



A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF JUDITH BUTLER'S POSTMODERN EXISTENTIALISM

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Abstract: The "performativity" idea put out by Judith Butler grows out of an existential phenomenology with origins in Hegel's postwar French interpretations. Butler's theory still clearly has connections to postwar existentialism, while being heavily inspired by poststructuralist philosophy in general and Foucault in particular. Despite recasting the lexicon of the existentialist movement in Sartre, de Beauvoir, and Merleau-Ponty's. The idea of performativity experiences many of the same issues that plague these theories of the "linguistic turn." thinkers. The article specifically identifies a conflict between Butler's assertions that created a notion of agency without subjects and the phenomenological precondition that intentionality is what the action is aimed for. On the other hand, it is claimed that the phenomenological presupposition of a intentionality, which "selects" from a menu of options while remaining "behind" the embodied social agent, Butler's approach does not entirely eliminate subject-positions. Calling this a "postmodern" approach existentialism," the paper critiques Butler's theory's ensuing deadlock.

Key Words: Gender, Judith Butler, Postmodernism, Existentialism, Identity.

1. INTRODUCTION :

The political grammar of social claims has changed during the past thirty years, moving from political demands for redistributive justice to identity-based efforts for cultural legitimacy. The "battle for recognition"(1) is quickly evolving into the archetypal form of political conflict, where "group identification replaces class interest as the primary tool of political mobilisation," according to Nancy Fraser.(2) The intellectual popularity of postmodern anti-foundationalism and theories of the diversity and fragmentation of social identities are also significant factors in the context, in addition to identity-based conflicts.(3) Postmarxism, the left-wing of postmodern politics, has had a significant impact in this regard with its notion that the cause of societal hostility is the incompleteness of identity. This connection between postmodern anti-foundationalism and the postmarxian emphasis on the politics of identity is made clear in the recent joint proclamation of a shared trajectory, initiated by Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek. (4) Additionally, it reaffirms Butler's status as one of the foremost theorists in this postmodern and postmarxist movement.

However, there is a big difference between confirming the conjunctural significance of cultural recognition conflicts and making them the driving force behind all social conflict. In summary, postmarxism confuses the centrality of cultural conflict with its generating function in social structuration. The ramifications of making battles for cultural recognition the driving force behind social conflict are best developed by Butler's view of identity as a cultural performance. The theory of performativity was first presented in *Gender Trouble* (1999) [1990], which resulted in an interpretation of Derrida's deconstruction and Foucault's discourse analytics that was greatly influenced by existential Hegelianism. Butler claimed that material institutions are the result, not the cause, of social subjectivity by interpreting the process of subject-formation through the Hegelian prism of the battle for recognition. Butler's sources (Althusser and Foucault) are overturned by the idea that identity formation serves as the foundation for institutional structuration, resulting in a generalised category of performativity that is based on individual dramatic performances and whose primary trait is its capacity to transcend its contextual determinants. Butler focuses her examination of identity-formation at the level of the person who rejects subjectification, which is even more difficult. As a result, the idea of agency that Butler uses to support his idea of a politics of the performative still resides in the abstract individualist conceptual realm. Her philosophy frequently struggles with the false issue of authorial intentionality and has a tendency to add social uniqueness largely through description.



Individual identity struggle is seen as the driving cause for significant structural change in Butler's perspective. Butler's politics of identity are based on the essential tenet that the individual chooses from a variety of socially scripted options when creating their own self-identification, as opposed to institutional rituals generating social subjectivity through interpellation. Initially, Butler argued that the standards of heterosexuality are upheld by behaviours that are "performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise appear to convey are fabrications constructed and perpetuated by bodily signals and other discursive methods." (5) Butler's support for a "stylistics of existence," based on Sartre and Foucault, was prompted by the potential for the demystification of gender identities through parodic performances. Butler stated that gender must be viewed as "a bodily style, a 'act,' as it were, that is both purposeful and performative, where 'performative' denotes a dramatic and contingent creation of meaning" in a highly revealing early formulation. (6) This provocative idea that social identity is a purposeful, theatrical performance shows a belief that personal praxis is the social structures' genetic source. It is predicated on the fundamental premise that a free-floating intentionality chooses the social identity that best serves its goals or interests in the given situation while remaining detached from the subject-positions that are open to the individual. In this sense, Butler's speech makes explicit use of the liberal political philosophy's unique sovereign intentionality of the rational actor.

2. 'IDENTITY POLITICS' AND BEYOND?

Butler's involvement in conflicts over cultural appropriation extends existential Hegelian philosophy to postmodern theory. By reinterpreting the master-slave dialectic as the relationship between the dominant heterosexual identity produced by the "heterosexual matrix" and marginalised gay identities, she achieves this. As a result, Butler's theory retains a recognisable Hegelian structure despite her distinctly postmodern invocations of numerous subject-positions and decentred forms of power. The "identitarian" concepts of identity politics are reframed by the author as relational complexes in a dialectical process, and this is then seen from the perspective of a Foucauldian conception of power as multiple and productive. The normalisation of heterosexuality necessitates the restriction and exclusion of homosexuality, according to Butler, who claims that the heterosexual matrix creates a power that is deployed through numerous venues. Because every socio political identity contains a covert allusion to its "constitutive outside" in the form of an abjected identity, (7) Butler contends that all sociopolitical identities are dialogically constructed. For instance, a melancholy disidentification from their marginalised "outside," in homosexuality, supports or subverts mainstream heterosexual gender identities.

In order to practise the Hegelian theory of the battle for recognition on the postmodern landscape of so-called "identity politics," the idea of a quest for self-identification as the motivating factor in social conflict has been adopted. Since this was the topic of her dissertation on the French reception of Hegel, Butler is obviously no stranger to analysing the persistence of a conceptual constellation, even, or perhaps especially, one consisting of a structure of misrecognition. Although the teleological story of the Phenomenology of Spirit has often been criticised, she contends that the "labour of the negative" of the Hegelian "subject of desire" is perpetuated in negation. (8) In *Subjects of Desire*, Butler shows how the "general economy" of post-Hegelian conceptions of the subject is characterised by a framework of "negation without transcendence" or "preservation despite negation." Butler argues that despite the self-reflexive self-identity of Hegel's subject retreating from a regulative concept (Hyppolite, Kojève), (9) to an imaginary yet necessary ideal (Sartre), and finally terminating as a meretricious fiction to be endlessly denounced by poststructuralism (Lacan, Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze), (10) Hegelian self-reflexive identity nonetheless lives a return of the repressed in the *Thus*, she accepts the fragmentation of subjectivity and the end of the grand story of developing self-identity while defending the value of the phenomenological quest. (11)

Moya Lloyd connects Butler's followers' reliance on authorial intention to lingering uncertainties in Butler's own position in an important critical critique of identity politics. (12) Butler simultaneously affirms the constructed nature of social identities and seems to imply that the ground for political action continues to be an unreconstructed assessment of interests. (13) The voluntarist theory of the radical mutability of gender performances developed by Butler's followers ignores the geographical differences between parody and politics, performance and performative, intentionality and agency. (14) The assumption of a seat of intentionality separate from the variety of identity roles available to the "performer" is essential to the notion that the individual's performance of social identities necessitates the conceptual apparatus of liberal individualism, which is here made explicit by Butler's supporters.

3. GENDER PERFORMANCE :

We must look at Butler's critique of essentialist theories of gender to understand why she would have started her theory-building process with the idea of the person's purposeful, theatrical performance. This will also help us understand what



tools she could have at her disposal to undo the individualist voluntarism that led to her conception. The essentialist view of gender as a significant difference indicating an underlying natural sexual split is rejected by Butler's theory of identity. She views gender as being created by social practises that are backed by institutional authority. According to Butler, gender identities are cultural performances that establish the "originary materiality" of sexuality in the past, in keeping with social constructivism. (15) Butler interprets this to mean that gender is a naturalised social ritual of heterosexuality rather than the manifestation of a "abiding substance" and that there is a relationship between the "metaphysics of substance" and the "identitarian categories of sex." (16) Here, "sexuality" in the sense of a preference for a certain gender and "sexuality" in the biological meaning of the makeup of the reproductive organs are being confused. Butler extends this theory by arguing that gender is a performative that results in constative sex and that the body is not a natural, material object but a discursively managed, cultural production. (17)

Butler is adamantly opposed to the idea of a fundamental substantial agent (a "person") or a physical being (a "body"). According to Nietzsche, "Gender is always a doing," she claims, "albeit not a doing by a subject who may be said to pre-exist the act." (18)

Butler believes that there is no psychology "beneath" the person's many gender roles that they play. Butler contends that the psychoanalytic notion of the incest prohibition—despite drawing on Freudian theory—is a byproduct of the heterosexual matrix that has to be dismantled. Butler claims to show the diversity and dispersion of social norms as well as the historical nature of sexual taboos rather than a permanent structure to the human mind that would serve as a foundation to gender identities. She proposes a view of gender identity that is believed to be historically particular and socially malleable by performing a historicist interpretation of Lévi-Straussian anthropology and Lacanian psychoanalysis, which is motivated by Foucault's critique of the repressive hypothesis. (19)

If the suppressed desire is "produced" through contingent discourses, then rather than the incest ban being universal, we confront a variety of specific taboos that change depending on cultural forms. According to Butler, the "repression of want" really develops a field of expected infractions rather than suppressing an innate psychological substrate of incestuous desire. This is because every standard is created via the citation of its exceptions. Butler, following Foucault, rejects psychological interiority as the source of the suppression of desire and instead turns "from interiority to gender performatives," arguing that normalization entails the body serving as the location of an urge to indicate. (20)

She comes to the conclusion that gender parody "reveals that the original identity after which gender forms itself is a copy without origin" by using an examination of drag as an example of resignification. (21) As a result, "the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence is disrupted" by the destabilizations caused by parodic recitation and marginal gender behaviours. (22)

For instance, drag acts show how genders are artificial. The divide between inner and outside psychological space is completely subverted by drag, which also successfully mocks both the expressive model of gender and the idea of real gender identity. Gender is therefore performative rather than constative. She claims that the regulatory ideal of bipolar gender identity is shown to be a fabrication and a norm that hides as a developmental law that governs the sexual field that it claims to define. (23) Thus, the dominant universality of heterosexuality is displaced and denaturalized by the subversive recurrence of gender norms in previously unheard-of circumstances, representing a practical deconstruction of the politics of gender normalization.

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