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Performative Jouissance and Analytic Act [1] : 6<sup>th</sup> October 2022 : Éric Laurent

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# LACANIAN REVIEW ONLINE

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## Performative Jouissance and Analytic Act [1]

Judith Butler's political project is that of a gathering of minority and disparate communities founded on an LGBTQI+ type of gender or racial identification, as the various movements of the black, Latino or Indian communities may embody in the United States. In Eric Marty's critical study of the theoretical framework underlying this project, the notion of the performative as an operator that allows passing from self-assertion to community belonging plays a central role. The self-determination of sex through gender is posited as performative and as performance. The assimilation of these two distinct registers of performance is claimed. The performance of sex is exemplified by the *drag queen* show, and the performative of sex is expressed in the teeming nominations of sexual practices in which everyone must recognise and name themselves. “Such acts, gestures, and enactments, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means.”<sup>[2]</sup>

The term “performative” used by Butler derives from linguistics and philosophy of language by multiple routes that make the final usage quite far from the original context, as Jacques-Alain Miller pointed out in his interview with Éric Marty on his book<sup>[3]</sup>. Butlerian usage is constructed in stages departing from the isolation by the philosopher of language John Austin of a class of statements that do not describe the world but act on it like the religious act of baptism. For Butler, “the performative has ceased to be a concept designating a small class of specific utterances (baptizing, promising, swearing), it is the whole of language that has been endowed with performativity, in the sense that for genders, all utterances

serve in some way to fabricate gender and norms.”<sup>[4]</sup> The performative becomes a generalised *speech act*<sup>[5]</sup> that allows for a founding self-assertion, full of meaning and future norms.

The jouissance brought about by the performative as an assertion of self is the opposite of the psychoanalytic production of the subject. For psychoanalysis, the surest assertion is that of failure [*écheç*]: bungled actions, slips of the tongue, various stumbles and blunders. The formations of the unconscious produce a subject through an act of language that knots together the enigma and the meaning attached to it.

To define the act by which speech and language are knotted,<sup>[6]</sup> Lacan first followed the French linguist Émile Benveniste. In the conflict between Benveniste and the Oxford philosopher John L. Austin in the 1950s, over the updating of the notion of act in language, Lacan largely ignored Austin, reserving only an ironic remark for him ten years later. What Lacan insisted on was that the assertion of the self passes through the Other. The subject is suspended there, waiting for the response that will give him his founding alienation. As his teaching developed and he distanced himself from the Law organising the Other, Lacan maintained the place of the partner and the place of the response he must give, but at the level of jouissance. When the place of the partner-symptom in its particularity is misrecognised or ignored, a call to the brotherhood of bodies arises. The paradox, according to Lacan, as we shall see, is that the claimed universal of the brotherhood of bodies engenders a new form of racism, of rejection of the particular jouissance.

#### *The act of language and the performative according to Lacan*

Lacan states, in “Function and Field of Speech and Language”, what he means by the act that knots speech and language, the subject and the Other. He presents it in abyme, attributing its formulation to an objection made to him by Benveniste, stressing that the act of language according to Lacan, taken in a dialectical form, amounts to defining “a communication in which the sender receives his own message from the receiver in an inverted form.”<sup>[7]</sup> Lacan recognises ‘the striking of his own thought’ and immediately adopts this objection as a definition. The presence of the Other at the very heart of the performative of speech gives full scope to the response I expect as soon as I speak, for ‘What I seek in speech is a response from the other.’<sup>[8]</sup> This incessant response ruins the mirages of performative identity. “I identify myself in language, but only by losing myself in it as an object.”<sup>[9]</sup> The link between nomination and loss of reference will be maintained in Lacan’s teaching, since in naming the Other, it is still necessary that he consents to it, and that in naming myself, in identifying myself, I am already no longer who I have been nor what I am in the process of becoming, the name slips away.

As in Lacan’s teaching the Other dispenses with the law of the Name-of-the-Father (which was limited to the specificity of psychoses where the Name-of-the-Father collapses<sup>[10]</sup>), the Other becomes a partner of jouissance. It is then revealed that, according to Schreber’s expression anticipating Georges Bataille: ‘God is a b...’, in other words, a partner of jouissance.

#### *The analytic act and irony in relation to Austin*

In order to formulate the analytic act, an act defined by him, Lacan authorises a rereading of Aristotle, which he quotes and comments on explicitly in the Seminar devoted to the Act.<sup>[11]</sup> This rereading depends on a position of the subject that does not come from Aristotle, but from modern logic, which allows us to posit a subject whose existence is of pure logic. Lacan implicitly polemicalises, without explicitly naming him, with John L. Austin who had just published in 1962 his “How to do things with words”, breaking with the logic of the proposition that fascinated the Cambridge school, culminating in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico philosophicus*<sup>[12]</sup>. While he had not shied away from a virulent polemic with Ogden and Richards<sup>[13]</sup>, proponents of the Cambridge school, about their objectification of meaning, Lacan does not consider Austin’s proposal to be up to the level of a quarrel for his proposals on

the performative. The famous example he takes is that of religious rituals, in particular baptism. When carried out under the prescribed conditions, by the right person, baptism, the eponym of the performative, is immediately effective. If it is done by the wrong person or aimed at the wrong objects, animals for example, it fails. The performative is not intuitive, it is prescriptive.

Lacan wants to find an act that does not depend on the quality of the apparent agent, the psychoanalyst, but is based solely on the analysand and the subject at stake in the analytic experience. "If we follow the weft suggested to us by the use of the syllogism, what we have to arrive at is something that will join this subject to what has been put forward here as a predicate, the psychoanalyst – if there exists a psychoanalyst – and alas, this is what we lack to support this logical articulation. If there exists a psychoanalyst, everything is assured: there may be many others. But for the moment, the question for us is to know how the psychoanalysand can pass to the psychoanalyst. How it is that, in the most well-founded way, this qualification can only be supported by the psychoanalysand's accomplished task."<sup>[14]</sup>

The analytical act according to Lacan radically raises the question of the formation of the psychoanalyst. The latter is only formed from words. The psychoanalyst is formed from the analysand, who is himself in the task of constructing the signifying chains that weave his unconscious. That there was, at the beginning, a particular psychoanalyst to enable the experience, does not guarantee the existence of a psychoanalyst at the end. To pass from the analysand to the analyst requires a particular diversion through the object. It must be shown that the signifying order of discourse ties the subject to something of another order, the acephalous jouissance that psychoanalytic discourse puts in the position of cause.

The object *a* is both the mark, the locus of the acephalous jouissance that animates the subject, and the result, the remainder of the accomplishment of the analyst's task. For the subjectivation of the analysand's sexual reality to occur, the psychoanalyst must already be the representation of that which he blocks [*bouche*] of this reality of the object *a*.<sup>[15]</sup>

Lacan introduces a radically new dimension into the performative logic. The one who has supported the operation finds himself at the end of it, excluded, rejected. "For if at the end of the finished psychoanalysis, this object *a*, which is undoubtedly always there [...] it is nevertheless only at the end of the operation that it will reappear in the real, from another source, namely as rejected by the analysand."<sup>[16]</sup> This separation, this production as "return in the real" is the effect of the desire that sustains the analytic operation. The subject ends up separating itself from its cause. The knot of the analytic task and the act defines the psychoanalyst as a rejection in the real, produced by the analytic task. "This is what is the production quite comparable to that of such and such a machine that circulates in our scientific world and which is, strictly speaking, the production of the psychoanalysand." It is here that Lacan makes an offbeat reference to Austin in a piquant play on words. "What is it after you have so transformed the object *a* into a production line, if the psychoanalyst produces the *a* like an *Austin*?" It is not clear that Austin noticed that his passion for doing things with words had something to do with the homophony of his name with a car.

The singular cause of the jouissance thus produced has the effect of ejecting the psychoanalyst. The effect of ejection produced by the Lacanian performative of the act is what is singularly forgotten by the performative of jouissance conceived as nomination or pure injunction on the Butlerian side.

#### *The Butlerian performative's forgetting of the real*

In Judith Butler's perspective, the magic of *empowerment*<sup>[17]</sup> implies that, as Éric Marty points out, all those excluded from the binary injunction and heteronormative prescriptions can and must constitute a "structuring social community"<sup>[18]</sup> that juxtaposes itself with others. The last words of *Seminar XIX*, in June 1972, come in advance to contest this Butlerian hope of non-binary fraternities. When Lacan wrote this warning in 1972, the exit from patriarchal civilisation seemed close. The post-Sixties era was still

buzzing with talk of the end of the power of fathers and the advent of a society of brothers, accompanied by the happy hedonism of a new religion of the body Lacan spoils the party a bit by adding a consequence that went unnoticed at the time. “When we come back to the root of the body, if we reassert the value of the word *brother* [...], know that what is on the rise, the ultimate consequences of which we have still not seen, and which is rooted in the body, in the fraternity of bodies, is racism.”<sup>[19]</sup> The idolatry of the body has consequences quite different from the narcissistic hedonism to which some people believed the “religion of the body” was limited.

At the very moment when Lacan was predicting the rise of racism, which was insistently underlined from 1967 to the 1970s, the atmosphere was one of rejoicing at the prospect of the integration of nations into the increasingly vast ensembles authorised by the “common markets.” Lacan accentuates this unexpected consequence with a precision that surprised at the time. Questioning Lacan in *Télévision* in 1973, J.-A. Miller echoed the surprise of the time and highlighted the importance of this thesis. “*What gives you the confidence to prophesy the rise of racism? And why the devil do you have to speak of it?*” Lacan replied: “Because it doesn’t strike me as funny and yet, it’s true. With our *puissance* going off the track, only the Other is able to mark its position, but only insofar as we are separated from this Other. Whence certain fantasies – unheard of before the melting pot.”<sup>[20]</sup>

The logic developed by Lacan is as follows. Since we do not know what the *jouissance* that we could orient ourselves is, we only know how to reject the *jouissance* of the other. In the 1970s, by ‘melting pot’<sup>[21]</sup> Lacan denounces the double movement of colonialism and the will to normalise the *jouissance* of those displaced, the immigrants, in the name of their so-called ‘good’. “Leaving this Other to his own mode of *jouissance*, that would only be possible by not imposing our own on him, by not thinking of him as underdeveloped. [...] how can one hope that the empty forms of human hysteria *[humanitaire]* disguising our extortions can continue to last?”<sup>[22]</sup>

These multiple *jouissances* fragment the social bond, hence the temptation to appeal to a unifying God. Here too, Lacan announces something quite surprising, the return of religious fundamentalisms. “[...] if God, thus newly strengthened, should end up existing, this bodes nothing better than a return of his baneful past.”<sup>[23]</sup> In his remarks on the logic of racism, Lacan takes into account the various forms of the rejected object, its distinct forms. Racism indeed changes its objects as social forms change, but according to Lacan’s perspective, there always lies, in a human community, the rejection of an unassimilable *jouissance*, the outcome of a “war of all against all”<sup>[24]</sup> by successive fragmentations.

What is at stake in our quarrel with the supporters of the destitution of the universal, considered as a lie aimed at eliminating minority particularities, is the forgetting of the function “of the one who *unites*, of the one who says no, that can be founded, that must be founded, that can only be founded, all that is universal.”<sup>[25]</sup> This function of the universal is not to be forgotten, nor is it to be destituted, but it ought to be rethought afresh, as we leave patriarchy behind. The logic of the analytic act, which does not presuppose any universal predicate prior to the act of speech, shows us a way. It brings to light the particular *jouissance* as function of cause, while making oneself a dupe of the function of the father as fiction of the guarantee of sense. This is what Lacan called ‘being post-Joycean’. “There is no wake up until this *jouissance*, to wit a devalued *jouissance* given that analysis, turning to meaning to resolve it, has no other chance of getting there but to get its dupe... its due pater [...]”<sup>[26]</sup> To make oneself the dupe of the father is to be the dupe of the fiction of “the one who says no” to common *jouissance* and thereby allows the subject to orient himself in his particular *jouissance* without giving in to communal imperatives.

Translated from the French by *Florencia F.C. Shanahan*

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[2] Butler J., *Gender Trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*, London/New York, Routledge, 1990, p. 173. Quoted by Marty É., *Le Sexe des Modernes*, Paris, Seuil, 2021, p. 113.

[3] Cf. Marty É. & Miller J.-A., « Entretien sur "Le sexe des Modernes" », *Lacan Quotidien*, n° 927, 29 mars 2021, p. 22. Available online. <https://lacanquotidien.fr/blog/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/LO-927-A.pdf> An excerpt of the interview was published in English in LRO 291, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2021. Available online. <https://www.thelacanianreviews.com/eric-marty-and-jacques-alain-miller-interview-on-the-sex-of-moderns1/>

[4] Marty É., *Le Sexe des Modernes*, op. cit., p. 52.

[5] In English in the original. [TN]

[6] In French "parole" and "langage." [TN]

[7] Lacan, J., "Function and Field....", in *Ecrits*, Transl. B. Fink, London/New York, Norton & Co., 2006, p. 233. The reprise en abyme is underlined by É. Marty in *Le Sexe des modernes*, op. cit. p. 131 and Lacan's objector is named in the interview between É. Marty and J.-A. Miller, in *Lacan Quotidien*, n° 927, op. cit.

[8] Lacan, J., "Function and Field....", op. cit., p. 247.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 247.

[10] Lacan, J., "On a Question Prior....", in *Ecrits*, op.cit., p. 485. "after the Name-of-the-Father began to collapse—the latter being the signifier which, in the Other, qua locus of the signifier, is the signifier of the Other qua locus of the law."

[11] Lacan, J., *Seminar 15*, "The Analytic Act", (1967-1968). Unpublished.

[12] Cf. Laugier S., « Acte de langage ou pragmatique ? » [Act of language or pragmatics?], *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, n° 42, 2004, p. 279-303, available online.

[13] Cf. Lacan, J., "The Instance of the Letter...", in *Ecrits*, op. cit., p. 412.

[14] Lacan, J., *Seminar 15*, "The Analytic Act", (1966-1967), lesson of 7<sup>th</sup> February 1968. Unpublished.

[15] *Ibid.*

[16] *Ibid.*

[17] In English in the original. [TN]

[18] Marty É. & Miller J.-A., « Entretien sur "Le sexe des Modernes" », op. cit., p. 22.

[19] Lacan, J., *Seminar 19*, “... or Worse”, Ed. J.-A. Miller, Transl. A.R. Price, Polity Press, 2018, p. 211.

[20] Lacan, J., *Television*, Ed. J. Copec, Transl. D. Hollier, R.Krauss and A. Michelson, London/New York, Norton&Co., 1990, p. 32. [« Parce que ce ne me paraît pas drôle et que pourtant, c’est vrai. Dans l’égarément de notre jouissance, il n’y a que l’Autre qui la situe, mais c’est en tant que nous en sommes séparés. D’où des fantasmes, inédits quand on ne se mêlait pas. »]

[21] In French ‘se mêler’: to mingle, to mix up, to join. [TN]

[22] Lacan, J., *Television*, op. cit., pp. 32-33.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 33.

[24] Miller J.-A., Interview with Éric Marty, *op. cit.*

[25] Lacan, J., *Seminar 19*, “... or Worse”, op. cit., pp. 184-85.

[26] Lacan, J., “Joyce The Symptom”, in *The Lacanian Review*, Issue 5, 2018, p. 18. TN: Alternative translation: “There is no awakening except through this jouissance, which is devalued by the fact that the analyst, resorting to meaning to resolve it, has no other chance of succeeding than to make himself the dupe... of the father.” [« Il n’y a d’éveil que par cette jouissance-là, soit dévalorisée de ce que l’analyste recourant au sens pour la résoudre, n’ait d’autre chance d’y parvenir qu’à se faire la dupe... du père » Lacan J., « Joyce le Symptôme » (1979), *Autres Écrits*, op. cit., p. 570.]

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