar argues, that the subject of the absolute monarch and God was put to its end by being negated by the citizen. Up until the French Revolution, the human being was understood as an individual but was still a subject subjected to the King or the Prince. Balibar also emphasises that the invention of the notion of the citizen with the declaration of the French Revolution was coupled intellectually with Kant's transcendental subject, the philosophical equivalent to an individual subjected to a unified sovereign. According to Balibar, it is thus no coincidence that Kant wrote his thoughts on the transcendental subject at the same time as the uprisings in France: "the moment at which Kant produces (and retrospectively projects) the transcendental 'subject' is precisely that moment at which politics destroys the 'subject' of the prince, in order to replace him with the republican citizen."[29] Montag and Elsayed also point out that in Kant's transcendental subject, there is an inbuilt tension between the subjected subject and the subject of a free will. They write:

> But even Kant's use of "Subject" to describe the "I think" draws on the etymology of subjection (*Subjektion*)" […]. It appears that the modern notion of the subject (and this applies equally to notions of agency, a term that shares the same moral and legal history) is caught in a circle of subjection: when it seeks the foundations of its freedom and self-determination within itself, the subject discovers the trace of the other who confers upon its autonomy.[30]

Through a close reading of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (*Declaration des Droits de L'Homme et du Citoyen*), approved by the French assembly in the summer of 1789, Balibar states that with the concept of the citizen, sovereignty was distributed relationally amongst each citizen for the first time: "What is new is the sovereignty of the citizen, which entails a completely different conception (and a completely different practical determination) of freedom."[31] This distinguishes modern citizenship with civic equality in Rome or Ancient Greece, where such status was hereditary.[32] The citizen subject stands in sharp contrast to this:

> It is now a matter of thinking the inverse: a freedom founded on equality, engendered by the movement of equality. Thus an unlimited, or, more precisely, self-limited freedom: having no limits other than those it assigns to itself in order to respect the rule of equality, that is, to remain in conformity with its principle.[33]

Balibar's answer to Nancy's question "Who comes after the subject?" is thus that the "citizen" comes after the subjected subject and couples itself with it. After the subjected subject comes the citizen subject. The labour of such a citizen subject, Balibar points out, can be traced all the way back to the nominalistic individual of the Middle Ages but can "find its name and its structural

position only after the emergence of the revolutionary citizen, for it rests upon the reversal of what was previously the subjectus."[34] Rather than an unlimited freedom, such a citizen subject is still founded on a paradox. On the one hand, it is a subject in the sense of Kant's idea of the transcendental subject, as the determinator of their own actions as well as subjected to a sovereignty, a subject subjected to the limits of freedom.[35] On the other hand, this freedom—which is based on a subjection—is founded on the equality of all other subjects—that all other subjects also hold such freedom. Such a citizen subject is the first of its kind in history, where equality between citizens is the foundation for citizenship, and the citizen subject thus produces a new paradox, since it is a freedom founded on equality between all citizens.

The final part of Balibar's essays is thus spent thoroughly reviewing the new paradoxes that the citizen subject holds and how that produces what he describes as an intense universality and sometimes "a hyperbolic proposition."[36] This intense universalism emerges from the fact that the citizen is no longer the subjectus (of the prince and the monarch) and not yet the sovereign subject. Rather, its indeterminacy lies in its institutional and cultural historical practices that are based on the equality of everyone. Above all, the citizen subject is indeterminate when it comes to questions of antinomies such as collective and individual, active and passive, as well as with regard to equality in relation to race, sex, and property. Hence, such intense universality is the battleground for politics and is represented by all major schools in modern thought, from communism to liberalism. As such, the citizen subject is a subject always to come; it is always constituted through a political movement of struggle. As Montag puts it:

> The citizen exists only in and through a struggle that is by definition permanent, a struggle that leads it beyond its own limits, as if to remain within them would reduce the citizen to the very subject against which it has defined itself. The citizen thus exists only through the activity in which its objectives remain immanent.[37]

An Aesthetic-Critical Citizen Subject to Come?

In the same year that Balibar published "The Citizen Subject," the literary Marxist Terry Eagleton articulated a trenchant critique of what he regarded as central to Kantian aesthetics. Specifically, he argued that Kantian aesthetics, with its emphasis on taste and morality as primary concerns, functions ultimately as a mechanism through which bourgeois power structures are reproduced and legitimised.[38] More recently, David Lloyd has criticised Kant's aesthetic as incapable of representing race and racialised subjects.[39] As Lucie Kim-Chi Mercier

notes, Lloyd also draws on the genealogy of the citizen subject, but does so in a different way to Balibar:

> whereas Balibar considers "anthropological differences" to be the unavoidable excess of civic-bourgeois universality and the irresolvable consequence of political modernity, Lloyd's suggestion is that the mechanisms of racialisation are intrinsic to the very category of the subject. Indeed, while Balibar seeks to maintain the philosophical polysemy and political ambivalence of the modern concept of subject, Lloyd's notion of S/subject is embedded in representation in a fundamental way, ideologically and materially, through what he describes as the "normative culture of the state."[40]

What Kim-Chi Mercier emphasises here is that Balibar's concept of the citizen subject is constituted through paradoxes of intense universality and that questions of representation and power need to be discussed from within that. Furthermore, whereas Eagleton and Lloyd primarily engage with Kant's conception of aesthetics as articulated in the *Critique of Judgment*, understood as a critique of taste, the perspective advanced here conceives aesthetics as integral to the transcendental subject as put forward by Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason*—a subject which, following Balibar, is constituted precisely through its paradoxes.

But what might this citizen subject tell us about the aesthetic dimension of the subject alluded to earlier, and what is the relation to a Marxist aesthetics? Balibar's citizen subject allows us to think Kant's transcendental subject as historically constituted and dialectically split. It is a subject within which questions of race, gender, and power as well as ideas of art, culture, and education cannot be thought outside. Such a citizen aesthetic subject, Balibar emphasises, emerges with the French Revolution and inaugurates a notion of freedom distributed equally among the citizens.[41] Based on the equality of citizens, such a concept of the citizen subject comes with several paradoxes and produces an intense universality. As such, the aesthetic citizen-subject is always a subject to come, is always a prospect, since it can never be positively posited but always disputed and negotiated. My speculative suggestion here is that a Marxist aesthetics must depart from this paradoxical and historically constituted aesthetic critical citizen subject.[42]

From the standpoint of the present, some further concluding remarks can be made. We must initially recognise that Balibar's notion of the citizen subject was constructed in the late 1980s, when philosophers were questioning the subject. Today, almost forty years later, Balibar's insistence on the universal subject as irreducibly split and dialectical is even more pertinent. During the intervening decades, critiques of a so-called sovereign subject have escalated both in art theory and elsewhere.[43] In times of political upheaval, a going back to the universal contradictory subject is key.

But what does it imply to consider such a subject in aesthetic terms? The aesthetic aspect of such a subject lies in its constitutive possibility; that is, in its capacity to produce an experience as well as to sensuously reflect on that experience, self-reflexively. To understand aesthetics in this way is to understand aesthetics critically, if by critical we here imply self-reflectively and as historically constituted. A critical subject has the possibility to critique the social form of capitalist production, for example, through different cultural forms such as art or education. This subject is aesthetic not in the sense that it produces art or has a certain level of aesthetic education, it rather uses or employs its aesthetic—its capacity to perceive and to reflect on such a perception—as the resources for a practical critique of the world. Contemporary Marxist aesthetics might benefit from reflecting on the contradictions of such a critical-aesthetic citizen subject, asking what forms of cultural practices can emerge from this.

NOTES

1 I will return to this term, but for now it suffices to say that with intensive universality, Balibar argues for a universalism that is based on the idea of the human being as a species being [*Gattungswesen*] and that such universality is not based on privilege but rather on the negation of such. For a hands-on approach to this term, see, for example, Anna-Verena Nosthoff, "Equaliberty: Notes on the Thought of Étienne Balibar," Critical Legal Thinking, 8 September 2014, https://criticallegalthinking.com/2014/09/08/equaliberty-notes-thought-etienne-balibar/.

2 For an account of post-structuralism's development of the subject, see Barbara Cassin, ed., *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, s.v. "Subject," trans. Emily Apter et. al (Princeton University Press, 2014), 1083–90 and Étienne Balibar and John Rajhman, eds., *French Philosophy Since 1945: Problems, Concepts, Inventions* (The New Press, 2011). For more recent critiques of the transcendental aesthetic subject in Kant's work, see, for example, David Lloyd, *Under Representation: The Racial Regime of Aesthetics* (Fordham University Press, 2018).

3 Warren Montag and Hanan Elsayed, eds., *Balibar and the Citizen Subject* (Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 3.

4 Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (Verso, 2013), 38–39.

5 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge University Press, 1998), A21/B36, 156, italics and bold as in this edition.

6 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A21/B35, 156 (I have exchanged the Greek characters with Latinised translations).

7 Osborne, *Anywhere*, 41.

8 This point has also been noted by many. See, for example, Karl Axelsson, Camilla Flodin, and Mattias Pirholt, eds., "Introduction," in *Beyond Autonomy in Eighteenth-Century British and German Aesthetics* (Routledge, 2021), 4 and Casey Haskins, "Kant and the Autonomy of Art," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 47, no. 1 (Winter 1989): 43.

9 Andrew Bowie*, Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche* (Manchester University Press, 2003), 69–88.

10 This is evident if we look at the entry for "Subject" mentioned in note 2, for example.

11 Étienne Balibar, *The Philosophy of Marx*, trans. Chris Turner (Verso, 2017), 29; Peter Osborne, *How to Read Marx* (Norton, 2008).

12 Balibar and Rajchman, *French Philosophy Since 1945*, xix.

13 Louis Sass, "Lacan, Foucault and the 'Crisis of the Subject': Revisionist Reflections on Phenomenology and Post-structuralism," *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology* 21, no. 4 (December 2014): 326.

14 I'm here thinking of the work of Judith Butler and her conception of the subject as subjected and a subject at the same time, which she takes from Foucault as well as from Althusser. This is best shown in Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford University Press, 1997). See also Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Harvard University Press, 1999). See also Lloyd, *Under Representation*.

15 Balibar and Rajchman, *French Philosophy Since 1945*, xvii.

16 Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (Verso, 2009 [1968]) and Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (Verso Books, 2011 [1988]).

17 *Jean-Luc Nancy, "Introduction," in Who Comes After the Subject?* ed. Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy (Routledge, 1991), 4.

18 See, for example, Montag and Elsayed, *Balibar* and Geoff Pfeifer, "Balibar, Citizenship, and the Return of Right Populism," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 46, no. 3 (March 2020): 323–41.

19 Louis Althusser, "Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses," in *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (Verso, 2003), 269.

20 Étienne Balibar, "Citizen Subject," in *Who Comes After*, 33.

21 Balibar, "Citizen Subject," 33

22 Warren Montag, "Between Interpellation and Immunization: Althusser, Balibar, Esposito," *Postmodern Culture* 22, no. 3 (2012), https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/pmc.2012.0016.

23 Balibar, "Citizen Subject," 33.

24 Montag and Elsayed, *Balibar*, 4.

25 Balibar, "Citizen Subject," 34.

26 Balibar, "Citizen Subject," 36.

27 Montag, "Between Interpellation and Immunization."

28 Montag, "Between Interpellation and Immunization."

29 Balibar, "Citizen Subject," 39.

30 Montag and Elsayed, *Balibar*, 5.

31 Balibar, "Citizen Subject," 44.

32 Balibar, "Citizen Subject," 45.

33 Balibar, "Citizen Subject," 45.

34 Balibar, "Citizen Subject," 45.

35 Susan Meld Shell, *Kant and the Limits of Autonomy* (Harvard University Press, 2009).

36 Balibar, "Citizen Subject," 46.

37 Montag, "Between Interpellation and Immunization."

38 Terry Eagleton, "The Ideology of the Aesthetic, Poetics Today," *The Rhetoric of Interpretation and the Interpretation of Rhetoric* 9, no. 2 (1988): 327–38.

39 Lloyd, *Under Representation*.

40 Lucie Kim-Chi Mercier, “The Racial Regime of Aesthetics: On David Lloyd’s Underrepresentation,” *Radial Philosophy* 2, no. 6 (Winter 2019): 61–62.

41 Such a subject can of course also be traced to the Haitian Revolution; I do not expand on this here because I follow Balibar’s essay. For a great work on the subject, see Peter Hallward, *Damming the Flood: Haiti, Aristide and the Politics of Containment* (Verso, 2007).

42 One could expand Balibar’s idea of the subject’s intense universality in relation to Kant’s notion of sensus communis (the capacity through which we make aesthetic judgements with a claim to universal validity, by adopting the standpoint of a possible community of other judging subjects) that he advances in *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. See, for example, Michael Wayne, *Red Kant: Aesthetics, Marxism and the Third Critique* (Bloomsbury, 2016). In this short essay I have focused on the concept of the aesthetic subject as put forth by Kant in *The Critique of Pure Reason*. For an earlier Marxist work on the recuperation of Kant’s universalism that also focuses on the First Critique, see Lucien Goldmann, *Immanuel Kant* (Verso, 2011 [1945]).

43 See, for example, Grant Kester, *The Sovereign Self: Aesthetic Autonomy from the Enlightenment to the Avant-Garde* (Duke University Press, 2023).