

## **The Politics of Performativity: A Critique of Judith Butler**

**Dr Geoff Boucher**

Judith Butler's celebrated concept of "performativity" is designed to expose hegemonic conceptions of identity as fictions. It thereby seeks to contribute to a leftwing cultural politics, based on the strategy of the marginal subversion of the reigning cultural norms.<sup>1</sup> Her work, which has been central to debates around identity politics and cultural recognition,<sup>2</sup> began by questioning the unity of the liberal subject and problematised liberal legal discourse on minority rights,<sup>3</sup> but has now shifted, in the context of neo-conservative xenophobia and the "war on terror," to explore the implications of the traumatic encounter with an unknown other.<sup>4</sup> Introducing a recent debate with leading thinkers on the Left, Butler has welcomed critical engagement with her positions that explored theoretical differences in the context of political solidarity with the post-Marxian emancipatory project.<sup>5</sup> In this spirit, my article presents a critique of what I take to be the persistent kernel of methodological individualism in Butler's work. I aim to demonstrate that her theoretical trajectory exhibits a major inconsistency, which indicates the limitations of an individualistic account of subject-formation framed in exclusively cultural terms.

Butler's inquiry into the embodied-performative aspect of the reproduction and contestation of social structures highlights the potential for resistance to hegemonic norms, which she claims results from a permanent disjunction between psyche and society. According to Butler, material structures are sedimented through ritualised repetitions of conduct by embodied agents, but these agents, rather than being mere cultural dupes, possess a divided subjectivity that implies a standing potential for deviation from regulatory norms. From this perspective, the theory of performativity seeks to explain how the subversion of power emerges within a dialectical relation

between constraint and agency. Butler's description of the contradictory process of social structuration, which seeks to avoid recourse to political voluntarism, or the sovereign intentionality of the autonomous individual, yields some insights into the links between personal and social identity. According to her conception, "performativity" describes the culturally-scripted character of identity, which is generated by power through repeated citations of norms and their transgression. Hegemonic cultural norms produce "melancholic" subjects, modelled on the Hegelian "unhappy consciousness," whose identity depends upon the marginalisation of excluded, transgressive subjectivities. The openness of the process of structuration, however, means that subjectification is not something permanent or stable, but rather represents the precarious assertion of identity through an always-ambiguous demarcation of mainstream subjectivity from marginalised alternatives. Generally speaking, because social identities are the permanently divided result of the ritualistic repetition of conventions, the possibility for subversion of the reigning social norms remains an ineradicable potential of all social relations.

In *Excitable Speech* (1997), she proposes a model of political transformation through counter-hegemonic cultural practices, one which continues to take gender parody as its paradigmatic instance. Butler's recent exploration of the ethics of alterity, then, is supposed to complement the politics of performativity by indicating why it is good that individuals exploit the subversive potential identified by this theory. In her recent work, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005), she proposes an ethic of responsibility for the other as the antidote to modern universality and the supposed "ethical violence" of its conception of moral autonomy. Oppressed individuals not only factually *do* subvert power, they also *should* subvert power, she suggests, and in doing so their political strategy should be guided by a calculation of the probable consequence of actions aiming to maximise some good. In other words, the politics of performativity is supported in Butler's most recent work by a form of act consequentialism – but, in keeping with the broad tenets of the ethics of alterity, the good to be maximised is not that of the subject but that of the other.

Against the widespread reception of this book in terms of celebration and congratulation, I propose a symptomatic reading of Butler's theoretical trajectory in terms of its underlying problematic, which I take to be that of methodological individualism. Although Butler's ethical turn has been read as a continuation of earlier inquiries, I shall demonstrate that it is best grasped as an effort to rectify serious problems in the theory of performativity – indeed, I shall argue that Butler's ethics reverses a crucial element of her politics, without, however, arriving at a more satisfactory position. Central to this problem is the perennial focus of Butler's investigations of identity-formation, on the individual in abstraction from structural determinants. Because she locates the central dynamic of contestation in the vicissitudes of hegemonic norms in the “psychic life of power” within an individual, her theory remains confined to the perspective of the isolated individual either resisting their subjectification or confronting their oppressor. Having located the basis for resistance in individual psychology, Butler conceptualises this resistance in phenomenological terms of personal narratives and subjective melancholy, in abstraction from structural determinants such as material interests or crisis tendencies of the social system. These problems are most clearly exhibited in her repeated redrafting of Althusser's scene of interpellation, which Butler grasps through the phenomenological lens of the “struggle to the death for recognition”. Progressive rewriting of this scene in the successive versions of her theory gradually erased Althusser's concern with the *institutional* formation of subjectivity, and replaced it, via an exclusively cultural focus, with a concern for the interpersonal and intrapsychic dynamics of identity conflict. The final result of this, I argue, is evacuates the materiality of institutions and the reduces the social field to the sum of dyadic interpersonal collisions. To demonstrate these claims, I propose to trace the theoretical trajectory of Butler's work through close reading of her sometimes dense and difficult texts, as it unfolds in successive drafts of the theory of performativity.

### ***Gender Performatives and the Subversion of Power***

To grasp how Butler's ethics reverse her politics, we need to understand how her theoretical trajectory is generated by the contradictions inhabiting the original theory of performativity. Described as a “new existentialism”<sup>6</sup>, the original formulation of the

theory of performativity – in *Gender Trouble* (1999) [1990] – produced an interpretation of Foucault’s discourse analytics and Derrida’s deconstruction that was profoundly inflected by existential Hegelianism. As I understand it, the requirement that her theory responds to is to produce a Foucault-inspired model of power that nonetheless includes a potential for subversion, without resorting to the unified subject that Foucault’s theory had just dispersed. Butler’s solution, strangely, will be to locate this potential in a disembodied intentionality that appears to stand outside of the culturally-scripted subject positions that the individual occupies. Since this might seem a counter-intuitive claim – given the dominant reception of Butler as a social constructivist who develops a subjectless conception of agency – I shall establish this contention in detail before proceeding.

Certainly, the opening premiss of Butler’s argument is a social constructivist one. Her theory of identity rejects the essentialist conception of gender as a substantial difference expressing an underlying natural sexual division. She conceptualises gender as constructed through social rituals supported by institutional power and proposes that gender identities are cultural performances that retroactively construct the “originary materiality” of sexuality.<sup>7</sup> The implication is that gender is not the expression of an “abiding substance,” but a naturalised social ritual of heterosexuality,<sup>8</sup> masquerading as an expression of natural sex. She proposes that there is a connection between the “metaphysics of substance” and “identitarian categories of sex”<sup>9</sup>, so as to deconstruct the supposedly obvious link between sexual dimorphism and gender polarity. In other words, Butler claims that a supposed link between pre-discursive natural sex and the heteronormative opposition between masculinity and femininity, is only essentialist metaphysics in the service of heteronormative power. Extending this analysis, Butler claims that the body is not a natural, material entity, but a discursively regulated, cultural construction,<sup>10</sup> while gender is a performative that *produces* constative sex.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, Butler is resolutely hostile to the Cartesian conception of an underlying substantial identity (“subject”) or natural entity (“body”). “Gender is always a doing,” she asserts on the authority of Nietzsche, “though not a doing by a subject who might

be said to pre-exist the deed.”<sup>12</sup> Indeed, according to Butler there is not even a natural body before cultural inscription:

Gender is the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being. A political genealogy of gender ontologies ... will deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts and locate ... those acts within the compulsory frames set by the various forces that police the social appearance of gender.<sup>13</sup>

Gender performances, then, are subjectless productions of a discursive formation, whereby that formation both polices and produces those bodies constituted in its field. Now, these premises together imply a pessimistic appraisal of the potential for resistance to heteronormative power; for gender appears to be everywhere, and yet there is no subject who might criticise the ubiquity of the reigning discourse on heteronormative identity. Indeed, Butler suggests (in line with Foucault’s general position as she understands it) that direct resistance, springing from the desire to transgress gender norms, is merely a ruse by which power extends its grip on subjects. According to the Foucauldian critique of psychoanalysis:

desire and its repression are an occasion for the consolidation of juridical structures; desire is manufactured and forbidden as a ritual symbolic gesture whereby the juridical model exercises and consolidates its own power.<sup>14</sup>

The “repression of desire” actually creates a field of anticipated transgressions, because any norm is constituted through a citation of its exceptions. Subject formation is the modality by which power operates and it follows that the psychic interiority of the desiring subject is merely a result of the operation of power. Accordingly, Butler shifts “from interiority to gender performatives” by following Foucault in the proposition that normalisation involves the body as the site of a compulsion to signify.<sup>15</sup> The style of the subject is the very modality of its subjection, because this inscription of individuation, taking the form of writing on the surfaces of the body, designates the “soul” as the “prison of the body.”<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless, Butler is not a cultural pessimist who believes that opposition to a monolithic power is impossible. Instead, she proposes that homosexuality and bisexuality operate as the “constitutive outside” of heterosexual norms,<sup>17</sup> so that “the ‘unthinkable’ is thus fully within culture, but fully excluded from the *dominant* culture.”<sup>18</sup> Alternatives to power are constituted, then, not in the depths of the desiring subject, but in marginal practices and identities that exploit the paradoxical “constitutive outside” of the hegemonic norm. These excluded practical identities permanently threaten the hegemonic norm: permanently, because they assist in its constitution and are therefore everywhere implied as an *absence* supporting its presence; threaten, because they expose its arbitrariness as a diacritical *construction*.

Accordingly, Butler argues that the signification of heterosexual identity on the body, as a necessarily divided and recited statement of the norm and its constitutive exclusions, “effects a false stabilisation of gender.”<sup>19</sup> Inspired by deconstruction, Butler claims the “citational,” or repetitive and decontextualisable character of performative utterances, opens the possibility for marginal subversion of the reigning gender norms through “resignification,” or the repetition of a signification in a new context. Drawing upon an analysis of drag as an instance of resignification, she concludes that “gender parody reveals that the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without origin.”<sup>20</sup> Therefore, the destabilisations effected by parodic recitation and marginal gender practices “disrupt the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence.”<sup>21</sup> Drag performances, for instance, reveal that genders are simulacra (copies without originals). Gender, then, is not constative but performative, and “drag fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity.”<sup>22</sup> The regulatory ideal of bipolar gender identity, she argues, is exposed as a fiction “and a norm that disguises itself as a developmental law regulating the sexual field that it purports to describe.”<sup>23</sup> The subversive repetition of gender norms in unprecedented contexts, in other words, displaces and denaturalises the hegemonic universality of heterosexuality, constituting a practical deconstruction of the politics of gender normalisation.

In developing this theory of political subversion, Butler is at the same time seeking to disperse the notion of an originary identity, which she associates with the constitutive subject. She denies the pertinence of the Cartesian identity of conscious intentionality and substantial entity, citing Nietzsche's claim that "there is no 'being' behind doing, effecting, becoming; 'the doer' is merely a fiction added to the deed – the deed is everything."<sup>24</sup> What Butler is rejecting is the notion of psychic interiority and substantive entity as constituting a pre-discursive self-identity. As she comments:

One might be tempted to say that identity categories are insufficient because every subject-position is the site of converging relations of power that are not univocal. But such a formulation underestimates the radical challenge to the subject that such converging relations imply. For there is no self-identical subject who houses or bears these relations, no site at which these relations converge. This converging and interarticulation is the contemporary fate of the subject. In other words, the subject as a self-identical identity is no more.<sup>25</sup>

The end of the Cartesian subject might be expected to lead to a determinist position, according to which the individual is only a bearer of the subject-positions that result from a structural location. Butler's politics of identity depends, however, upon the fundamental assumption that in spite of how institutional rituals form social subjectivity through interpellation, the individual somehow selects from a range of socially scripted alternatives in an auto-production of self-identity. The norms of heterosexuality, Butler claims, are sustained through acts that "are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means."<sup>26</sup> The demystification of gender identities through parodic performances leads to Butler's advocacy of a "stylistics of existence," modelled on Sartre and Foucault. In a highly revealing early formulation, Butler claimed that gender needs to be considered "as *a corporeal style*, an 'act,' as it were, which is both *intentional* and *performative*, where 'performative' suggests a *dramatic* and contingent construction of meaning."<sup>27</sup>

### *Primary Narcissism and the Scene of Interpellation*

The revealing notion of social identity as an intentional dramatic performance betrays a conviction that a non-positional intentionality subtends the dispersed subject-positions occupied by the individual. This is a tricky proposition and it needs close reading of Butler's work to elucidate, for at first glance, it seems impossible that gender parody by an individual could be an "intentional and ... dramatic" performance of identity, when her theory proposes that action is subjectless and that power scripts all performances in advance. One key is to note that although Butler denies the liberating potential of the category of the (unitary or desiring) subject, she does not thereby deny its existence (as an "imaginary relation" with real effectiveness), or reject all agency associated with the individual bearer of these discursive relations. Another key is to observe that the "constitutive outside" to power implies a limitation to the omnipotence, if not the ubiquity, of power. The form of agency that the theory of performativity identifies, then, can exploit the internal limitations of power (its paradoxical dependence on a "constitutive outside") precisely because this agency somehow eludes or precedes the process of subject-formation.

Yet this agency, which Butler describes as an intentionality, cannot simply leap clear of the existing discursive formation. According to Butler, "all signification takes place within the orbit of a compulsion to repeat," so that the task for a subversive identity politics "is not *whether* to repeat, but *how* to repeat and, through a radical proliferation of gender, to displace the very norms that enable repetition itself" {Butler, 1999 #6@148}. Who (or what) decides "*how* to repeat"? On what basis is the decision to subvert power made? In question, I suggest, is the phenomenological assumption that a free-floating intentionality, standing aside from all processes of subjectivation, provides the launching point for the decision of "*how* to repeat". But why does this intentionality not merely hopelessly register its entrapment in the cultural script of gender identity – why would one *want* to subvert the network of power? These questions can be answered with reference to Butler's theory of the originary narcissism of the individual.

Butler's position is developed most clearly in her recurrent "primal scene" of interpellation-address, where she superimposes the Hegelian master-slave dialectic onto

an anti-phenomenological theory of subject formation. Although Butler's return to Althusser's theory of ideological interpellation might seem surprising after her Foucauldian position on subject-formation, we should remember that Foucault's imaginary "soul" corresponds exactly to Althusser's ideological "subject," as a misrecognition of institutional rituals constituted through the category of the subject.

Althusser's theory of subject-formation took its cue from Lacan's "mirror stage," to propose that ideological institutions interpellate (hail, recruit) "individuals as subjects" through the mechanism of misrecognition.<sup>28</sup> On this theory, the individual has identity conferred upon it by virtue of misrecognising itself as a subject, that is, a mirror image of the collective Subject that is the (supposed) author of social relations (for instance, God, Humanity).<sup>29</sup> This is a misrecognition because in actuality social relations constitute the subject as a mere bearer of decentred structures. But this misrecognition is not an epistemological mistake that expresses a subjective desire for self-identity – instead, it is the effect of institutional rituals that impress an ascribed subjectivity on the operator of these social practices.

Althusser's position (read now "after Foucault") is revised by Butler in her important article, "Conscience Doth Make Subjects of Us All." In part, this consists in a restatement of interpellation in terms of the superego: "for Althusser, the efficacy of ideology consists in part in the formation of *conscience*",<sup>30</sup> so that "to become a 'subject' is, thus, to have been presumed guilty, then tried and declared innocent."<sup>31</sup> Indeed, because this effect of "hailing" is not a singular act, but a continuous repetition of ideological interpellations, the subject-citizen is constantly demonstrating their innocence through conformist practices.

But at the same time, Butler interprets the process of subject-formation through the lens of the philosophy of reflection, to propose that although agents are socially constructed through the cultural ascription of multiple subject-positions, nonetheless, the intentionality behind these gender performances is driven by a desire for self-identity. She grasps the anticipation of identity effectuated by ideological interpellation as an ambivalent relation to authority that *precedes* identity-formation, based on a

combination of guilt and love. What this means is that Butler takes advantage of the paradoxes of the philosophy of reflection to reinstall the desire for recognition, in the form of the individual's pre-discursive will-to-identity, at the heart of ideological interpellation. The well-known paradox of post-Cartesian philosophy consists in the claim that, in self-reflexivity, the constitutive subject is simultaneously the subject and the object of its own knowledge. This paradox – obviated for Althusser's theory by its insistence that misrecognition is an institutional effect, but implied by his theoretical vignette of police "hailing" – can be restated as the epistemological problem of how the subject before the mirror recognises itself in the image when this recognition is what confers identity. Butler reads Althusser's vignette and not his theory, to claim that a passionate attachment to the image of the law that *precedes* subjectification is the basis for this identification, which makes it possible for subjects to recognise themselves in the call of conscience. The "subject" is "driven by a love of the law that can only be satisfied by ritual punishment."<sup>32</sup> This does not solve the problem, of course, but instead merely displaces it from categories of knowledge (the problem of how I can *know* myself before the mirror image) to the register of affect (the problem of how I can *love* my existence sufficiently to want to be called into being by a guilty conscience).

Butler therefore *accepts the postulate of a pre-discursive auto-affection*, so that the subject originally desires identity. Indeed, she claims that the "I" comes "into social being ... because I have a certain inevitable attachment to my existence, because a certain narcissism takes hold of any term that confers existence."<sup>33</sup> Of course, if an originary auto-affection – a primary narcissism – stands outside of relations of power because it is before subjectivation, then this explains why the intentionality behind an ensemble of subject-positions might have a *critical* role in *subversive* performances. But glib references to Nietzsche notwithstanding, the postulate of a pre-discursive, narcissistic auto-affection as the mainspring of the subject originates with Fichte, who was the first to propose that the subject is initially the *deed* of self-positing driven by the quest for self-identity.<sup>34</sup> The crucial point is that in developing her apparently social constructivist theory of subjectless agency, Butler has not, in actuality, dispensed with the assumption of a pre-discursive individuality. She has only translated the register of its existence, from self-knowledge, to auto-affection. This postulate of primary narcissism provides the foundation for an individualist theory of agency and explains

where the intentionality that drives gender parody is located – in the pre-discursive kernel of the human individual.

In the revised introduction to *Gender Trouble* (1999), however, Butler draws on the Foucault of *Discipline and Punish* to repudiate voluntarist interpretations of her work. Instead, she asserts the reduction of the subject to a mere effect of institutions, lining up with the standard determinist position that the subject is not an origin, but an ensemble of dispersed, multiple subject-positions {Butler, 1999 #6@viii-ix}. Butler claims the agency in question is not that of the *subject* (as in individualist-voluntarist accounts), but of language itself, whereby we can locate “agency within the possibility of a variation on ... [linguistic] repetition” {Butler, 1999 #6@145}. The collocation of a (later) introduction repudiating the agency of the subject, with an (earlier) exposition of performativity in terms of an “intentional, dramatic performance” of identity, indicates why I am claiming that an inconsistency drives Butler’s theory construction forward through a series of revisions. More precisely, she claims that the speaking and acting “I” is constituted *through* discourse<sup>35</sup> and that an auto-affective pre-subject *precedes* discourse are in contradiction.

Some commentators claim that Butler’s “Nietzschean-Foucauldian” conception of agency decisively refutes any individualist interpretation of performativity.<sup>36</sup> Certainly, Butler’s restatement of the structural constraints surrounding the agent, condemning the individual to strategies of recuperative or subversive repetition of speech acts, prevent any *voluntaristic* interpretation of a subject who wilfully “decides,” on a day-by-day basis, to adopt this or that subject-position.<sup>37</sup> But how compelling is the claim that a Foucauldian treatment of the subject completely blocks methodological individualism? By depriving the subject of its power as genetic origin of structures and instead analysing the process of subjectification as a variable and complex function of power, Foucault *appears* to eliminate the agency of the individual. For Foucault, ritualised institutional practices take the form of disciplinary norms that literally conform subjects by subjecting them to regimes of bodily signification – drills, routines, conventions – which inscribe the illusory psychic interiority of the soul on the socialised exterior of the body, so that “the soul is the prison of the body.”<sup>38</sup> The resistance of the subject is

merely a ruse of power, for power depends upon this illusory interiority and its frustrated struggles with authority for its elaboration, extension and penetration into the depth of the individual. The problem is that this arguably resulted in a form of objectivist determinism that prevents the emergence of effective resistance while mechanically reducing the subject to an effect of institutional socialisation. Certainly, Butler questions the ability of this position to think the subversion of power.<sup>39</sup> Foucault's subsequent work on the "aesthetics of existence," instead of solving this problem, merely inverted it, asserting that although the subject is formed through constraints, nonetheless, the possibility remained open for "practices of liberation" of a voluntarist kind.<sup>40</sup> It might be said, then, that Foucault exposes the constitutive subject – the better to save the political individual. From this perspective, Butler seemingly rehearses Foucault's trajectory in reverse, shifting from subjective voluntarism to institutional determinism.<sup>41</sup>

Nonetheless, for all its rejection of voluntarism, the revised position still does not manage to eliminate the pre-social individual as the foundation for politics from its "subjectless conception of agency". To understand how this can be the case, we have to be particularly attentive to the distinction between the *autonomous* individual, which Butler tends to call the "sovereign ego" and to regard as the political correlate to the philosophical doctrine of the constitutive subject, and the leading assumption of methodological individualism, which is that the individual (not necessarily autonomous) precedes socio-political engagements. Certainly, in Butler's work, the sovereign subject of classical, liberal political philosophy and social theory is finished. In its place, however, stands the post-liberal political individual, who only intervenes within an intersubjective network of constraints. This individual, while no longer the sovereign ego of classical liberalism, nonetheless forms around the kernel of a pre-discursive auto-affectation centred on the individual body – in other words, an affective individual identity. This position is repeatedly affirmed in Butler's work following *Gender Trouble*, such as *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997), where Butler supplements Foucault with a non-Lacanian Freud for whom primary narcissism implies that identification-socialisation happens with objects taken to be like the (auto-affective) self.<sup>42</sup> In her contributions to *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality* (2000), Butler again defends this position as a corrective to Foucault's determinism.<sup>43</sup> In other words,

the idea that the individual forms around a pre-discursive primary narcissism, and that this is the Archimedean point in the subversion of power, traverses her theory, whether in semi-voluntarist or quasi-determinist mode. Thus, although dethroned from the position of generative origin and constitutive subject, the individual in the theory of performativity nonetheless remains the motor of political subversion. To grasp just how problematic this becomes for Butler, we need to examine how she translates these abstract propositions into concrete political interventions, in her work on “hate speech”.

### *The Politics of Performativity*

*Excitable Speech* (1997) tries to redress the lack of historico-political specificity in Butler’s theory by outlining a politics of the performative. Butler examines several categories of illocutionary act – including “hate speech” and gay declaratives in the military – to redeem the claim that effective performances of alternative identities subvert hegemonic norms, because they defy calculation, both by the authorities and the agent of political subversion.<sup>44</sup> The centrepiece for this demonstration is her theorisation of resignification, through the category of the perlocutionary consequences of speech acts. Where the illocutionary force of a speech act is conventional, the perlocutionary consequences are unconventional, depending on the mobilisation of affect in dialogue partners (as in the distinction between warning someone and generating the side-effect of alarming them).

At the same time, the idealist side of Butler’s theory of discursive materialisation is clearly exhibited in the claim that performative speech acts somehow transubstantiate the referent, for this claim relies upon the assumption that transcendental subjectivity constitutes not just the epistemological forms, but also the substantial materiality of the object-world. Specifically, the theory of performativity supposes that illocutionary declaratives miraculously transform not only the social status of the speaking subject, but also the sexed materiality of the *res cogitans*. For Butler (somewhat incredibly), the performative character of social identity suggests that the ontological characteristics of the body are conferred by the discursive matrix which constitutes its gender positioning.<sup>45</sup> Examination of these related contentions will clarify the internal link between Butler’s phenomenological position and her methodological individualism.

To grasp the limitations of Butler's politics of performativity, we need to attend closely to the technical distinctions relevant to speech act theory. The distinction between constative and performative speech acts corresponds to the difference between saying something and doing things with words. A constative utterance describes a state of affairs according to criteria of veracity (a statement of correspondence to reality that can be true or false) and so semantics is the proper domain of the constative. By contrast, a performative utterance does something (alters the status of the referent) in the enunciation. For instance, "I do" in a marriage ceremony does not report that the person is married, but instead makes (does) the bond of marriage.<sup>46</sup> Unlike the constative statement, the performative utterance cannot be true or false – it can only be, in Benveniste's terminology, "legitimate" or "illegitimate" (Austin uses the less politically suggestive terms "felicitous" and "infelicitous"). According to Austin's main stipulation, "there must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances."<sup>47</sup> Searle, following Austin, refers to the institutional context within which the performance can be legitimate as the "conditions of satisfaction" of the performative aspect of the utterance.<sup>48</sup>

It is well known that Austin abandoned the initial binary distinction between constative and performative for a ternary distinction between illocutionary force (performative dimension), locutionary act (constative dimension) and perlocutionary consequences (the ability of speech acts to engender consequences in partners in dialogue, for instance, persuasion).<sup>49</sup> Austin's explicit motivation for the shift is the radical instability of the division between two distinct classes of speech acts, which necessarily yields to an analysis of the different *aspects* of every speech act. Every speech act contains both a locutionary and an illocutionary component. This effectively subverts the true/false distinction as the criterion for the validity of the locutionary act, for the veracity of a statement now depends upon the context implied by the utterance, and this context is determined by the "conditions of satisfaction" of the illocutionary act. As Austin notes, "the truth or falsity of a statement depends upon what you were performing in what circumstances."<sup>50</sup> Equally, however, the duality of the speech act subverts Butler's notion of the "magic of performatives," where the constative dimensions of speech acts can be entirely forgotten, and discourse can be held to mysteriously transmute the

natural properties of the referent. For the illocutionary force of the utterance now depends upon what factually is the case in the context that supplies the “conditions of satisfaction” for the performative legitimacy of the speech act.

Indeed, the abandonment of the performative/constative distinction has important implications for the referential employment of language. The fable of the “Emperor’s New Clothes” can clarify the relation between illocutionary force and locutionary accuracy. Every locutionary act (“the Emperor has new clothes on”) can be trivially rephrased to make explicit the illocutionary assertion implied in the referential claim (“I believe that the Emperor has new clothes on”).<sup>51</sup> The Emperor’s mistake is to believe that an illocutionary assertion can completely over-rule the locutionary accuracy of the speech act, forgetting that “generally, in the performance of any illocutionary act, the speaker implies that the preparatory conditions of the act are satisfied.”<sup>52</sup> These preparatory conditions are institutional conventions external to the speech act (for instance, those governing rational belief-formation); making an assertion does not alter these conditions – instead, these conditions regulate the legitimacy of the illocution. Thus, Butler’s assertion that “the constative claim [to describe sex] is always to some degree performative,” is, strictly speaking, trivial, and does not at all demonstrate that “there is no reference to a pure body which is not at the same time a further formation of that body.”<sup>53</sup>

Butler’s reluctance to accept the full consequences of Austin’s revised position is compounded by an uncritical acceptance of Derrida’s deconstruction of speech act theory.<sup>54</sup> Because Butler’s theory is founded on the deconstructive position, the significant limitations of Derrida’s concept of “citationality” weaken the infrastructure of the theory of performativity.<sup>55</sup> Austin makes two aspects of the illocutionary dimension of speech acts perfectly clear. Illocution depends upon convention and not intention. In the illocutionary act, “the act is constituted not by intention or by fact, but by convention.”<sup>56</sup> Illocutionary force depends primarily upon the conventionally sanctioned authority of the executor, and therefore upon the social and institutional context, and only secondarily upon the actual wording of the statement. Moreover, the attention given by speech act theory to the determining role of the context of illocution

prevents any naïve understanding of the ability of locutions to float free of this context and function as decontextualised utterances with the same illocutionary force. For instance, the appearance of the sentence, “the constitution is suspended” in a sensational pamphlet and a government decree illustrate the possibility of a single locution in entirely different illocutionary contexts (with distinct illocutionary forces). Equally, production of hate speech on the street when a majority group threatens a minority, and citation of the locutionary content of this speech act in a courtroom, when that minority demands redress from the offending parties, entail speech acts with wholly different illocutionary forces. Taken together, the relative separation of illocution and locution, together with the non-decontextualisability of speech acts, means that in no sense does a word “drag its context around with it,” like a snail with its shell. Thus, the context of signification, when considering the illocutionary force of the speech act, is *not* diacritically structured on the same level as the signifiers in the utterance (it is institutionally structured instead); the signification of the utterance engages an illocutionary syntax whose reference is the analytically distinct field of the institutionally defined “conditions of satisfaction” of the illocutionary act.<sup>57</sup>

Derrida’s deconstruction of Austin has rightly been described as “bizarre,” for its insistence (despite the textual evidence) on the centrality of intentionality to speech act theory, and for its ambivalence regarding illocutionary force (performative success).<sup>58</sup> Peter Dews demonstrates that Derrida’s grasp of speech act theory involves the decontextualisation of the utterance and therefore a neglect of the illocutionary context of speech acts.<sup>59</sup> Derrida attributes the force of language to its transcendence of context, with the inevitable entailment that his deconstruction of speech act theory is obliged to consider the “structure of *locution* ... before any illocutionary or perlocutionary determination.”<sup>60</sup> Deconstruction is, in other words, pre-Austinian, because the “structure of locution” *cannot* be considered, qua locution, independently of its contextually-based illocutionary force. Likewise, the concept of “resignification” falls into the deconstructive trap of imagining that a decontextualised locution continues to enjoy the same category of illocutionary force (reverse interpellation as a form of declarative) regardless of institutional context.

Against this conceptual background, the basic idea in *Excitable Speech* is that the subject is generated through interpellation-subjection, in a process whereby individuals are assigned “injurious names” (for instance, “queer”), but that by taking up these names as affirmations a “reverse interpellation” can be effected, generating militant subjectivities instead of conformist subjects. This is the meaning of Butler’s condensed claim that “insurrectionary speech becomes the necessary response to an injurious language.”<sup>61</sup> What in one context is injurious speech (“queer”) becomes, in another context, the bearer of insurrectionary language, not, it is implied, directly through its illocutionary force, but rather through the unpredictable consequences of using this locution *as if it were* an illocution with a different force. Butler’s claim, therefore, treats illocution as if it was locution, and neglects the all-important institutional context of the speech act. Indeed, the collapse of the illocution/locution distinction is directly stated in Butler’s assertion that “the critical and legal discourse on hate speech is itself a restaging of the performance of hate speech,”<sup>62</sup> which completely neglects the relevant contexts of utterance. Unfortunately, the entailment is that her “reverse interpellation,” or “resignification,” is a locutionary pseudo-declarative, lacking the required illocutionary force, and so the promised politics of performativity do not actually materialise.

Butler’s major thesis is that speech is constitutively “out of control,” because its effects exceed the “sovereign” intentionality of the conscious agent.<sup>63</sup> As Butler states, “agency begins where sovereignty wanes. The one who acts ... acts precisely to the extent that he or she is constituted as an actor and, hence, operating within a linguistic field of enabling constraints from the outset.”<sup>64</sup> While this particular claim have been received as evidence of her subjectless conception of agency,<sup>65</sup> her position actually does nothing more than restate the fundamental contention of speech act theory, that the illocutionary force of the utterance depends on social context and not individual intention. Recognition of the importance of social context might be expected to generate a “politics of performativity” oriented to a radical reconstruction of institutions. The twist is, however, that Butler’s conception of the politics of speech acts depends on the radically untenable (because in contradiction with both her own claim above and the basic tents of speech act theory) assertion that social context is *irrelevant* to the political implications of the utterance. As we shall see, far from

developing a subjectless conception of agency, this enables Butler to return to her perennial theme of the individual resisting their subjection through oppositional cultural practices; like Foucault, Butler dethrones the omnipotent subject so as to save the political individual.

Butler rejects both the ability of sovereign intentionality to govern speech, and the simultaneity of utterance and injury supposedly required by the construction of hate speech as illocutionary acts.<sup>66</sup> She opposes the theory of the performative employed by legal theoreticians such as Catherine McKinnon, for whom, Butler claims, the performative is an immediately efficacious expression of the sovereign intentionality of the individual agent, and equivalent to a physical action.<sup>67</sup> Butler is right that any interpretation of speech act theory such as McKinnon's must be specious, but this is for reasons internal to that theory, namely, that the illocutionary force of the utterance depends upon the "uptake" (Austin) of the hearer. This "uptake" is not simply a question of the linguistic competence of the hearer, for the force of illocutionary acts (as we have seen) depends upon the hearer's registration of the institutional warrant of the speaker and the satisfaction of the preparatory conditions for the speech act. Where these institutional conditions are contested – as is always the case with the dialogical aspects of culture – or the preparatory conditions unclear, then being called a "dirty Jew," for instance, will have a double effect on the hearer. Constant acts of hate speech generate the institutional conditions for this to function as an act of naming with sinister implications, but they also function to indicate the speaker's preparedness to act. As such, hate speech functions in a delayed way as a declarative, but in an immediate way as a commissive: its intention to call the other an injurious name might not work immediately, but the promise of violence inherent in the act is unmistakable. Hate speech, in other words, is not itself an act of physical violence, but instead is an incitement to, and indispensable preparation for, violence.

Butler cites legal theory to the effect that what is really at stake in hate speech is an illocutionary force, operative in certain contexts, directed at negating the social identity of the victim.<sup>68</sup> Instead of directly intervening into the debate on how speech act theory supports legal judgements, however, Butler reasserts her deconstructive criticism of

Austin, to imply that all performatives are generally inefficacious and temporally delayed, beyond the conscious control of the speaker and distinct from physical acts. The rationale for this position is to create a gap between the existence of hegemonic norms and their employment by social agents in speech acts, preventing any monolithic conception of the social field. Its effect, however, is that Butler uses the speech act/social conduct distinction to drive a wedge between hate speech and acts of violence.

Butler maintains that the power of words to wound resides in unanticipated effects generated through a *loss* of context and *opposes* the effort to link illocutionary force to institutional conditions.<sup>69</sup> She proposes the adoption of a perlocutionary model, according to which the injury done to the victim of hate speech results unpredictably and in a delayed way.<sup>70</sup> Because her deconstructive interpretation of speech act theory neglects any taxonomy of illocutionary acts, Butler is in no position to propose an alternative understanding of how the institutional context changes the nature of the illocutionary force of various forms of hate speech. Indeed, the consequence of her stance is that she attacks as “conservative” Bourdieu’s effort to connect speech to institutions so as to raise the question of social equality, and rejects his “amplification of the social dimension of the performative.” By contrast, Butler insists that what she calls, in an ultra-revolutionary turn of phrase, an “insurrectionary” resignification can break with its context, thanks to its ability to act in unconventional ways.<sup>71</sup> In other words, Butler restricts speech act theory to decontextualised locutions and unconventional perlocutions, discarding illocution entirely as “conservative” and insufficiently “insurrectionary”. As usual, however, when ultra-revolutionary rhetoric becomes a means whereby social questions are rejected for an “autonomous” dimension of language,<sup>72</sup> Butler’s position masks a thorough-going political individualism, because it turns theoretical attention from the way institutions treat disadvantaged groups back to the individual and incalculable side-effects of each separate speech act.

### *The Limitations of Performativity*

Butler is resolutely opposed to most (but not all, as we shall see) forms of legal redress and official censorship, on the grounds that state intervention may strengthen those

institutions while being deployed against the victims of hate speech. In opposition to racial vilification, Butler proposes not state intervention (legislation), but radical mobilisation and practices of resignification. Her concern is that speech act legislation functions as state censorship and becomes the precedent for banning homosexuality in the military and censoring pornography. In line with the deconstructive indifference to the locution/illocution distinction, she claims that the state, by reiterating hate speech acts, repeats discursive violence and prosecutes the victim, finally protecting hate speech as “free speech.”<sup>73</sup> Her insensitivity to the possibility that a single locution can have different illocutionary force in distinct contexts encourages Butler to directly equate legal discourse and hate speech, leading to an apparently ultra-left dismissal of all legal redress and state protection as counter-productive. At the same time, Butler claims that she “is not opposed to any and all regulations,” such as, for instance, “hate speech regulations that are not state-centred, such as those that have restricted jurisdiction within a university.”<sup>74</sup> This is an interesting position to take, considering that (1) she works in one, and therefore might be thought to benefit from such legislation and (2) according to the Althusserian model of ideological interpellation, on which she builds, the education system is *the* modern ideological *state* apparatus.

The ethico-political consequences of Butler’s stance are disturbing. Butler proposes that the idea of a sole originator of speech is a consequence of the juridical model, which needs to fabricate an author so as to find them guilty.<sup>75</sup> Hence, the law produces hate speech so as to legislate censorship and fabricates a culpable subject so as to prosecute them. Subjects, Butler claims, are not uniquely accountable for their speech because the subject is a “belated metalepsis,” or subject-effect,<sup>76</sup> a retroactively installed substitution of a “guilty party” after the citation of a speech act. The immediate implication is that it is possible for every speaker to plead diminished responsibility. Butler claims that the citationality of speech amplifies ethical responsibility for hate speech, however, by making individuals accountable for “the manner in which such speech is repeated.”<sup>77</sup> This brings us back once again to the loop of “*how to repeat*” and the way in which Butler’s theory constantly returns to the centrality of the individual just when it appears furthest from it. In *Excitable Speech*, Butler claims that the question of responsibility is “afflicted with impurity from the start” and “intimates an

ethical dilemma brewing at the inception of speech.”<sup>78</sup> It is more likely, however, that the ethical dilemma springs from Butler’s posing of the question.

An immediate index of the problematic nature of Butler’s formulations is the logical contradiction involved in the concept of resignification. As an alternative to police protection and legal redress, Butler suggests that victims of hate speech exploit the open temporality of the sign.<sup>79</sup> Speech acts do not take place in the punctual instant of the utterance, but represent a “condensation” of the historicity of a social ritual and a semantic history, and so an utterance may be “excessive to the moment it occasions,” raising the possibility of resignification as a political alternative.<sup>80</sup> Resignification, she suggests, “depletes” the term of derogatory history and converts it into an affirmation (for instance, queer, black, woman).<sup>81</sup> This possibility springs from the hypothesis of the contextual determination of the value of the sign. Nonetheless, despite these theoretical ruminations, Butler in actuality rehearses the leftwing commonsense, that resignifying “queer” is something different to deploying “nigger,” and that citing a pornographic image is different to burning a cross. She claims this is because of the significance of the historicity of the sign.<sup>82</sup> The two claims (the contextually determined value of the sign, and the historicity of the sign) are in contradiction: one is the Saussurean theory of the diacritical nature of the sign; the other is the philological theory that Saussure began by rejecting. Likewise, Butler asserts that when the oppressed lay claim to their universal human and political rights, from which they have hitherto been excluded, they produce a performative contradiction.<sup>83</sup> Not surprisingly, even for the most sympathetic interpreters, “*Excitable Speech* does not provide a clear idea of how interpellatives may be replayed or their meanings altered.”<sup>84</sup>

“On the whole,” one commentator concludes, “there is a tendency in Butler’s work to confine discussion of the politics of the performative to a series of dualisms ... which are far from adequate to capturing the complex dynamics of social change.”<sup>85</sup> The abstract and formal theory of agency provided by performativity restricts gender politics to the question of symbolic identity, to the exclusion of considerations of material equality and social practices.<sup>86</sup> Butler’s efforts to concretise agency and salvage performativity tend to consolidate these problems rather than rectify them. The

consequence is that “the primacy that Butler’s model accords to the process of symbolic identification results ... in a disregard of the specificity of socio-political power.”<sup>87</sup> The force of these complaints can be explicated in the terms developed in this article: Butler’s theory of performativity lacks a focus on institutions because it constantly gravitates to the pre-social kernel of the individual in primary narcissism; so, it necessarily tends to reinscribe the dualisms characteristic of liberal political theory and neglect the material aspects of the social formation.

These problems come to a head in the question of the relation between the self and the other. For Butler, the incompleteness of identity means that the shock of the encounter with the other sets permanent limits to my self-identity. Butler claims that:

The “incompleteness” of each and every identity is a direct result of its differential emergence: no particular identity can emerge without presuming and enacting the exclusion of others, and this constitutive exclusion or antagonism is the shared and equal condition of all identity-constitution.<sup>88</sup>

The permanent stance of marginal subversion follows from this conception of the *necessity* for the self to exclude the other, so that while Butler formally advocates the development of an inclusive universality, no new social order can be imagined that would not, in fact, be based upon domination. Sartre’s impasse – that ethics is both necessary and impossible – is here repeated on the terrain of the politics of performativity, so that the norms that make sociality possible can only be conceptualised as a constraint upon the spontaneity of the self. The problem with this theory is that it reduces the social field to the sum of dyadic interpersonal collisions, flattening the institutional complexity of social formation onto a pseudo-dialectic of narcissistic identification and sibling rivalry. No wonder, then, that the “collective dimension is missing from Butler’s account of performative resignification, whose underpinnings in a theory of psychic dislocation confine its explanatory force to the private realm of individual action.”<sup>89</sup>

***“I Shall Come to Your Ethical Rescue...”***

Against this conceptual background, Butler’s most recent intervention can be read as an effort to stabilise the politics of performativity by overturning the assumption that self-identity involves excluding the other. Before outlining how I think this is problematic, I want to indicate why I am in solidarity with many of the things Butler says in *Giving an Account of Oneself*. Her revision of the theory of performativity is designed to support it with a moral philosophy which outlines the dependency of the subject on the other and so reinforces a politics of cultural inclusiveness with an ethics of non-violent dialogue. The multiple struggles for cultural recognition endorsed by the contemporary Left are now framed by an ultra-ethical commitment to the equivocal humanity of the other, and so the struggle for recognition is not to be understood in liberal terms as striving for self-determination or asserting minority rights. I fully support the broad thrust of this position, but suggest that, for instance, Nancy Fraser’s *institutional* theory of both redistribution and recognition achieves the same things more plausibly and without recourse to Butler’s rejection of deontological ethics.<sup>90</sup> For Butler, by contrast, self-determination is seen as aggressive “moral narcissism,” and she suggests that the performative contradictions that she earlier endorsed as a necessary cost of making rights claims in recognition struggles can be resolved, once these claims are grasped in the context of acting for the good of the other.

At first glance, however, it is not at all clear that *Giving an Account* has *rescued* the theory of performativity so much as *buried* it. Performativity depends, as we recall, on the proposition that the subject, although dispersed across a multiplicity of subject-positions, is called into being by a guilty conscience springing from a pre-discursive auto-affection. That most recalcitrant material, the primordial narcissism of the human individual, is formed by language in the repeated scene of interpellation-subjectivation, but it remains a standing reserve and the critical resource for evaluating “how to repeat”. This critical reserve of self-preservative auto-affection, invoked under the signs of Nietzsche and Freud, is crucial for understanding how it is that the delays and differences introduced by repetition result, not in desperate conformity and pseudo-difference, but in differential resistance and cultural diversity. If we now dispense with the postulate of a self-preservative drive born of primary narcissism and reject the

notion that guilty conscience explains moral reasoning,<sup>91</sup> then it would seem that the critical potential of the subject has been extirpated, replaced by a two-dimensional theory of social norms and their inherent transgressions. Butler's way out of this dilemma is to anchor the critical potential of the subject in the other.

To do this, although Butler will continue to maintain that self-identity remains incomplete, instead of excluding the other, she asserts that identity primordially includes the other as that which in the self remains alien. The otherness of the stranger really springs from that unconscious element of myself which continues to elude my grasp and therefore provokes my anxious and potentially destructive response. Abandoning Nietzsche for Levinas and Freud for Laplanche, she argues that the subject, far from being narcissistic and guilty as she earlier claimed, is primordially open to alterity and should act responsibly for the good of the other. Although this position is highly abstract and not illuminated with examples, the following sense can be made of it. Liberal forms of self-determination – such as minority rights claims – rely on misrecognising the self as a complete identity and pursuing a politics of self-preservation and interest-assertion that inherently exclude the other. By contrast, Butler's view would seem to be that the self needs to be liberated from the misconception that the other, like the self, can be exhaustively known and therefore finally recognised within a system of interests, rights or virtues. It follows from this that although the subject should act responsibly in relation to the good of the other – and thus Butler adopts a consequentialist position – this good remains ultimately incalculable.

In this context, the significance of Butler's endorsement of the psychoanalytic theory of Jean Laplanche is that he offers an account of the relation between the subject and its objects that substitutes the other – the image of my fellow being, which depends fundamentally on the projection of my narcissism – for the Lacanian Other – the impersonal symbolic network of intersubjective norms and social codes that regulates every encounter between self and non-self. Laplanche famously maintained, in a recondite debate with Lacan whose political stakes are now becoming crystal clear, that the unconscious is the condition for the emergence of language rather than, as Lacan

would have it, that language precedes the emergence of subjectivity, including both consciousness and the unconscious.<sup>92</sup> Butler's fresh return to the primal scene of interpellation, then, this time with Laplanche and Levinas rather than Freud and Nietzsche, frames subject-formation within the dialectics of ethical address between self and other.<sup>93</sup> Not only does this place self and other effectively outside of history – because this framing address is understood as prior to every institutional location – but it also effectively evacuates the last traces of institutional-social determinacy from Butler's already attenuated version of Althusser's theory. It does so because even inside the frame of ethical address, in the vignette of hailing of the self by the other, this other is not the impersonal social institution (the Lacanian Other), but the image of another human individual.<sup>94</sup> In other words, the hyper-abstractness of the politics of performativity is now redressed by the excessive specificity of an ethics of alterity that calls for responsibilities to others, taken one-by-one and in abstraction from their social-collective determinations. This might appeal to a series of postmodern mantras, such as for instance the valorisation of the local over the general and the rejection of the universal for the particular. But it also sustains a prolongation of Butler's theoretical leitmotif, the elevation of the individual over the institutional, by virtue of a focus on individuation that only includes the social as the empirically given, as the factual backdrop for the perennial drama of the one-on-one encounter of self and other.

If Butler seeks to challenge the supposed supremacy of the political individual by dethroning the moral narcissism of the sovereign ego, then the resources she has at her disposal are limited by her insistence on the pre-social character of the ultra-ethical relation to the other. As usual, Butler seems to pre-empt criticism of her position by taking refuge in a damagingly abstract conception of moral action; nonetheless, it is possible to say of this position that any combination of constrained agency and infinite responsibility that demands that the subject act for the (unknown) good of the other must result in something close to paralysis. Indeed, the consequentialist position that she presently advocates<sup>95</sup> seems to oscillate. According to Butler, although divided by power and condemned to a permanent nucleus of opacity installed in the very heart of the speaking "I" by its ambiguous sociality, the melancholy subject must – despite all of the constraints on agency outlined in the various revisions of the theory of performativity – take responsibility for the incalculable consequences of its actions

upon the other, even, indeed especially, when the subject accuses the other of being a persecutor. On the one hand, this might be read as an ultra-ethical stance that negatively limits the formulation of moral maxims by prescribing that “thou shalt not kill,” but providing no concrete guidance on how to modify any concrete set of historical circumstances (thus voiding the force of the consequentialist argument, which relies upon the eminent practicality of its moral calculus). On the other hand, it might mean that the moral calculus performed by the self applies only to another individual, on the basis of the potentially condescending idea of acting so as to maximise the good of the other person. But all this is, finally, not a real challenge to moral and political individualism, for a consequentialism that acts for the good of others, taken one-by-one, is finally just a means for aggregating preferences based on the best guess about the other’s interests, rights and values.

In summary, Butler’s theory of performativity, seeking to outline a “stylistics of existence” based on individual subversion of cultural norms, lands in an oscillation between voluntarism and determinism. Butler’s resolution of this problem tends to evacuate institutional determinacy from the theory and produces a politics of performativity that is unsatisfactory in terms of its abstract individualism. This problem is compounded by a deconstructive understanding of speech acts and an idealist ontology of performative materialisation. Butler’s effort to ground her politics in an ethics of alterity results in an ethics that swings between a pre-ethical openness to the other incapable of generating new moral norms, and an endorsement of consequentialism based in the potentially condescending ideal of the good of the other. The methodological individualism that all this suggests constrains Butler’s account of the social field to the classical opposition between individual and society, generating a perspective that conceptualises marginal subversion in terms of the resistance of the individual to hegemonic norms and ethical alterity in terms of the duty of one individual towards another. Ultimately, for all her hostility to liberal political philosophy, her own alternative seems to be only another, somewhat more radical version of moral and political individualism.

**Geoff Boucher** is a lecturer in literary studies at Deakin University, Australia. He gained his interdisciplinary PhD from the University of Melbourne. He has written on psychoanalysis, contemporary European philosophy, and social theory. His co-edited collection of critical essays on Slavoj Žižek entitled *Traversing the Fantasy* has just appeared from Ashgate Publishing. He has published internationally on Slavoj Žižek, Judith Butler and Jacques Lacan. He is a regular contributor to *Arena Magazine* and a member of the Independent Social Research Network.

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<sup>1</sup> See Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. London and New York: Routledge, 1993; Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York and London: Routledge, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> See Judith Butler, "Merely Cultural." *New Left Review*, no. 227 (1998): 33-44; Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek. *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*. London and New York: Verso, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> See Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. London and New York: Routledge, 1997; Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997.

<sup>4</sup> Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005.

<sup>5</sup> See Butler, "Merely Cultural."; Butler, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*.

<sup>6</sup> Alan Schrift, "Judith Butler: Une Nouvelle Existentialiste?" *Philosophy Today* 45, no. 1 (2001): 12-23.

<sup>7</sup> Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p. 12; Butler, *Gender Trouble* p. 22.

<sup>9</sup> Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p. 12; Butler, *Gender Trouble* p. 22-25.

<sup>10</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble* p. 24.

<sup>11</sup> Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 11; 33.

<sup>12</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 33.

<sup>13</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 43-44.

<sup>14</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 96.

<sup>15</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 171.

<sup>16</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 172.

<sup>17</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 98.

<sup>18</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 99.

<sup>19</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 172.

<sup>20</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 175.

<sup>21</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 175.

<sup>22</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 174.

<sup>23</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 173.

<sup>24</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 25.

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- <sup>25</sup> Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p. 229-230.
- <sup>26</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 173.
- <sup>27</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 177 emphasis added.
- <sup>28</sup> Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Translated by Ben Brewster. London: New Left Books, 1971. 127-186.
- <sup>29</sup> Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy* p. 180-181.
- <sup>30</sup> Judith Butler, "Conscience Doth Make Subjects of Us All." *Yale French Studies* 88 (1995): 6-26, p. 13.
- <sup>31</sup> Butler, "Conscience Doth Make Subjects of Us All." p. 16.
- <sup>32</sup> Butler, "Conscience Doth Make Subjects of Us All." p. 24.
- <sup>33</sup> Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p. 104.
- <sup>34</sup> See, Dieter Henrich, "Fichte's Original Insight." In *Contemporary German Philosophy, Volume 1*, 15-53. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1982, pp. 15-53.
- <sup>35</sup> Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p. 8.
- <sup>36</sup> See for instance Lois McNay, "Subject, Psyche and Agency: The Work of Judith Butler." *Theory, Culture & Society* 16, no. 2 (1999): 175-93; Alan Schrift, "Foucault's Reconfiguration of the Subject: From Nietzsche to Butler, Laclau/Mouffe and Beyond." *Philosophy Today* 41, no. 1 (1997): 153-59.
- <sup>37</sup> Sara Salih, *Judith Butler*. London and New York: Routledge, 2002, pp. 43-71; Garber, Marjorie. *Vice Versa: Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life*. New York: Schribner/Touchstone, 1996, p. 183-184.
- <sup>38</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977, p. 30.
- <sup>39</sup> Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p. 8.
- <sup>40</sup> Lois McNay, *Foucault: A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994, pp. 88-124.
- <sup>41</sup> Lois McNay, "Subject, Psyche and Agency: The Work of Judith Butler", p. 177-178.
- <sup>42</sup> Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, p. 57-71.
- <sup>43</sup> Butler, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, p. 151.
- <sup>44</sup> See Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*; Butler, *Excitable Speech*.
- <sup>45</sup> Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p. 8; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. viii-ix.
- <sup>46</sup> J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962, p. 13.
- <sup>47</sup> Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, p. 14.
- <sup>48</sup> John Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969.
- <sup>49</sup> Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, p. 98-100.
- <sup>50</sup> Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, p. 145.
- <sup>51</sup> See John Searle, *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.
- <sup>52</sup> Searle, *Speech Acts* p. 65.
- <sup>53</sup> Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p. 11, 10.

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- <sup>54</sup> See Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.* Translated by Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988.
- <sup>55</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 12-16.
- <sup>56</sup> Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, p. 128.
- <sup>57</sup> Searle, *Speech Acts* p. 54-71.
- <sup>58</sup> Peter Dews, *The Limits of Disenchantment: Essays on Contemporary European Philosophy*. London and New York: Verso, 1995, p.54.
- <sup>59</sup> Dews, *The Limits of Disenchantment*, p. 50-64.
- <sup>60</sup> Derrida, *Limited Inc.* p.14.
- <sup>61</sup> Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p. 163.
- <sup>62</sup> Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p. 163.
- <sup>63</sup> Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p. 15.
- <sup>64</sup> Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p. 16.
- <sup>65</sup> McNay, "Subject, Psyche and Agency: The Work of Judith Butler", p. 178-181; Salih, *Judith Butler*, p. 100.
- <sup>66</sup> Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p. 16.
- <sup>67</sup> Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p. 15.
- <sup>68</sup> Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p. 16.
- <sup>69</sup> Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p. 16.
- <sup>70</sup> Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p. 16.
- <sup>71</sup> Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p. 16.
- <sup>72</sup> Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p. 16.
- <sup>73</sup> Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p. 121.
- <sup>74</sup> Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p. 102, 101.
- <sup>75</sup> Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p. 50.
- <sup>76</sup> Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p. 50.
- <sup>77</sup> Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p. 50.
- <sup>78</sup> Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p. 28.
- <sup>79</sup> Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p. 121.
- <sup>80</sup> Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p. 14.
- <sup>81</sup> Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p. 158.
- <sup>82</sup> Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p. 57.
- <sup>83</sup> Butler, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, p. 38.
- <sup>84</sup> Salih, *Judith Butler*, p. 115.
- <sup>85</sup> McNay, "Subject, Psyche and Agency: The Work of Judith Butler", p. 178
- <sup>86</sup> See Carrie Hull, "The Need in Thinking: Materiality in Theodor W. Adorno and Judith Butler." *Radical Philosophy*, no. 84 (1997): 22-35.
- <sup>87</sup> McNay, "Subject, Psyche and Agency: The Work of Judith Butler", p. 181.
- <sup>88</sup> Butler, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, p. 31.
- <sup>89</sup> McNay, "Subject, Psyche and Agency: The Work of Judith Butler", p. 189.

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<sup>90</sup> See Nancy Fraser, "Heterosexism, Misrecognition and Capitalism: A Response to Judith Butler." *New Left Review*, no. 228 (1998): 140-49; Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking Recognition: Overcoming Displacement and Reification in Cultural Politics." *New Left Review*, no. 3 (2000): 107-20; Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, eds. *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*. London and New York: Verso, 2003

<sup>91</sup> Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*.

<sup>92</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. Second ed. London and New York: Norton, 1998.; Jean Laplanche, *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis*. Translated by David Macey. Oxford and New York: Blackwell, 1989.

<sup>93</sup> Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*.

<sup>94</sup> Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*.

<sup>95</sup> Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*.