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Theory Culture Society 2006 23: 214

DOI: 10.1177/026327640602300245

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Performative Knowledge

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Keywords Butler, Foucault, gender, language, power, subjectivity, subjectification

'Performativity' could no doubt be given various introductions and genealogies. Understood as part of a movement against Descartes' *cogito*, the notion of performativity names an approach that refuses to tie the fact that 'there is thinking' to identity or ontology. In place of the certainty that I am – the *cogito* – is an argument for 'co-extensivity'. 'Thinking' is only confirmation that an individual exists within a discursive world; 'the subject', in this rendering, is co-extensive with his or her outside in the sense that they are produced by historically varying conditions that are in turn sustained by their produced elements. From Nietzsche's fiery 'there is no doer behind the deed' to Foucault's image of the Panopticon by which he sought to present diagrammatically the exercise of productive power/knowledge relations, to Judith Butler's feminist rendering of the argument, this co-extensivity is a radical critique of any originary notion of interiority. The sense of an interiority – what Butler calls the 'trope' of interiority – into which the subject him or herself can 'look' and thereby enact a conscience, a self, is an *effect*, it is argued, of the configurations in which the subject is 'caught'.

To consider the process of subjectification one has therefore to attend to the lines of light and enunciation that literally incorporate the subject and sustain the subject as it both indicates and sustains the wider matrix of power. To speak of 'performativity' in relation to the subject or subjectivity is to focus on the practices of this conditioned element within the various matrices by which it is sustained. In particular, performativity has become, via Judith Butler's thesis, a tool of analysis by which to interrogate differentiated subject formation within practices that sustain lines of power and power effects. Thus, while the term comes from the study of linguistics, was coined by J.L. Austin (1962) and was further elaborated by Searle's *Speech Acts* (1969), its implications and its critical challenges now extend beyond a theory of language. A performative utterance, for Austin, was one in which 'the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action' (1962: 163), such that the saying of the utterance – his classic examples were 'I do [take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife]' and 'I name this ship the *Queen Elizabeth*' – is not to describe my doing but 'to do it'. 'When I say, before the registrar or altar, &c., "I do", I am not reporting on a marriage: I am indulging in it' (1962: 163). These utterances are oftentimes taken, erroneously in his view, to be the outward description, true or false, of 'the occurrence of the inward performance'

(1962: 164). It is his challenge to the idea that there needs be an inward, even spiritual, act to accompany these performative utterances that foreshadows Butler's use of his thesis. For while Austin's ultimate concern was to explicate the requisite conditions for the smooth or 'happy' functioning of a performative, it is crucial to his argument that performatives – even the 'awe-inspiring' 'I promise to . . .' (1962: 164) – cannot be considered within the terms of truth and falsehood. Even one who promises in bad faith, still, in uttering the words, makes the promise. A promise has been made; something has been done, and something is set in motion. It is the non-necessity of an 'inward' performance to accompany the 'outer' performative that enables Austin's thesis to be tied to the tradition of critical thought indicated above, which is what Judith Butler achieved so brilliantly in her text *Gender Trouble*. For her, the fiction that there are two discrete genders is a fabrication, a performative achievement that is sustained through the production and repetition of 'corporeal signs' (1990: 136). The gendered subject is the outward performance, in other words, sustained without the necessity of any 'inward act': the idea that there is such an interiority – one that 'causes' the subject's gender – is the 'cultural fiction' that 'discrete and polar genders' flow from the seemingly simple duality of anatomical sex (1990: 140).

The power/knowledge relations that produce the subject require that subject – as their conditioned element – to respond in ways that in turn sustain those power/knowledge relations. The disciplined body is one that has to co-ordinate its movements in the most minute detail. Not only are the disciplined bodies Foucault describes in *Discipline and Punish* (1977[1975]) required to follow timetables that co-ordinate them in space and time – eating, sleeping, praying, exercise, reading, and so on – but they must also co-ordinate each limb, each glance, each gesture. The schoolboy Foucault describes has to pay attention to the placement of his feet, the extension of his spine, the grip of his pencil, the formation his letters. These movements are a training because they become habits, sustaining the attentions of power without passing through consciousness. The inmates in Foucault's description of the Panopticon come to act as if they believe they are being watched, whether they are being watched or not *and* whether they truly believe it or not *and* whether they even consider their surveillance as a question. In Foucault's power/knowledge regimes, the knowledge is taken in, folded into the subject's very being.

'In all his work', wrote Deleuze, 'Foucault seems haunted by this theme of an inside which is merely the fold of the outside, as if the ship were

a folding of the sea' (Deleuze, 1988: 97). If the seeming integrity of the object is a product of the workings of the *dispositif*, of the lines of light and enunciation that have that object as their mobile, incomplete product, and if difference – such as ethnic or gender difference – is understood as indicative of the implicit or explicit power, even violence, of the regime within which it appears, then what is readable on the body is only ever the embodiment, momentary if seamlessly reiterated, of forces that emanate from without. The sustenance of the element in question by this external process is what allows for the achievement of difference. Deleuze explains: 'a line of subjectification is a process, a production of subjectivity in a social apparatus [*dispositif*]: it has to be made, inasmuch as the apparatus allows it to come into being or makes it possible' (1992: 161).

As Deleuze reads Foucault's oeuvre, he finds this recurrent theme of the fold. From *Madness and Civilisation* through to the later volumes of the *History of Sexuality*, he reads from one book to another, gradually building his own reading. He follows the 'games of repetition' (1988: 98) whereby Foucault 'is always concerned with showing how the Other, the Distant, is also the Near and the Same', as Foucault put it in *Madness and Civilisation*, which in Deleuze's words becomes figured as the fold: 'it resembles exactly the invagination of a tissue in embryology, or the act of doubling in sewing: twist, fold, stop and so on' (1988: 98). This theme can be traced throughout Foucault, from his interest in Raymond Roussel and the notion of the 'snag' – 'no longer the accident of tissue but the new rule on the basis of which the external tissue is twisted, invaginated and doubled' (1988: 98) – to his final works where, for example, the notion of *enkrateia* – a sort of self-mastery, a mastery over the inside which becomes 'hollowed out' as a relation with the self is allowed to emerge – can be understood as the Greek version of the snag and the doubling.

To interrogate the performative nature of these productions is to lay emphasis on the detail of power's operations, as well as its fragility. Subjectification is always incomplete and always threatened therefore by the sense in which its accomplishment is also its ability to be undone. It is threatened by its melancholic structure as Butler describes it in *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997) by which something has to be foreclosed to enable the subject's survival where certain possibilities are forbidden or disallowed. More generally put, it is threatened by the principle fact of co-extensivity. As Butler puts it in more recent work: 'I am outside myself from the outset, and must be, in order to survive, and in order to enter into the realm of the possible' (2004: 32). It is the

temporal nature that makes the productions fragile; they need to be reiterated and *sustained* across time in order to support the lines of the *dispositif*. Movement within those lines – as highlighted in accounts of passing and changing gender both historical and contemporary – is not impossible but is potentially dangerous.

For Butler, the fragility of gender production does not mean that its deployment is easily interrupted or broken. Partaking in the cultural fiction is also the securing of one's own 'cultural survival' in a world where genders are distinct, hierarchically related and heteronormatively organized. To exist outside the contemporary terms of intelligibility is to risk sanction. The ethical questions at stake here – that is, the ethical requirement to demonstrate the foreclosures of a variety of regimes of different orders – are always the primary issue for Butler. That is, how to articulate a response to those regimes while cognizant of the contradictions in positing an escape via an 'undisciplined' route to a place free from disciplinary regimes. Not only are psychoanalytic terminologies disallowed within a Foucauldian paradigm, so too are any claims that flirt with an authentic or natural subject and community. Belongings, even those given via the most genealogical of routes, require (or are required to entail) a performative dimension (Boyarin and Boyarin, 1993).

One strong theme in the post-Panopticon literature is the emphasis on the use of embodied performance to explore a tension between the one who appears and the one who performs; that is, there is no need to revert to a notion of a true subjectivity or interiority in order to comprehend how differently disciplined bodies can co-exist. More than one disciplined body can share the same co-ordinates in space, and insofar as bodies move through different institutions, and operate in different capacities, this is necessarily the case. In a fascinating exploration of this thought, Hamera (2005) tells the story of a couple – Ben and May – from Cambodia, Khmer survivors living in Los Angeles, who were trained in classic Khmer dance. Through their performance of this highly stylized dance form, Ben and May perform an embodied 'answer' to past trauma. Their interviews with Hamera suggest that they understand their skill in embodying this 'ur-text' of Khmer culture (2005: 97) as allowing that culture to survive. Moreover, they sense that their embodied knowledge of it comes to account for their own survival. May Sem says:

I hear my teachers who did not get out. I hear them sometimes in the day. I don't see, just hear. I am scared but they tell me the steps [movements generally] to the dance. I am like a child, a baby. I listen to them tell me the step. At first I am so scared, I don't listen. Maybe

go crazy like my neighbour I tell you. But I listen to them tell me the step, then I do. I do. Sometimes I do better, I think so, because they tell me. (2005: 97)

This accountability is a complex one in which, as Vivian Patraka suggests, the doing/performance is always accountable to the 'thing gone' (1999: 7). Hamera understands this accountability in Bakhtinian terms such that, for the Sems, dance becomes the vehicle through which Ben and May perform *answers* for their individual survival, and that of Khmer culture.

There are several 'bodies' engaging in performative knowledge here. The dancing body exhibits its rigorous training in technique, while the dancer engaged in the performance is understood to become the embodiment of 'Apsaras', the celestial dancers who guard the heavens and mediate between the sacred and the secular through their dances. Then there is the refugee-survivor body who in his or her performance offers an ambiguous, non-spoken answer to the past as well as exhibiting the fragile possibility of potential survival.

According to Deleuze's reading, in *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 2: *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault suggested that the folding does have the possibility of establishing a subjectivity which, while of course derived from power and knowledge, is not dependent upon them (Deleuze, 1988: 101): '[The line of subjectivation] is a line of escape. It escapes preceding lines and *escapes from itself*' (1992: 161, emphasis added). In other words, subjectivity, as Foucault comes to regard it through the texts studied in *The Use of Pleasure*, breaks off from the lines of force which brought it into being and establishes its relation to self; in the practice of the relation to the self, there is what Deleuze would call a line of escape or flight by which one establishes one's subjectivity (1988: 102). At this point in his account, Deleuze's writing also breaks away from Foucault's, as he moves beyond admiration to emphasize a certain reading, circling Foucault's thematic in order to produce something which amounts to his own argument.

This notion of the line of escape which may continue preceding lines but then loops and forms new shapes and spaces such that it breaks from them, is a reading of Foucault that belongs very much to a Deleuzian reading. Indeed, Deleuze's reading of the *dispositif* or apparatus draws it close to his own notion of the assemblage. To return to Deleuze's 'What is a Dispositif?', the 'lines' encircle and seem to give rise to objects and subjects; but for Deleuze co-extensivity does not mean an imposition of an interiority from outside, as a more Nietzschean reading of Foucault might offer. Rather co-extensivity would be another term

to describe the rhizomatic nature of the lines of Foucault's *dispositif*:

These apparatuses, then, are composed of the following elements: lines of visibility and enunciation, lines of force, lines of subjectification, lines of splitting, breakage, fracture, all of which criss-cross and mingle together, some lines reproducing and giving rise to others, by means of variations or even changes in the way they are grouped. (1992: 162)

As he puts it elsewhere, the analytic task is to follow the tangle of the assemblage. 'We have as many tangled lines as a hand . . . What we [Deleuze and Guattari] call by different names – schizo-analysis, micro-politics, pragmatics, diagrammatism, rhizomatics, cartography – has no other object than the study of these lines, in groups or as individuals' (2002[1977]: 125). Amidst these paths will be those of the 'line of flight . . . of the greatest gradient': 'this line appears to arise [*surgir*] afterwards, to become detached from the two others, if indeed it succeeds in detaching itself' (2002[1977]: 125). This line of flight is a movement of creativity within the tangle of lines of the *dispositif*.

What is at stake here is how one understands this creativity. For this creativity does not seemingly replace or contradict co-extensivity in Deleuze's understanding. There are still lines of light, knowledge, power and subjectification that encircle and produce the effect of interiorities. These must remain in the analysis. But it certainly means that for Deleuze and Guattari following movements of becoming – or, to use the Bergson-inflected language, attempting to trace the path by which a differing, a specific becoming, is actualized – is also to trace the path of a creative relationship to self which, insofar as it is posited as a relationship of the thing to itself, implies a version of interiority and a critique of the mantra 'no interiority, only co-extensivity'. What has

been, if not denied, then bracketed, namely the creativity of things, their self-activity, indeed the very insistence of *life*, is put back into the frame.

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