Resisting with Authority: Historical Specificity, Agency and the Performative Self

Terry Lovell

> It is clearly possible to speak with authority *without* being authorized to speak. (Butler, 1997a: 157)

Agency, the Self and Political Intervention

THE PROBLEM of agency in relation to social transformation continues to haunt feminist theory. The problem is chronic in the wake of forms of theory, dating back at least as far as 1950s sociological structural functionalism, in which agency is linked to a socially constructed self whose very formation is deeply embedded within the very institutional practices and norms that feminists wish to challenge.

This article will look at this problem in the work of Judith Butler, to assess her success in negotiating it through her 'politics of the performative'. It will follow Lois McNay (2000) in arguing that while Butler's conceptualization succeeds in establishing the *possibility* of agency, it is less powerful in providing tools for the analysis of effective agency in specific historical contexts and in relation to particular movements of transformation. I shall extend McNay's critique to argue that the problem lies in too narrow a search for transformative agency in the socially constituted self.

The performative self walks a knife-edged ridge. A slip of the foot to one side casts the 'performative self' down among earlier casualties of 'oversocialization' (Wrong, 1977): the Parsonian individual, the target of Wrong's critique, the Althusserian interpellated subject. The temptation on the other

■ *Theory, Culture & Society* 2003 (SAGE, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi), Vol. 20(1): 1–17
[0263-2764(200302)20:1;1–17;030918]

side is to imagine one can take wing and soar away into freedom. My argument will be that Butler's strategy for traversing the edge is hampered by the focus on 'the (subjected) self' rather than on the social relations of political (inter)action, and the specific historical conditions of particular social transformations.

Although Butler defends her work against the charge of voluntarism made against *Gender Trouble* (1990), and specifically disavows 'the figure of the choosing subject – humanist – at the center of a project whose emphasis on construction seems to be quite opposed to such a notion' (1993a: x), if we place 'the self' at the centre of agency, it is often difficult to avoid slippage, so that the 'self' merges with 'the individual human agent' when the analysis moves from abstract theory to examples of specific instances in the social history of transformative moments and movements. What is required is the recognition of agency as a function of *ensemble* performances – often with a very large cast of others. Transformative political agency lies in the interstices of interaction, in collective social movements in formation in specific circumstances, rather than in the fissures of a never-fully-constituted self, or in the always open-ended character of speech and language, although these instabilities of language and the self are indeed among the conditions of possibility of agency.

I shall develop my argument through available accounts of an historical incident that Butler touches upon very briefly, the famous refusal of Rosa Parks in Montgomery, Alabama in December 1955, to give up her seat to a white passenger. My argument relies rather heavily upon the analysis of a single sentence of Butler's, one that is actually at odds with Butler's explicit theoretical stance. She describes Parks as having '*endowed* a certain authority on the act' (Butler, 1997a: 141, emphasis added), using the active voice. It might be objected that this was a momentary slip. But while I do not take the view that all errors in speech or writing are symptomatic, I believe that this one may be: the result of a rare focus on the action of a particular individual, but indicative of the dangers confronting analysis that places so much weight of emphasis on 'the (performative) self'.[1]

The moment in *Excitable Speech* in which Butler conflates historical agency with the performance of an individual is one in which she is engaging with Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*. Butler's 'reiterative performances', in which social norms are reproduced but may be reproduced awry, or with a difference, bear some resemblance to Bourdieu's 'practices'. She identifies the dependency of social norms upon the necessity for endless repetition in which we express who we are and what the world is like through our performances within it. Both Bourdieu and Butler draw upon J.L. Austin's (1962) concept of *performativity.* Some speech acts seem to have almost magical power. They make a difference in the world. Austin distinguishes between speech acts that seem, through their mere utterance, to effect what is asserted, and those whose effects are mediated. Ritual and formal ceremony provide many examples of the former, for example, the transubstantiation of the host in the celebration of Mass, or the utterance of

the words of the marriage service, the conferral of a knighthood, or the award of a degree. The deed is effected with the utterance of the words.

Bourdieu refers this power of (some) speech to effect what it says in the saying as 'social magic'. It appears to be the words that do the deed, but actually the effectiveness of the words depends upon social institutions and the position or status within those institutions of the person who speaks the words. The magic only works when the words are spoken on the right occasion in the right manner by one who is authorized to utter them. Those who are not so authorized may give identical and punctilious performances without the same effect, like the villains of Samuel Richardson's fiction staging mock marriages to deceive the heroines, where the result is not to institute legally binding ties, though the effects on the heroine are real enough.

Butler recognizes the affinity between her concept of performativity and Bourdieu's *habitus. Habitus*, she concedes, has the potential for acknowledging the hold of institutional norms through practice without losing the promise of agency, because *habitus* is defined as generative rather than determined. It is a concept that registers 'those embodied rituals of everydayness by which a given culture produces and sustains belief in its own "obviousness"' (Butler, 1999: 114). Through *habitus*, social norms are incorporated in the body of the individual subject.

The citational practices that reproduce social norms, for Butler, are habitual and largely unreflexive, while for Bourdieu, 'the logic of practice' likewise resides beyond the easy reach of reflexive consciousness. Yet both, equally, claim to have avoided closure into the kind of self-reproductive structure that Althusser and the sociological structural functionalists before him found so difficult to avoid. Bourdieu, like Butler, is passionately committed to social transformation. But political interventions aimed at transformation require an understanding of agency that goes beyond the unintended consequences of shifts within the social field that operate 'behind the backs' of human agents but which does not re-situate that agency upon the individual human actor.

It is on the issue of agency that Butler distances herself from Bourdieu. Focusing primarily on *Language and Symbolic Power* (Bourdieu, 1991), she argues that he reduces the power of words to the power of social institutions. The promise of agency through *habitus* is thus lost. It is in principle generative, but it is itself generated by the field in which it develops and therefore has no independent effect upon that field. She accuses Bourdieu of tying the authority of authoritative and effective speech acts exclusively to the position occupied by the speaker within institutionally structured fields, so that only those who are licensed within the field to speak with authority due to their status may successfully 'do things with words' (Austin, 1962). Butler argues that Bourdieu's analysis depends on the maintenance of a distinction between the merely verbal and the social, and accuses him of, in effect, re-instituting the Marxian distinction between base and superstructure. Social norms and institutions provide, for Bourdieu, the solid infrastructure

that guarantees the effectiveness of authoritative speech acts, but their effectiveness is bought, Butler argues, at the expense of the possibility of human agency. The bonds that tie together *habitus* and social field, are, she argues, tied too tightly. The subject is, in effect, tied hand and foot.

There are two elements in Butler's critique of Bourdieu. First, in *Excitable Speech*, she argues that Bourdieu fails to understand the implications of his own thesis of embodiment. Speech acts are not 'merely linguistic' but also bodily, and Butler identifies therefore the possibility of discordance between what is spoken and what the body says: 'He fails to grasp how what is bodily in speech resists and confounds the very norms by which it is regulated' (1997a: 142). It is in the margins, between what is said in words and the eloquence of the body, that resistance, even subversion, may be nourished. And, second, because social norms and institutions depend for their reproduction on iteration and re-iteration in performance, there is a 'logic of iterability' that makes even the most entrenched institutionalized norms vulnerable to subversion and transformation through transgressive performances (1997a: 147).

For Butler, the possibility of transgression is therefore implicit in the very nature of speech acts, indeed of all action. But she goes further. She envisages speech acts and other performances which do not merely transgress, but that do so with authority. Legitimacy is maintained only by being enacted in repeat performances. But through performances that have no prior authorization in social norms, institutional norms may yet be derailed with authority.

For Butler, agency requires an account of subjectivity that leaves room for innovation, for the freedom to resist. *Habitus*, she argues, as specified by Bourdieu, closes down on this possibility, because it turns out to be generative and relatively autonomous only in theory. In practice, in Bourdieu's account of the relationship between *habitus* and field, the field itself generates the characteristic *habitus* of the individuals who are formed by daily practice within it: 'the rules or norms, explicit or tacit, that form that field and its grammar of action, are themselves *reproduced* at the level of *habitus* and hence implicated in the *habitus* from the start' (Butler, 1999: 117, emphasis in the original). The distinction between *habitus* and field is, she concludes, a tenuous one. Like Althusser's social formation, Bourdieu's social field is itself attributed the power to generate the subjectivity it requires for its own maintenance. The quasi-independence of *habitus*, which might guarantee at least the possibility of effective intervention to transform social life, dissolves into the field of its own formation – 'submits' is the term used by Butler. In the final analysis, *habitus* disappears without remainder into the field in which it was forged in the first place.

Butler pins her hopes for effective agency not only upon the dissonances and fractures of language and of the socially constituted self, but also upon certain categories of social actor. She is particularly interested in those that occupy positions that are not interpellated (in Althusser's Lacanian vocabulary), not recognized other than as scandalous, positions

that are not liveable yet are nevertheless occupied: the position of sexual dissidents and of others who suffer abjection (Kristeva, 1982), non-recognition, mis-recognition. It is from these marginal spaces that she looks for movements of radical contestation and transformation.

The equivalent to 'abjection' in Bourdieu's conceptual toolkit is the process of 'symbolic violence': the violence that is daily inflicted upon the dominated who must see themselves through the symbolic schemas of the dominant (Fanon, 1986). But symbolic violence has its roots entirely in the processes of *social* life, *social* domination, rather than in the psychic life of the subject and of power, which, for Butler, is rooted at a deeper level of a multi-layered subjectivity. Bourdieu's habitual self has less depth than has that of Butler: his reflexive sociology does not include any critical links between the habitual self and the unconscious, in which the psychic life of power takes root (1997b). *Habitus* does generate a certain depth. For Bourdieu as for Butler, the self, subjected or dominant, is not transparent to itself. But neither is any part of it located at depths which either the conscious, reflective self or the habitual self has a stake in refusing to know, in strenuously disavowing. Bourdieu's equivalent of abjection is produced in relations of domination that structure the surface of *social* life and the layers that lie not too far below that surface. It is incorporated in the embodied *habitus* of dominant and dominated alike. In terms of the metaphor of depth, *habitus* lies below consciousness and intentionality, but well above the level at which the unconscious is interred.

For Bourdieu, social transformation is effected through the fractures of a complex social field as it develops through time, and through the exchanges between subjects that are mediated by *habitus*. Transformation is not effected, however, through the disposition to resist that constitutes certain types of *habitus*, but through forms of collective political action in specific historical circumstances. In his writings on *habitus*, particularly in the accounts he gives of the feminine *habitus*, it operates more often as a constraint upon effective agency for change than as its source (Bourdieu, 2001).

I shall now move on to consider the issue of historical agency, using the example of Rosa Parks's historic 'act of resistance', and replacing it in its historical context, in order to make the case for the shift away from the subject/agency couplet, to give agency a more interactive, collective and socio-historical location.

Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Protest

The instance in question is the famous one that sparked the Montgomery Alabama bus protest in the mid-1950s. On 1 December 1955, Rosa Parks, on her way home from work, refused to give up her seat on a segregated bus to a white passenger. Gary Younge suggests that the rhetoric of myth is absolutely characteristic of the terms in which this historic act of resistance is usually recounted:

> Parks's arrest sparked a chain reaction that started the bus boycott that launched the civil rights movement. . . . It was her individual courage that triggered the collective display of defiance that turned a previously unknown 26-year-old preacher, Martin Luther King, into a household name. (Younge, 2000: 8)

This rhetoric of myth informs Butler's brief gloss on the incident:

> In laying claim to the right for which she had no prior authorization, she endowed a certain authority on the act, and began the insurrectionary process of overthrowing those established codes of legitimacy. (Butler, 1997a: 141)

Butler's claim that it is possible to act and speak with authority, although without any prior institutional authorization, is unexceptionable. The sociologist Max Weber famously included among his types of authority one such. His first type, traditional authority: ('It is written'), is of the kind that Bourdieu identifies in Kabylia, and in the naturalization of arbitrary but timeless social norms. The second, legal-rational authority, is underwritten by formal rules, rationally legitimated, explicit. The third type is perhaps the most famous and the most discussed: charismatic authority: ('It is written, but I say unto you'). Weber's paradigm case was the Old Testament prophet (Weber, 1979).

Those who exercise legitimate authority of all kinds may lose it. Bourdieu is clear on the relationship between the retention of authority and the recognition granted by those who are subject to it. This is true of all three of Weber's types, but it is charismatic leaders who are most fully dependent on their followers. With the loss of followers, the charismatic leader is brutally cut down to size, to risk becoming a figure of bathos.

The exercise of authority is legitimated in two directions: by the position or social status that gives the right to its exercise and by the recognition of those who are subject to it. But authority and recognition of authority are mediated by the *habitus* of the authority-holder, as exhibited in the performance of those acts in which authority is exercised or established. A gap may open up between the pretension to authority of a status-holder, and the *habitus* of the one upon whom the mantle of authority falls. The garment may be ill fitting. Under Bourdieu's concept of *noblesse oblige*, authority-holders are under obligation to act up to the qualities and skills that are attributed to them by virtue of their status: to become what they are. However if the gap remains too wide, and respect for the authority-holder is lost, the nakedness of the emperor may be glimpsed. Compliance in such cases may cease, or cease to be voluntary, and the degree of coercion required to secure it is one measure of the loss of authority.

The Montgomery bus protests occurred in the context of the erosion of the legitimacy of the Alabama laws and ordinances regulating segregation on the buses in the eyes of the black community, measured by the increasing recourse of the bus drivers to bullying and force. However

Butler's claim is that Rosa Parks's refusal to give up her seat was itself an act of authority and not only of defiance. What was the source of the authority that she claims for Parks's act? Butler appears to be attributing it to some quality inherent in Parks's performance. She uses the active voice ('she endowed', not 'the act was endowed'), but we are left to speculate on whether that endowment resided in the words exchanged, the bodily stance, or in some special quality of the performance of the act, or whether anyone who refused to give up their seat could likewise be said to be acting with authority.

Could the act be understood as the exercise of charismatic authority? Parks is described by Branch (1988) as taciturn, quietly spoken and reserved. 'Dignity' is the term used by her biographer, who describes her at the time of her arrest as 'a prim, well-mannered, middle-aged woman' (Brinkley, 2000): a far cry from Weber's Old Testament prophet. She could not be said to be appealing to traditional, but possibly to rational-legal authority. She was arrested for violating the Alabama bus segregation ordinances, convicted and fined $14. The nature of the charge opened the way for an appeal to the federal justice system and the Supreme Court, 'challenging the constitutionality of segregation in interstate transportation' (White, 1990: 117). The terms in which Martin Luther King spoke of the case in an address in the Holt Street church in Montgomery shortly after Parks's arrest is interesting in this respect:

> King spoke of the law, saying that the arrest was doubtful even under the segregation ordinances, because reserved Negro and white bus sections were not specified in them. 'The law has never been clarified at that point, and I think I speak with – legal authority – not that I have any legal authority – but I think I speak with legal authority behind me'. (Branch, 1988: 139)

What ensued in 1956 was a protracted battle in the courts, with the Montgomery authorities drawing on state law, and the boycott leaders appealing to federal law. In December 1956, the Supreme Court found in favour of the latter with the ruling that Montgomery's segregated public transport ordinances were unconstitutional.

To assess the nature of Rosa Parks's act it is necessary, therefore, to look at the broader context, legal and social, and at the actions of others who played critical parts in the decision to make Parks's arrest a civil rights issue. It is not an action that, in and of itself, can be classified solely in relation to the moment of defiance on the bus. It is interesting to compare the outcome of her refusal to give up her seat with similar refusals earlier.

Jo Ann Robinson, who was a teacher at Alabama State College, reports an incident that greatly distressed her on her first arrival in Montgomery in 1949, when she unwittingly contravened local segregation practices by assuming a seat reserved for whites. She was abused by the driver and thrown off the bus (Robinson, 1987). Branch reports another occasion (without giving a date) on which the previous incumbent of Martin Luther

King's position in the Dexter Street Baptist church, Vernon Johns, entered by the front door of the bus and occupied a seat reserved for whites. The driver refunded his fare, and ordered him off the bus. Johns answers more nearly than does Parks to Weber's characterization of the charismatic prophet – he was referred to as such by another Montgomery preacher and activist, Ralph D. Abernathy (Branch, 1988: 110), and his response to being ordered off the bus might be understood as a (failed) attempt to exercise charismatic authority. 'Johns invited all the Negroes and whites on the bus to follow him off in protest.' None did so (Branch, 1988: 14). Parks herself reported that her action in December 1955 was nothing new for her: 'My resistance to being mistreated on the buses and anywhere else was just a regular thing with me and not just that day' (Morris, 1984: 51). She had been ejected from buses on a number of occasions in the 1940s. In March 1955 in Montgomery, nine months prior to Parks's historical action, the 15-year-old Claudette Colvin was arrested for just such an act of defiance, and in October 1955 another woman, Mary Louise Smith, was arrested, charged and convicted in similar circumstances. If Butler is right in her claim, then we must ask what was the difference between these acts that 'endowed' one but not the others with authority, to mark it as the beginning of an insurrectionary process?

The difference between the 1955 cases and the earlier ones surely lies in part in the enhanced mobilization of coercion and the law in response: the arrests, detentions, charges and convictions, and most analysts attribute this escalation to the mounting resistance in the South, including Alabama, to a number of Supreme Court decisions, including most importantly the landmark Brown case of 1954 relating to segregation in schools, which had ruled against the segregationist practices of the South. Prior to this, it seems clear that, at the level of everyday practice, actions like that of Rosa Parks in December 1955 were familiar to drivers and passengers alike. Claudette Colvin is reported as saying that what happened to her in March of that year was unexpected: 'I thought he [the driver] would stop and shout and then drive on. *That's what they usually do*' (Younge, 2000: 11, emphasis added). This form of words is very significant. If it was possible to say what usually happened in such circumstances, then the implication is that such incidents were common enough to have developed around them a set of expectations based on custom and practice. We might almost say that a re-iterable practice was in formation in these earlier instances, and it would be a mistake to look for an original act of transgression. Rather we should recognize that the originality of Parks's action lay in the response it produced, the fact that its time was right, as we shall see. What was new in the three 1955 cases was the suspension of 'what usually happened', and the escalation of confrontation associated with the use of legal sanctions.

Butler is correct in her observation that Parks 'had no prior right . . . guaranteed by any of the segregationist conventions of the South' to refuse to give up her seat (Butler, 1997a: 147), although the coexistence of federal law complicates the picture. However, to suppose that only what Max Weber

referred to as 'formal/legal authority' would count in Bourdieu's specification of 'legitimacy' is greatly to reduce the scope of his analysis. His concept of 'the social field' and its institutional norms, and the analyses he offers in many different contexts, make it clear that social fields are always complex, their dominant norms often, even usually, contested internally. The social field is not always already (or ever?) fully constituted, fixed and unequivocal. Institutions and practices depend not only upon everyday performances which instantiate them, but also on contests between more or less powerful social actors with different 'stakes' in the field. In the case in question, the authority of the segregationist institutions and practices of the South was not sovereign or uncontested in 'the field' in which the civil rights struggles unfolded, as sources of authority. In addition to the Supreme Court rulings, Montgomery had by 1955 a fledgling civil rights movement which already had its leaders and spokespersons: local activists, among them Rosa Parks, the white lawyer Clifford Durr, and the black community spokesman E.D. Nixon, who took the decision that Parks, rather than either Colvin or Smith, was a suitable candidate to be the standard bearer behind whom the challenge to the bus laws would be mobilized; and Jo Ann Robinson and the Women's Political Committee, who came independently to the same assessment of the Parks case, and who had been actively looking for a suitable candidate for some time. The WPC prepared leaflets calling for a boycott of the buses, copied them, and distributed them on the day following the arrest of Parks (Robinson, 1987).

It was not just Parks's act, nor the sledgehammer response of the white authorities, but also the response of the Montgomery black community organizers, and ultimately, the actions of thousands of black people in supporting the boycott, thus granting, provisionally, the recognition upon which the authority of their 'representatives' depended, in the context of an emergent civil rights movement, which 'endowed' Parks's act with a retrospective authority that the earlier incidents, including those that involved Parks herself, lacked. We need to look beyond Parks's 'performance' on that day in 1955 to understand the authority of her act of resistance.

Social Class, Groups and Resistance

Bourdieu offers another approach to resistance and legitimate authority in his work on representation, not considered by Butler in her critique (see for example Bourdieu, 1998). The authority of Parks's act of defiance was not endowed on it, as we have seen, by Parks alone, but by the endorsement and publicity given to it by the nascent civil rights movement and by the people who supported the boycott with such impressive solidarity and in the face of great personal hardship. Parks was considered to be a suitable icon for the movement, and it is in this 'suitability' that we may find clues to her personal authority. Neither Claudette Colvin nor Mary Louise Smith was deemed a good candidate. For Bourdieu, the legitimacy of the leaders and organizers of dominated groups depends upon the assent, the recognition, of their members. In this process of double recognition, the group itself is

constituted as well as the authority of its 'representatives'. The boycotters massively, if provisionally, endorsed the legitimacy of their leaders through their action in refusing to ride the buses over a period of 12 months.

For Bourdieu, one of *the* main locations of domination and of resistance resides in the relations of social class. In an article entitled 'What Makes a Social Class? On the Theoretical and Practical Existence of Groups' (Bourdieu, 1987), he argues that social classes and, more generally, social groups, may come into being as a function of contiguity in social space: 'agents who, being subject to similar conditions, tend to resemble one another and, as a result, are inclined to assemble practically, to come together as a practical group, and thus to reinforce their points of resemblance' (Bourdieu, 1987: 6). He endorses E.P. Thompson's account of the English working class as a class that was made, not given. It was not the automatic product of structure, but the outcome over time of historically and socially located social interaction and of organizational and political work: 'The working class as we perceive it today . . . is a well-founded historical construction' (Bourdieu, 1987: 9). Bourdieu generalizes his account of class formation to that of all social groups. The fact that his model for social groups is based on the case of social classes creates problems for the analysis of social groups founded on categories of people, such as women, who are not contiguous in social space. But what he has to say about groups is particularly interesting in relation to Butler's politics of the performative. Thus, later in the same essay, he defines 'symbolic power' as 'the power to make groups and to consecrate or institute them' as a function of 'the performative power of naming' (Bourdieu, 1987: 14). His definition of class is worth quoting at length:

> A 'class', be it social, sexual, ethnic or otherwise, exists when there are agents capable of imposing themselves as authorized to speak and to act officially in its place and in its name, upon those who, by recognizing themselves in these plenipotentiaries, by recognizing them as endowed with full power to speak and act in their name, recognize themselves as members of the class, and in doing so, confer upon it the only form of existence a group can possess. (Bourdieu, 1987: 15)

In other words, the authority of Rosa Parks's act was retrospective, the outcome of a process of group formation that was social and collective. It was the willingness of the black community in Montgomery to accept Parks as 'a suitable standard-bearer' for their cause – a willingness that was only evident after her action in refusing to give up her seat – that contributed critically to the authority that Butler ascribes to that act. The choice of Parks as 'suitable' was initially the result of the judgement of local black activists, and their choice was confirmed by the subsequent success in mobilizing the black community to participate in the bus boycott. Legitimate authority, the power to confer 'symbolic capital', cannot be understood as the exclusive property of the dominant, although the authority of the dominant is

underwritten by more powerful sanctions and institutional supports. Where Bourdieu focuses not upon the processes that secure and reproduce the position of the dominant in social space, but on the political mobilization of the dominated, it is clear why the emphasis on 'consecrated' authority and on institutionalized dominant norms alone is misleading. Authority within dissident, dominated groups-in-formation cannot be reduced to socially instituted normative structures (Bourdieu, 1998). Neither is it always a function of charismatic performance.

Richard King offers a useful gloss on the authority of the dominated, and the significance of the public and collective nature of the claiming of rights:

> To protest publicly was itself to assume that one *already* belonged, that a space of public appearance waited to be rightly occupied. To assert this was a kind of performative utterance, appropriating the right to protest in the act of asserting it. (King, 1996: 103)

This formulation by King is interesting in relation to Butler, and in relation to the distinction between actions that ask for inclusion and that may serve to reinforce social norms in certain respects, and those that seek radical transformation (Butler et al., 2000: 162 *passim*). In Montgomery, existing norms and social relations of domination were significant in determining the choice of Parks for the iconic role she played. She had credentials that were a function of her 'distinction' within the social field in which the civil rights movement emerged, in terms of class, race and the culture of respectability, and which marked her out as 'suitable' in a way that Colvin was not. What was sought, by Nixon and Durr, by the Women's Political Committee, and by the black populace that was being asked to take great risks and suffer much hardship in supporting the boycott, was not a leader but an emblem of the mundane harassment that black people routinely suffered: an 'innocent' victim of impeccable credentials who had suffered abuse on the buses. Rosa Parks was working class. Had she not been, she was unlikely to have been a regular bus commuter. She worked as a seamstress. But she is characterized by many of the commentators on the civil rights movement in Montgomery in terms of middle-aged 'respectability': 'She wore rimless spectacles, spoke quietly, wrote and typed faultless letters . . . a tireless worker and churchgoer of working-class station and middle-class demeanor' (Branch, 1988: 125). As we have already seen, she was most frequently described then and subsequently in terms of personal dignity. The contrast with Branch's description of the status and demeanour of Claudette Colvin could not be greater:

> A feisty high school student . . . who defended her right to the seat in language that brought words of disapproval from passengers of both races. . . . Colvin was crying and madder than ever by the time the policeman told her she was under arrest. She struggled when they dragged her off to the bus and screamed when they put on the handcuffs. (Branch, 1988: 120)

> . . . immature – prone to breakdowns and outbursts of profanity. Worse, she was pregnant. . . . Colvin would not do. (Branch, 1988: 123)

This description of Colvin is contested in some accounts, for example that of Jo Ann Robinson (1987: 38). But the consensus in most of the accounts that we have of this incident is that Colvin lacked the insignia of respectability that Parks embodied. Too dark-skinned, too 'rough' in class terms, too young, too loud, and pregnant but unmarried: it was for these reasons, claims Younge, all of them deeply rooted in the dominant conventions of respectability, that Colvin's action was not destined to be marked by a little brief authority.

Performativity, Political Agency, Resistance, Inclusion

In this concluding section I shall attempt to pull together the themes of this article and to spell out some of its implications.

The Ambiguities of Resistance and Conformity

Pure acts of resistance are as rare as unequivocal acts of submission. We may look for and find elements of submission/consent to norms within the most courageous acts of resistance, and vice versa, elements of resistance in the *habitus* of submission.

The display of submission may deceive. While Bourdieu is correct in his recognition that, because of the eloquent 'speech' of embodied *habitus*, the dominated assent to more than they know, Butler is equally correct in her insistence that 'what is bodily in speech' may undermine what is submissive in what is said. The *habitus* of submission may actually assent to less than it seems to. The ambivalence of resistance may be matched by the ambivalence of submission. The *habitus* acquired by the dominated may serve to *represent* submission without fully expressing it. It may mask deep resentment. But these ambivalences of submission may be communicated, 'body-to-body'. For example, what children learn about the meaning of gender in the day-to-day exchanges within the family may be more than either parent realizes he/she is saying: hence the commonplace injunction, 'Don't do as I do, do as I say.'

Branch suggests that W.E.B. Du Bois's analysis of 'double consciousness' may be read into the *habitus* (not a term he uses) of Martin Luther King: 'For King, this meant that to represent his race nobly he had to behave more like his idea of white people and less like white people's idea of Negroes' (Branch, 1988: 73). 'Double consciousness' is not divided between what is conscious and expressed in language, and what is below consciousness and expressed in *habitus*, but structures all levels of communication about the self and the world.

Butler and Bourdieu both, then, are able to theorize the existence of a gap between what is expressed verbally, and (relatively) consciously, and what the body says. But the hopes and fears that they read into this gap are diametrically opposed. Bourdieu fills it in a manner that makes of the body

and the information it betrays a force for conservatism. He fails to recognize that *habitus*, and the subjectivity written in and expressed by the body, may be equivocal, or that a submissive *habitus* may cover resentment and hostility that may be available for political mobilization. Butler, on the other hand, offers a perhaps overly optimistic reading of this rift that may open up between speech and the body. She looks exclusively for resistance in 'what is bodily in speech' (1997a: 142). But *habitus*, body language, is as polysemic as speech, has to be interpreted, and may be ambivalent.

Richard Sennett argues that resistance and dependency may coexist in a close symbiotic relationship. Whether verbal or encoded in the language of the body, resistance may actually tighten the bonds that tie together those with authority and those subject to it (Sennett, 1980). And in a justly celebrated study of popular working-class memory of fascism in Turin, Luisa Passerini (1987) also draws attention, in this historical context, to the barely hidden ambivalence of both submission and rebellion. The 'disposition to resist' may coexist with a desire to (appear to) conform. This desire may be dictated by prudence, as is the case in many of Passerini's examples. But it may also be deeply inscribed in lived subjectivity.

Socioanalysis and 'the Psychic Life of Power'

In psychoanalytic theory the subject is never entirely at one with the social persona she has acquired and that she assumes in the everyday practices in which this unfolds and develops over time. This is true whether or not 'the social field' in which it develops is relatively simple and unchanging, or complex, fractured and changing. Jacqueline Rose has drawn on the understanding that certain positions that are offered to subjects are impossible to live, most notably 'the feminine' (Rose, 1983). For Butler, all subject-positionings are necessarily incomplete, no 'interpellations' entirely successful: 'You call me this, but what I am eludes the semantic reach of any such linguistic effort to capture me' (Butler et al., 2000: 12).

In the course of the dialogues with Laclau and Žižek, Butler criticizes Foucault for his failure to appreciate the manner in which his analysis of power would be enriched by a recognition of its 'psychic life'. The psychic life of power, the title of Butler's 1997b study, is likewise absent from Bourdieu's strictly sociological theory. Bourdieu nowhere feels the necessity to draw upon psychoanalytic theory in the way that all three of the contributors to the dialogues do. If Bourdieu believes that power has a psychic life, it is difficult to detect it in the framework of his reflexive sociology. It is perhaps this absence that makes Butler so reserved with respect to *habitus*. In her own theory of agency through performance, the psychic life of power deeply informs the self that power produces. It plays perhaps the dominant role in mediating social power and the self.

Butler is surely correct in her contention that power has a 'psychic life', but Bourdieu, like Foucault, has chosen not to enter 'the psychic life of power' into his analysis of social space and its reproduction/transformation. It is interesting that Bourdieu refers to his work of reflexive sociology,

in its value for those crushed by brutally mundane forms of symbolic violence, as 'socioanalysis' (see for example the discussion in Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 62 *passim*). The very term signals that it occupies the space and the functions that psychoanalysis has assumed in left appropriations of Lacan. As psychoanalysis may have power to reconcile the patient to 'ordinary everyday unhappiness', socioanalysis may have the power to reveal to those who suffer '*la misère du monde*' the source of everyday suffering in *social* injustice and structures of domination, even if, like psychoanalysis, it is equally unable in and of itself to alter the conditions that produce that suffering (Bourdieu et al., 1999).

Agency and Politics

The concept of agency has caused and continues to cause great anxiety within feminisms that wish, on the one hand, to register 'women's oppression', yet on the other, to avoid the figure of 'woman as victim'. The affirmation that women are active subjects who resist the oppression visited upon them is a familiar theme. 'Agency' in such discourse is aligned unequivocally with radical politics and the struggle against the dominant social norms and institutions within which women are oppressed. What both 'performativity' and '*habitus*' permit is the recognition that individual agency is not necessarily aligned with resistance and that neither 'dispositions to resist', nor performative acts of resistance, guarantee political effectiveness. Effective political agency is interactional and collective. But, as Butler argues in the dialogues with Laclau and Žižek, the collectivities that are formed in the creation of oppositional groups may achieve incorporation at the expense of redrawn boundaries of inclusion/exclusion. Butler raises this issue in the context of the bid for inclusion of homosexual couples through the legal recognition of same-sex marriages: 'with whom do they break alliance?' she asks (Butler et al., 2000: 176). What norms are reinforced through the success of particular bids for inclusion, what exclusions reaffirmed? She leaves open the possibility of a more radical politics that does not seek, and cannot be contained by, inclusion. She signals a form of political action that is transformative, but constantly aware of the need to police and pull down its own incorporative palings.

Gender and Incorporation

The bid for authority that the whole civil rights movement in these early years represented was a bid that was clearly marked by gender. For King's 'space of public appearance' (1996) was *not* 'waiting to be rightly occupied' by black women – at least not in 1955. After the rise of second-wave feminism, this point was often made in terms of the difficulty that black male comrades had, both in the civil rights movement and in later forms of black mobilization, in recognizing authority in women (Davis, 1982; Giddings, 1984). A reviewer of Brinkley's biography of Parks comments that this story of her life has 'a certain opaqueness . . . it feels less like a narrative than an unchangeable picture – a frozen frame of that chapter in the

history of human freedom' (Wood, 2001). What comes across very strikingly in the biography is not only Rosa Parks's own diffidence about her credentials: her authority as a leading member of the civil rights movement, but also the way in which she was marginalized. The image that remains is of someone who kept finding herself returned to the margins, in spite of her iconic status and her role in the Montgomery boycott. In March 1965, Parks returned to Alabama to participate in a mass march from Selma to Montgomery. She found herself repeatedly 'shunted aside' at a rally in St Jude (Brinkley, 2000: 198). This was a recurrent experience: a new 'iterable' sequence of events? When Nelson Mandela visited Detriot in 1990, Parks was left off the VIP list, and was made an uneasy party to the reception group as an afterthought. Her uneasy, almost Bourdieu-like sense that she shouldn't be there was only allayed by Mandela's unequivocal recognition and warm welcome.

What we detect through the writings on Parks and in her biography is a personal authority in her bearing, combined with a sense of unease in assuming her place among the leaders of the movement on public occasions. Parks's sensitivity to the possibility that she might not really be wanted was not simply due to diffidence on her part. Ella Baker, a close associate of Parks, felt that there was no real leadership role for her in the SCLC, the organization she helped to create: 'Why? First, I'm a woman. Also I'm not a minister' (cited in Giddings, 1984: 312). Whatever else was being challenged and transformed by the movement at this stage in its history, it was not the dominant (white) norms of gender relationships. Black men under slavery in the US had been denied the right to stake such claims in their relationships with women. The claims of the movement were claims for the recognition of 'manhood' – a term and a claim that recurs again and again. But it is a claim that can be deeply problematic for women. The claim to manhood and its privileges is also a claim over women. It marks out a position for women that is not readily reconciled with female authority.

Notoriously, the planning committee of the famous 1963 march on Washington had also neglected to include any women speakers in the final programme: 'Mrs. Parks . . . was presented, but almost casually. . . . Some of us recognized anew that Negro women are second-class citizens in the same way that white women are, in our culture' (Anna Arnold Hedgeman, quoted in Giddings, 1984: 312). The struggle for black subjectivity and citizenship was one that was bounded by gender as well as by class.

Note

1. Interestingly, the essay by Butler on the Rodney King video faces the opposite problem (Butler, 1993b). The meaning that attaches to King's black body in the context of an urban riot, overrides any possible action that King himself might have taken, on Butler's analysis. Whatever King's 'performance', the meaning that was 'endowed' upon it was fixed by the logic of white racism.

References

Austin, J.L. (1962) *How To Do Things with Words*. London, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1987) 'What Makes a Social Class? On the Theoretical and Practical Existence of Groups', *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 32: 1–17.

Bourdieu, P. (1990) *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice. Cambridge: Polity.

Bourdieu, P. (1991) *Language and Symbolic Power*, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson. Cambridge: Polity.

Bourdieu, P. (1998) *Acts of Resistance: Against the New Myths of Our Times*, trans. Richard Nice. Cambridge: Polity.

Bourdieu, P. (2001) *Masculine Domination*, trans. Richard Nice. Cambridge: Polity.

Bourdieu, P. and L.J.D. Wacquant (1992) *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P. et al. (1999) *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society*, trans. P.P. Ferguson. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Branch, T. (1988) *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954–63*. New York: Touchstone.

Brinkley, D. (2000) *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: The Life of Rosa Parks*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

Butler, J. (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York and London: Routledge.

Butler, J. (1993a) *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limitations of 'Sex'*. New York and London: Routledge.

Butler, J. (1993b) 'Endangered/Endangering: Schematic Racism and White Paranoia', in R. Gooding-Williams (ed.) *Reading Rodney King, Reading Urban Uprising*. New York and London: Routledge.

Butler, J. (1997a) *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. New York and London: Routledge.

Butler, J. (1997b) *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Butler, J. (1999) 'Performativity's Social Magic', pp. 113–28 in Richard Shusterman (ed.) *Bourdieu: A Critical Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Butler, J., E. Laclau and S. Žižek (2000) *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*. London and New York: Verso.

Davis, A. (1982) *Women, Race and Class*. London: The Women's Press.

Fanon, F. (1986) *Black Skin, White Mask*, trans. C.L. Markmann. London: Pluto Press. (First published 1968.)

Giddings, P. (1984) *Where and When I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*. New York: William Morrow.

King, R.H. (1996) *Civil Rights and the Idea of Freedom*. Athens and London: University of Georgia Press.

Kristeva, J. (1982) *The Powers of Horror: An Essay in Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press.

McNay, L. (2000) *Gender and Agency: Reconfiguring the Subject in Feminist Thought and Social Theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Morris, A.D. (1984) *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*: *Black Communities Organizing for Change*.New York and London: Free Press.

Passerini, L. (1987) *Fascism in Popular Memory: The Cultural Experience of the Turin Working Class*, trans. Bob Lumley and Jude Bloomfield. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Robinson, J.A. (1987) *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Woman Who Started It.* Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press.

Rose, J. (1983) 'Sexuality and its Discontents', *Feminist Review* 14. Reprinted in J. Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision.* London: Verso, 1986.

Sennett, R. (1980) *Authority.* London: Secker and Warburg.

Weber, M. (1979) *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, trans. Ephraim Fischoff. Berkeley: University of California Press.

White, J. (1990) *Black Leadership in America: From Booker T. Washington to Jesse Jackson*. London and New York: Longmans.

Wood, G. (2001) 'A Ticket to Ride, a War to be Fought', *Guardian* 8 January.

Wrong, D. (1977) 'The Oversocialized Conception of Man in Modern Sociology', in *Skeptical Sociology.* London: Heinemann Education.

Younge, G. (2000) 'She Would Not be Moved', *The Guardian Weekend* 16 Dec.

Terry Lovell is a professor at the Centre for the Study of Women and Gender, and the Department of Sociology, at the University of Warwick, where she has lectured in sociology, women's studies and cultural studies since 1972. Her publications include *Pictures of Reality: Politics, Aesthetics and Pleasure* (BFI Publications, 1980), *Consuming Fiction* (Verso, 1987) and *A Glossary of Feminist Theory* (with S. Andermahr and C. Wolkowitz, Edward Arnold, 1997). She is the editor of *British Feminist Thought* (Blackwell, 1990) and *Feminist Cultural Studies* (2 vols, Edward Elgar, 1995). She has written extensively on feminist social theory and the sociology of culture.