

Queering Performativity

Understanding performativity as a renewable action without clear origin or end suggests that speech is finally constrained neither by its specific speaker nor its originating context. Not only defined by social context, such speech is also marked by its capacity to break with context. Thus, performativity has its own social temporality in which it remains enabled precisely by the contexts from which it breaks.

—Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech*

I am invariably transformed by the encounters I undergo; recognition becomes the process by which I become other than what I was and so cease to be able to return to what I was.

—Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*

1.

One of the most precious legacies of the long and tortuous itinerary of deconstructing Western metaphysics is the contestation of the image of the sovereign individual. That image is the very premise that enables the justification, normalization, or obfuscation of political and social practices of oppression, exclusion, and expropriation. As an admirer of Hannah Arendt and the Frankfurt School, and as a latecomer to post-structuralist epistemology, I was fascinated by the breakthrough that the performative accomplished in transforming the relationship between actor and act. A term borrowed from John Austin, but deployed as a prism through which to reappraise theories that decenter the subject, the performative opened up the possibility of moving away from causal rationality (the actor is the cause of the act) and toward a circular, self-reflexive model according to which the doer is inseparable from the deed.¹

It is true that Austin thought within the context of speech acts, not quite able to sever his ties with the logocentric conception of the world—*logos* referring here to speech rather than to reason. Conceived as a speaking being par excellence, the human universe is regulated by signification, according to Austin. The constative function of speech (utterances are considered to describe or report something) is dethroned, but Austin's

performative is still a *speech* act. Rethinking social conduct or political action as performative, that is, as bringing into being a situation or an actor that was hitherto nonexistent, produces a break with the linguistic context within the conceptual trajectory of the “performative.” By way of example, instead of evaluating social movements with respect to their tactics and aims, social movement research is now reflecting on how the very emergence of a movement results in the transformation of dominant power matrices, bringing about altered subjectivities and introducing new actors onto the political scene, even if the aims of the movement are ultimately frustrated. Contesting the foundationalist construal of the subject, the promise of the performative lies in the possibilities it opens up for reflecting on the points of articulation between power and agency. Who am I if I am a situated, cultured, embodied being whose very constitution cannot be isolated from a complex matrix of social powers, the workings of which can never be totally cognized or mastered? Who am I if my “self” cannot be fully distinguished from enactments of that very self?

It is with Judith Butler that the theory of the performative took on a definitive turn toward comprehending the body in its materiality and desires. The apparent givenness of the latter, whether based on biological or conventional claims, was brought into question in radical ways. How to understand the persistence of social conventions was the most challenging—and innovative—problem that Butler’s rethinking of the performative set out to resolve. By suggesting that social norms and conventions precede the subject but owe their permanence to the subject’s performative reiterations, Butler reformulated the “continuity versus change” conundrum that most nonfoundationalist critical theories were finding difficult to sort out. Butler’s refusal to set resistance apart from subjection promised to fill in some of the lacunas that weighed down several theories of agency.² By summoning but also reappropriating Sigmund Freud, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida, in addition to feminist thought, Butler was able to show how the gendered and sexualized constitution of bodies is neither a structural nor an ontological “given” but an ongoing process. The subject acts on condition that it is acted upon: it is interpellated into available positions by linguistic and ritualistic practices, but the latter are dependent upon being reiterated by subjects in order for their interpellative force to be sustained over time.

Louis Althusser’s thesis that there is no ideology except by and for subjects was thus creatively transformed. In Butler, that thesis would read as follows: there is no social structure except *by* and *for* subjects. What matters for our purposes here is the “by,” which indicates that social norms and powers are not beyond the subject in a formal or metaphysical sense but are upheld by subjects. This not only allows for historicity and contingency to

perturb the otherwise nonempirical universe of structuralism, but it also allows for the question of responsibility to be posed.

To avoid any misunderstanding: Butler would not (and given the premises of their theory, could not) straightforwardly claim that normative and conventional structures result from our own actions. That would make Butler fall back upon causality (I am the *originator* of *my* actions and can therefore act in such a way as to master the consequences of my acting). And, worse, that would require Butler to retreat into a form of possessive individualism whereby my actions would be considered my *own*. Neither of the two propositions has their place in Butler's theory of the performative. Hence the quote I chose as one of the most inspiring passages in my reading of their work:

Understanding performativity as a renewable action without clear origin or end suggests that speech is finally constrained neither by its specific speaker nor its originating context. Not only defined by social context, such speech is also marked by its capacity to break with context. Thus, performativity has its own social temporality in which it remains enabled precisely by the contexts from which it breaks.³

As inspiring as it is, though, this passage is also highly intriguing. My perplexity arises from Butler's penchant for the impersonal and formal, even at moments when the whole thrust of their text begs for a more personalized or personified theory of agency. I hope I will be able to explain what I mean in what follows and urge Butler to also think in that direction.

2.

The performative constitution of identity and bodily desires in Butler's work entails thinking of social positions as responses to dominant forms of interpellation. The very inevitability of reiterative interpellation (I am called over and over again into "womanhood" or "manhood" throughout my lifetime) shows that no identity or body can be considered a natural or ahistorical entity. Butler interprets the incessant interpellative force of social norms as the tacit sign of the impossibility of foreclosure. No authority is authoritative enough to perpetuate itself without reiterative practices that assign and reassign a place to subjects. The frailty, as it were, of structures is manifest in the need to replicate the subjugation *ad infinitum*.

Although the impossibility of foreclosure appears as the negative condition of the possibility of agency, Butler tells us that power is also positively enabling. The agent, who is different from the sovereign subject, also wields power, where "power" connotes a field of enabling constraints that are not only linguistic but also include *dispositifs* that are material, legal, and political. The agent is enabled by the very power that constitutes it. Either the

interpellation fails to solicit a response from the subject, or the nature of naming is such that no interpellation can ever interpellate fully.

The second option is the one Butler tends to espouse when explicating their theory of agency. In the quote from *Excitable Speech* cited above, the inevitable misfiring of an interpellation is imputed to the nature of speech: “*speech* is finally constrained neither by its specific *speaker* nor its originating *context*” (emphasis added). It is speech that has a “*capacity* to break with context.” But as a performative act, interpellation paradoxically enables agency because no originating context or speaker can foreclose the capacity of speech to mark other subjects in other contexts, thus creating new significations and enabling unforeseen responses. To take up an example dear to Butler: the term *queer*, uttered in an injurious manner in one context, may shift contexts in such a way that it begins to call into being forms of resistance to that very injury.

By and large, breaks or ruptures have a special status in Butler’s theory. In *Excitable Speech*, they serve to distinguish forms of agency that perpetuate available norms from those other forms that alter or subvert them. This is a tricky exercise, of course, since, if every interpellation necessarily fails, ruptures in context must be distinguished from sustained attempts to comply despite misfires. Indeed—and contra Austin—even the performative fulfillment of assigned social roles hinges on the inevitable misfiring of their enactment: “The possibility of missing the mark is always there in the enactment of gender; in fact, gender may be the enactment in which missing the mark is a defining feature.”⁴ In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, the breakdown of norms of recognizability accounts for the formulation of an ethical response: it is only when addressed by an unwilling and unknowable Other that “I” am inaugurated as a relation and a response. In *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, when nonconforming, stigmatized, or excluded bodies assemble in public, this appearing itself performs a rupture in patterns of recognizability. Such public appearances also performatively embody and actualize the rights that the bodies assembled have set out to demand. Breaks do not only point to normative preferences (we *do* want gender nonconforming bodies to live and move freely in public spaces) but also serve to ground the performative conception of agency.

It is not difficult to see why queering emerges as *the* mode of rupture, that is, as resisting par excellence, in Butler’s work. If the subject is always already dependent on social norms and constraints for its very existence qua subject, then transformative agency is what is performed at the interstices, margins, limits of interpellative power but never at an absolute distance from it. Hence, queering is a subversion of norms rather than an *ex nihilo* form of self-constitution.

This account of (ethical, transformative) agency is invaluable in contesting the figure of the sovereign, autonomous individual, affectively and epistemologically transparent to itself and moving about in the world attending to relationships and objects of its own making or choosing. The theory of performativity allows us to become conceptually attuned to how power works in constituting us in inconspicuous and inescapable ways by deploying its own interpellative force. *Hic Rhodus, hic saltus!* This is an excellent riposte to those who continue to stick steadfastly to a disembodied, asocial, power-free conception of the agent, ethical or otherwise. The critical task that the theory of performativity accomplishes lies precisely in its refusal to gloss over the complex ways in which all agents are implicated in power relations.

3.

So why am I perplexed at this construal? To say last things first: I worry that it too might operate a form of foreclosure, one that might impair our possibility to reflect more deeply on the nature of difference. This is in part due to Butler's espousal of the Derridean concept of *différance* (simultaneously *differ* and *defer*). In both Derrida and Butler, speech does not connote a semantic utterance regulated by the structural laws of linguistics but consists rather in acts or enactments that require agency. In Derrida, signification is a function of iterability, *différance*, and the effacement of presence (of the actual empirical context in which the utterance is made). The condition of possibility of signification is at the same time the condition of possibility of its interminable alteration. In both Butler and Derrida, the force of the performative arises not through recourse to established conventions but through the break performed. But Butler effectuates a rupture in the Derridean scheme by reinscribing performativity into social contexts (thus giving Derrida a dose of his own medicine). Initially setting out to deconstruct the normative and discursive formation of gender and sexuality, Butler finds in drag parody the paradigmatic disclosure of how gender is naturalized. Just as the iterability of behavioral norms and embodied gestures constructs heteronormative sociability as natural and effaces the power at work in the production of that very naturalness, parody breaks with the predominant matrix even as it performatively cites and reiterates it.

In critiquing the Derridean position, Butler underscores how historicity or the sedimentation of usages of utterances is absent from his theory of deconstruction. What indeed accounts for why certain usages become predominant, even exclusionary, and certain others are prohibited, punished, or delegitimated? Although iteration and reiteration are what turn an utterance into a "mark" in the Derridean sense, his rather formalist structuralism

evacuates the question of power. To remedy this void, Butler reintroduces the question of historicity by reflecting on the constraints that limit the possibility of free-floating shifts in contexts. Yet interjecting sociality and historicity into Derrida breeds another form of trouble. Butler wants to retain the Derridean formula whereby the performative is an impersonal force with its own temporality. But the agency of the subject in bringing about a break in available conventions must then be accounted for in social and historical terms.

Consider, for instance, the “quite plausible scene” that Butler herself proposes: “one is called by a name and one turns around only to protest the name: ‘That is not me, you must be mistaken!’”⁵ A clear break in the expected pattern of behavior, this “no” illustrates how the performative constitution of submissive bodies may not only fail but also be actively (and performatively) rejected. The difference between missing the mark and refusing the mark comes out starkly in this example. The question remains, then, as to how the subject *can* say “no.” Who or what can be said to refuse to be interpellated? And how is the agency of a subject who can say “That is not me” constituted?

Butler accounts for this specific scene by recourse to the notion of authorization. The performative cannot produce an effect if the speaker is not *authorized* to make a certain utterance. If I’m not the police, my hailing will either fail to interpellate or be met with the retort, “who are you to hail me?” In order to explain how the performative works through breaks with authorizing contexts, Butler situates authorization in the address. Although the subject is interpellated into compliance, it is also so authorized to answer back, thus performatively breaking with the social place it is being compelled to occupy. But does this really solve the enigma of why the subject answers back instead of complying? The “answering back” is the contingent element that solicits an explanation here. Authorization itself cannot account for the *actual* break but can only spell out its condition of possibility.

Butler tackles this conundrum in various ways throughout their oeuvre. At times, the possibility of dissent is derived from injury, from the injurious address to which historically marked groups are subjected. At other times, it results from an encounter with an unrecognizable other, which compels the agent to move out of itself. Unwilled forms of proximity or oppositional voices may also disturb reiterative modes of compliance. But often, the *explanans* appears already presupposed by the *explanandum*: the subject who answers “no” must already have framed its assigned social position as an “injury” in order for it to react, and responsiveness must already be presupposed (as in Emmanuel Levinas’s preontological assumptions) in order for calls by unfamiliar others to be taken up as worth responding to or even hearing.⁶ If the subject’s role in refusing the interpellation is not merely an

unintended consequence or a performative accident, then we have to assume that the subject *can* maintain a distance from norms upholding dominant social powers. But where does that distance come from? Is it external to the subject or somehow internal to it?

The simultaneous presence of a multiplicity of norms and circumstances within any social setting is cited in Butler's later work as an implicit solution to the enigma of the break. In *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, they write that in the course of enacting a norm "some weakness of the norm is revealed, or another set of cultural conventions intervenes to produce confusion or conflict within a field of norms, or, in the midst of our enactment, another desire starts to govern, and forms of resistance develop, something new occurs, not precisely what was planned."⁷ Socialization is an ongoing, living process in which subjects are interpellated from a variety of different directions and are never allowed to settle in a single identity or normative field. The differential distribution of power, moreover, imposes double or triple layers of inclusion and exclusion on some groups in society. Nonconforming bodies are also interpellated as legal subjects; the disenfranchised are called into accepting their exclusion from property schemes, even as they are included through paid or unpaid labor to produce enormous wealth for others; and so on.

But even when one argues that subjects at the margin of power can reappropriate the terms by which they have been interpellated, we would have to explain why certain subjects *do* resist and certain others who share the same conditions (whether economic or racialized or gendered) continue reiterating the practices that uphold prevailing forms of exclusion.

Moreover, even when we take for granted that the social effects of speech and action always exceed the intentions of the agent and, simultaneously, that no agent is bereft of the power to resignify (and I *do* take this for granted), we would still need to fathom the whys and hows of individual responsibility. How can we hold racists, sexists, or fascists accountable? How can we hold ourselves responsible for resisting or failing to resist domination and exclusion? Such queries prompt me to pose the question of the status of the agent anew.

4.

If it were indeed our wish to move beyond binary thinking (structure *or* consciousness, ownership *or* dispossession, presence *or* absence, and so on), we would have to queer the theory of the subject. And this is exactly what Butler compellingly proposes.

The term *excess* is often employed in Butler's oeuvre (as an alternative to the Derridean *remainder* perhaps) to connote that which in the subject explains its agency. In describing interpellation, for instance, they write: "If the one who delivers it does not author it, and the one who is marked by it is not described by it, then the workings of interpellative power exceed the subjects constituted by its terms, and *the subjects so constituted exceed the interpellation by which they are animated.*"⁸ This "excess" seems not only to inhere in language (or in conflicting norms or external circumstances) but also in the *subject*, although it is stowed away in the unconscious, as an effect of paradoxically enabling processes of *assujétissement*.

But what if, instead of resorting to a theory of the unconscious, we enlarged the notion of plurality so dear to Butler so as to make room for singularity as a *potentia* that accounts for the emergence of the unexpected and new? This would not be at cross purposes with Butler's own theory, since they themselves remark that "critique finds that it cannot go forward without a consideration of how the deliberating subject comes into being and how a deliberating subject might actually live or appropriate a set of norms. Not only does ethics find itself embroiled in the task of social theory, but social theory, if it is to yield nonviolent results, must find a living place for this 'I.'"⁹

Pushing Butler more systematically in the direction of finding that "I" a place, I suggest that we explore some of the propositions they make at moments when they verge on construing the agent as active and willful in the processes of negotiation, resignification, resistance, and change. We need not be put off when, at those very moments, Butler immediately attempts to foreclose the possibility of personalizing the "I," warning us of how the personal is only intelligible within an impersonal context determined by language, norms, and power. For instance, as soon as they start discussing singularity as a form of irreplaceability, they write as if to conjure the risks inherent in such thinking: "my singularity has some properties in common with yours and so is, to some extent, a substitutable term."¹⁰ Following Adriana Cavarero, Butler construes singularity as a condition of being exposed (no one can be exposed for me; I alone suffer that exposure) but then instantly notes that it is a *shared* condition. We know, of course, how Butler ingeniously turns vulnerability into a ground for ethics—a ground that eschews metaphysics or formalism since it refers to a common ontological condition. This justifies why the personalized sense of singularity is constantly averted.

But if we can claim, with Butler, that there is a "structure of substitutability at the core of singularity," we can equally claim that there is a structure of singularity at the core of substitutability.¹¹ It so goes that half of the glass is empty, but it does matter what we prefer to utter concerning the glass—its fullness or its emptiness. Prioritizing the impersonal over the

personal, the common over the singular, seems, I think, crucial for Butler since they want to contest the idea of the sovereign subject while at the same time developing a nonfoundationalist vindication of ethics. But need the “I” become something like a vanishing point for this remarkable project to succeed? And wouldn’t the emphasis on sameness (substitutability) risk compromising the grounding of ethics in difference? Are we bound to each other by what makes us similar or by what differentiates us? Butler’s ethical choice would be the latter, I think.

To illustrate what I mean, I would suggest that we pursue a reflection that Butler makes but does not develop in their earlier work: “And what if one were to compile all the names that one has ever been called? Would they not present a quandary for identity? Would some of them cancel the effect of others?”¹² Refusing such a possibility, Butler cites Émile Benveniste to argue that “the very conditions of the possibility for becoming an ‘I’ in language remain indifferent to the ‘I’ that one becomes.”¹³ But the claim that the linguistic “I” is indifferent to what I become is only partially true. Language exists only by and through subjects, as Butler would remind us. So what if we construed the subject as a *trajectory* and not an entity, a trajectory of relations of naming and renaming, involving multiple names and multiple instances of subjection and agentic empowerment, the result being that your story would never be my story?¹⁴ This would indeed become a quandary for identity—but isn’t queering identities exactly what we want to do?

I use *trajectory* here in the way Sara Ahmed uses the terms *orientation* and *direction*. According to Ahmed, life is full of turning points. These are not the psychic processes of turning that Butler recounts, nor are they only about turning around and thereby misrecognizing oneself when hailed by the police. Ahmed eloquently argues that turning “might also take subjects in different directions. Depending on which way one turns, different worlds might even come into view. If such turns are repeated over time, then bodies acquire the very shape of such direction.”¹⁵ To this I might add: different worlds and different norms, conventions, constraints, and forms of interpellation also come into view when one turns. To be sure, disorientation and perhaps even paralysis belong to this itinerary. But disorientation would not exactly amount to a loss, as Butler is prone to claim, since it would be the very condition upon which a new direction is found or perhaps, I will venture to say, invented.

The singularity of each life seems to be acclaimed by Butler, particularly in the second passage I chose to highlight in the epigraph:

I am invariably transformed by the encounters I undergo; recognition becomes the process by which I become other than what I was and so cease to be able to return to what I was.¹⁶

But here again, instead of saying that the glass is half full, Butler opts for the opposite. They hastily qualify the incapacity of the “I” to return to what it was as a loss, as a condition of being “compelled and comported *outside oneself*.”¹⁷

Yet, if every turn inaugurates new paths, as in Jorge Luis Borges’s garden of forking paths (and more often than not, one cannot turn back and rewalk some of those paths, or, even when one attempts to return, those will not be the same paths one has walked since “one” is not the same now as in the initial walking), then every life must be construed as a *noniterable, unique trajectory*. No single context, semiotic convention, norm, or power structure can be said to have determined or dominated that trajectory—every trajectory would be overdetermined, so to speak. What from one perspective appears as a loss appears from another point of view as a gain—that of the subject’s singularity. We could construe these turns as constitutive breaks within the performative actualization of a life story. For if “I” am not a self but a trajectory of becomings, then there is no “being” compelled outside of itself and no loss, only a change in the direction of the becoming. Within the accidental or encounter-induced turns made throughout a lifetime, the “I” might constitute a memory, a fiction of identity and consistency; it can develop the desire to stick passionately to certain directions while marking others as “perverse.” But the feeling of loss would be a *subjective* reaction rather than an ontological condition.

Admittedly, every possible trajectory is constrained by forces not of the agent’s own making. It often is the case that certain paths are foreclosed or certain directions forced upon the one who walks, or that walking down a path results in exclusion, stigma, or abjection. Such practices and conditions seriously obstruct the singularization of trajectories and the queering of becomings. The refusal to recognize all lives as noniterable and unique is inherent in the unequal distribution of power and punitive measures. Norms governing the inegalitarian attribution of protection to lives, for instance, perform the erasure of singularities via ascriptions of worthiness or fantasies of homogeneity. As facticity, a singular life escapes narration or full transparency, even to the “I.” This does allow for it to be violently dispossessed, but that dispossession might very well be construed as a socio-historically induced condition rather than a constitutive one. My point is that the singularity of each life trajectory can never be effectively erased, except perhaps in a fully totalitarian world.

5.

But why worry about explicitly theorizing uniqueness or singularity? A tentative answer would be that avowing the radical difference between

living “I”s might be a necessary step in accounting for the force of rupture or break that Butler tends more often than not to impute to the impersonal workings of the performative. The unique trajectory that constitutes each “I” might be what enables the subject to distance itself from particular interpellations, even though this distance is never an absolute one.

Three sets of contingencies could be said to be at work in the constitution of a singular life trajectory: (i) innumerable forking paths interpellate the subject in different ways, in different contexts and times; (ii) the subject that has walked down one path instead of the other is necessarily different from the one that was at the junction before the turn was made; (iii) no two subjects could ever be constituted by the exact same trajectory, even those inflicted with similar social injuries or marked in similar ways. The contingency afflicting interpellative practices qua speech acts owes partially to this that no agent’s uptake of an utterance will ever be exactly the same as the uptake of another.

Such an enlarged (and radicalized) affirmation of plurality allows us to revisit the temporality of performativity as being dependent upon both unforeseen circumstances *and* individual life (hi)stories, which are themselves forged by encounters, unwilled forms of cohabitation, moments of recognition and misrecognition, names that injure and names that celebrate, interpellations that succeed and others that produce dissonances between normative orders or schemes of intelligibility already visited during a particular trajectory. The relative distance the subject *can* maintain vis-à-vis conventions is a distance that is acquired performatively albeit not fully consciously. The unthought (and unthinkable) nature of that distance—and of the trajectory that enables it—would not invalidate its ontological force, its role in enabling the agent’s active refusal to submit to various forms of interpellation. This refusal is the power wielded by the subject, which is in many ways distinct from the normative power that has produced it and keeps on exerting a pressure on its trajectory. Such a power is not yet a law, as Butler writes in describing Antigone’s act, but “a law formulated precisely through the singular instance of its application.”¹⁸

Following suit, we might attempt to construe instances of “turning” within noniterable trajectories as limit situations in which available norms cease to apply and new schemes of intelligibility can be actively and willfully formulated. It is in that sense that every moment of disorientation becomes an ethical one. Even as the “I” remains unthinkable and unsustainable without the “you,” the turns made within singular trajectories may be imputed to the agent. To be sure, a critique of the social conventions and circumstances that forge the turn remains essential to ethical reflection. “I” can be called into account for the turns I made as well as the turns I did not make. The address that imputes to me actions (that I am asked to

performatively own) generates responsibility as to what part of the action I can account for and what part I could, given my trajectory, have done otherwise. Admitting that a speech act or response is enabled by the powers of subjectivation is not incompatible with the claim that a unique trajectory of deeds and turns institutes the agent as a locus of responsibility—an origin to which *this* moment of reiteration or *that* act of subversion can be attributed.

Last but not least, if the concept of queering (the emphasis is on the verb “to queer” and not on the reconstruction of yet another identity in the form of “being queer”) is to effectively force open available schemes of intelligibility, the inward pressure that social movements tend to exert on persons considered to be the “same” must be averted to allow for differentiation and singularity. Constative concepts such as cultural plurality or intersectionality are not sufficient to ward off the risk in this regard. Butler’s latter work underscores all the more forcefully that the present task of critical scholarship is to reflect on the conditions of possibility of responsive *and* creative agency more than on its limits or impossibility. I hope to have contributed to this endeavor by hinting at how Butler’s concept of performativity may move in queerer directions than they themselves might be prone to admit.

Notes

1. See J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (London, 1962).
2. See Judith Butler’s argument with Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek in Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (London, 2000).
3. Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York, 1997), 40.
4. Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, MA, and London, 2015), 30.
5. Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 33.
6. In *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence* (Pittsburgh, 1998) Emmanuel Levinas seeks to uncover the preontological weight of language, rather than considering language as an ontological code that can be traced in what is said in the phenomenal world, circumscribed by space and time. Butler notes that this preontological assumption leads Levinas to extract the primary scene of address (which is in essence a scene of accusation and persecution) “from its concrete historical appearances”; Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York, 2005), 93–94. Although Butler disputes Levinas’s preontological claims, they nevertheless derive a theory of responsibility from the idea that the subject emerges through unwilling address. The inevitable vulnerability of the subject is owed to this scene of emergence, but Butler also identifies the conditions of possibility of responsibility in the permeability and relationality implied by this account of subject formation.
7. Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory*, 31.

8. Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 34 (emphasis added).
9. Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 8.
10. *Ibid.*, 34.
11. *Ibid.*, 35.
12. Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 30.
13. *Ibid.*
14. The phrase “your story is never my story” belongs to Adriana Cavarero, as cited in Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 34.
15. Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC, and London, 2006), 15.
16. Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 27–28.
17. *Ibid.*, 28.
18. Judith Butler, *Antigone’s Claim: Kinship between Life and Death* (New York, 2000), 10.