



**“Rearticulating the Political Subject in the work of Judith Butler”**

**BY**

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## **Abstract**

The dissertation attempts to reconceptualise the political subject beyond traditional ideas of propriety and self-possession which have hitherto dominated it. Butler's concept of precarity is distinguished from any sense of an inaugural loss per Butler characterisation of dispossession in its primary valence. This conception of precarity is thus analysed for its potential to provide such a departure and thus rearticulate relations of property with regards to the subject. In rearticulating relations of propriety, it is hoped to move beyond any rational conception of the subject for politics. The act of foreclosure, sexual difference as incommensurability and dispossession as loss are addressed in their relation to the concept of precarity. This research will attempt to move beyond accounts which attribute Butler's post structuralist view to a game of languages which does not occasion any 'real' political change (Žižek, 1989; Butler et al, 2000). Furthermore it will also attempt to tackle Žižek's (2008) argument that any account of the political subject must move beyond a scepticism which paralyses political action by securing a sovereign conception of the subject. Consequently the attempt is towards a conception of subject which cannot be reduced nor subsumed by an instrumental mean-ends view of politics.

## **Declaration of Originality**

“I, the undersigned, declare that this dissertation is my own original work, and I give permission that it may be photocopied and made available to other students.”

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## Introduction

Since the mid-2000s, Judith Butler's works have taken a turn to questions of ethics and configuring a social, 'bodily ontology' (Murphy, 2011, p. 577). This 'turn' is not surprising nor without precedence given Butler's earlier work on gender (1990, 1993) was committed to understanding and analysing the ways in which sexed and gendered lives were produced as more or less liveable. Consequently the positioning of vulnerability, precarity and dispossession for re-articulating ontology in Butler's later work (2004, 2009, 2013, 2015) in attempts to re-configure the mechanisms by which subjects are produced as vulnerable beings stems from this original question on the production of lives as liveable and unliveable. I argue that precarity, and the ambiguous nature of vulnerability as a constitutive condition of the subject, is precisely what allows for a re-articulation of the subject beyond traditional liberal and metaphysical claims of a subject who is known to oneself, who in possession of themselves and thus a rational being of politics. In turn then precarity offers a conception of the subject as relational and interdependent and holds out the possibility to re-articulate these traditional conceptions of propriety which have hitherto defined and limited the subject.

In chapter one Butler's re-reading of Lacan will be analysed to determine the extent to which her re-casting of foreclosure as a socially constituted act and thus a historically revisable act remains a possibility. I argue that despite misreading Lacan on the act of foreclosure it is still possible to produce an account of foreclosure which does not determine the subject at an inaugurally limit. Reading Lacan in light of Butler's own concept of precarity produces the

possibility of an inaugural foreclosure which does impose a certain set of cultural ideals as a transcendental limit. This inaugural foreclosure, the act of *verwerfung*, is understood through Butler's account of precarity such that signifiers come to be excluded through an 'admission in the symbolic' (Lacan, 1955-56, p. 20). Certain signifiers are foreclosed inaugurally because, removed from the symbolic and thus the horizon of receptivity and impressionability, they are not made available to the subject via the mechanisms of representation and regimes of power. Secondly the act of *veimennung*, a foreclosure for Lacan (1955-56) which is secondary to *verwerfung*, comes to be this inaugural foreclosure and produce foreclosure as a perpetual process of exclusion, admission and exchange between the symbolic and the real. Consequently within Butler's account of precarity reside the possibility for reconfiguring the subject which emerges upon the condition of foreclosure but is not determined by this initially act.

Chapter two looks to reconfigure sexual difference as both a category which cannot be effaced in the conceiving of the political subject and as one which therefore must move beyond a binary account and one which aids the production of a sovereign account of the subject. Butler is charge by many second wave or 'new materialist' (Jagger, 2015) critics of effacing the category of women and thus undermining feminism (Benhabib, 1995a, 1995b; Fraser, 1995; Norton, 1997; Tyler 1991). Zirelli (2008) suggests that Butler is embroiled in the very same problem as her critics: conceiving of a sovereign subject which is necessary to politics and to whom rights but be attained. Zirelli (2008) argues that this results in a means end conception of politics whose guaranteed point of the reference is the necessity of this sovereign subject. Zirelli argues in favour of a freedom centred feminism which would focus on 'doing - world building, beginning anew' (Zirelli, 2008, p. 44). In re-writing sexual difference

as precarity (Parker, 2017) and thus revitalising Freud's claim of polymorphous perversity as intrinsic to the subject rather than the subject having an intrinsic sex, Butler's concept of precarity retains the possibility of rearticulating politics beyond a means-end conception. Disavowing the necessity of a sovereign subject, in favour of a relational conception of the subject proffers the possibility for a political engagement which attends to the mechanisms by which lives are produced as vulnerable and precarious rather than attempting to provide an exhaustive account of groups which are legible for constitutive rights. As such precarity offers a way of rearticulating the political subject in ways which move beyond a means-end conception of politics to the more productive focus of attending to the mechanisms by which lives are produced.

Butler's account of precarity proffers this possibility for reconceiving the political subject and as such rearticulating the democratic demand of politics beyond concepts of the self as property (Devenney, 2011) and thus define this conception of means-end politics. However by positioning dispossession as inaugural and constitutive of the subject, Butler resorts to an original loss which posits the possibility of a subject in full possession of themselves and relies on ideals of propriety as the constitutive condition of the subject. Chapter three will evaluate the extent to which it is possible to retain this ambiguous state of relationality and precarity in order to deny forms of propriety as the essential condition of the subject and instead position them as violences by an Other in order to cover up and deny their own vulnerability. It is firstly the state of ambiguity which allows us to ensure, per Derrida's work on ghost and inheritance (1994), that forms of dispossession are not defined in advance. For if we assume an inaugural dispossession we posit the conditions of propriety as essential to a conception of the subject and thus define it in advance as a subject in full possession of itself and it is



these forms of dispossession which are imposed universally. However by leaving this concept of precarity as ambiguous and predefining the conditions of dispossession, it demands that the conditions of these dispossessions be attended to. Furthermore in attending to the relationality and interdependence of subjects and the ways in which this subject is produced, the subject is an effect of these mechanisms of power and representation and as such can not ever be in full possession of themselves. Consequently relations of property, which start with the subject, must be redefined under this account of precarity in ways which could lead to novel way of discussing dispossession in its second valence and understanding the violences which are institutionalised upon the Other when a subject attempts to secure itself and protect itself and its property over and against this Other.

## Chapter 1: Foreclosure

In *Contingency, Hegemony and Universality* (Butler et al., 2000) Judith Butler is in agreement with her co-commentators Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek that 'every subject emerges upon the condition of foreclosure' (p. 140). However what exactly foreclosure amounts to and means to each, Butler suggests, is highly contested. For Butler, foreclosure figured in the traditional Lacanian conception as a universal condition of subject emergence within the symbolic. Žižek's and to a lesser extent Laclau's conceptualisations presumes a heteronormative articulation of the subject and imposes heterosexist determinations as the prerequisite for qualification as a subject 'through recourse to anachronistic structuralist accounts of kinship' (Butler et al, 2000, p. 140). Consequently Butler (1993) re-articulates the act of *verwerfung* in Lacan not as an inaugural act of foreclosure but as a continual process of exchange and refutation between the real and the symbolic beyond any constitutive act. I argue that Butler misreads Lacan on *verwerfung* and as such fails in her attempts to produce an account of foreclosure which a) does not take the subject's inaugural emergence and constitution to operate in a deterministic and conclusive fashion and b) moves beyond heteronormative determinations by accounting for the forever changing terrain of social and political criterion. Instead her work on precarity, vulnerability and dispossession when read against the backdrop of her salient revisions of foreclosure as 'that which refutes a set of signifiers', provides more fertile ground for a re-working of foreclosure which *does* do exactly what Butler initially sets out to do. Consequently, the possibility for a foreclosure which does not provide an ahistorical and non-revisable limit as to which subjects will qualify to be represented as subjects that matter in politics emerges.

## Lacan and Castration

For Lacan, foreclosure is the rejection of the 'name-of-the-father' as if it had never existed; as such it is not integrated into the symbolic order of the subject and thus there is a hole, a lack (the real), within the symbolic chain, at the level of the unconscious. Fink (1995, p. 110) describes foreclosure as the 'complete and utter exclusion of something from the symbolic register' as if it had not existed. Consequently the real is retroactively constituted in the act of foreclosure – it is thus both exterior to but also prior to any kind of symbolisation. It is that which cannot be symbolised due to its traumatic investment; any kind of attempt to symbolise the 'material' of the real, those objects or signifiers which have been imbued with traumatic investment, would result in the unravelling of the subject. The real then is that which is impossible and inarticulable because it cannot exist in the symbolic order and as such remains invisible or altogether non-existent as far as the subject is concerned. Yet because the subject perpetually avoids the symbolisation of the real, it is simultaneously that which structures the subject and symbolisation – is it that around which the subject and the process of symbolisation orbit, orientate and comes to be structured.

This act of foreclosure, which retroactively constitutes the real, is instigated or is set in motion by 'objet petit a': a non-assimilable, 'primordial foreign body that sticks in the throat of the subject' (Zizek, 2012, p. 150) which cannot be symbolised, consumed or dissolved into their being but brings the subject into existence, or intelligibility as Butler would term it, and thus into the symbolic order. Objet petit a is what Lacan designates the object cause of desire. Moati (2016) describes how the object cause of desire is not itself an object but the very impossibility of an object to ever fully satiate desire itself. Instead objects of desire can only

ever come to be substituted for this *object cause* but can never actualise, fulfil or satiate it and thus only inadequately come to represent it and therefore perpetuate the substitution of objects in its place once *this* particular object has inevitably been found to be insubstantial to satiate the subject's desire:

'objet petit a is just as much the cause of desire as it is simultaneously the cause of the preservation of desire in a state of a paradoxical lack, where the subject persists in lacking what it desires at the precise moment when it obtains what it desires. This is why lack is constitutive of desire, which ceaselessly searches for the lacking object-cause at the paradoxical moment when desire obtains what it desires' (Moati, 2016, p. 3).

The object cause of desire, objet petit a, is thus that which installs the horizon of desire itself within the subject and creates the subject as a desiring being. For Lacan this object cause, and thus simultaneously desire itself, is tied to the act of symbolic castration and the concept of jouissance. Symbolic castration is the denial to the subject of a mythical, pre-symbolic exorbitant pleasure, which Lacan terms jouissance. It is a pleasure that would exist beyond Freud's cost benefit evaluation that takes place in the pleasure principle (Freud, 1920) and *finally* satiate the subject. Objet petit a is thus that jouissance which is denied the subject by entering in the symbolic order and as such perpetuates a desire for the object which can never be found because it never existed in the first place. This is why objet petit a is not an object itself but an object *cause* of desire – that which the subject constantly tries to replace with inevitably unsuitable, non-satiating objects. Impossible and mythical because it is prior to the symbolic and the subject's emergence within it, jouissance only 'exists' to the extent that the subject imagines that it is denied to them. However the effects of the objet petit a are real (not in the Lacanian sense) in that this imagined denial of jouissance produces the subject as

a being who desires, who chases after jouissance in forever failed and unsatisfactory attempts.

The castration complex, in denying jouissance and thus establishing the horizon of desire is key to objet petit a, is central to the Lacanian real and foreclosure. Symbolic castration, for Lacan, is the denial or removal of the imaginary phallus. Phallus here can be attributed to the power or authority which the father has within the traditional nuclear family structure, which comes to be represented by the phallus, which like the power, the mother does not have. Thus jouissance, this in exorbitant pleasure, comes to be viewed as an indisputable and omniscient power, a subject of complete mastery and control. In this scenario the child, becoming aware of the mother's lack of power and position within the family structure, attempts to be the object cause of the mother's desire, that jouissance she is lacking. The attempts to 'be' the phallus are only abandoned when the illusion to be the phallus can no longer be maintained i.e. when the father intervenes by showing that he is the omnipotent figure without any curtailing of desire and thus 'has' the phallus. At this point the child repudiates the mother and chooses to identify, ambivalently, with the father – less he be castrated too. This encounter with the objet petit a, that impossible, non-assimilable real, sets in motion. The subject constitution through the symbolic order by foreclosing the possibility of becoming the phallus; that impossible possibility which must be repudiated from the symbolic for the subject to persist.

### The Heteronormativity of Castration

This concept of castration as constitutive to an inaugural foreclosure is problematic because as Butler identifies it presumes the universality of the nuclear family and thus ossifies

heteronormative desire, as the transcendental, universal and ahistoric pre-condition for *all* subjects' emergence within the symbolic. For Butler, Freud offers not only the choice of two objects in castration, the mother and father, but also two sexual dispositions: the feminine and the masculine. Consequently the normative choice of the heterosexual disposition – to love the mother, abandon attempts to the phallus for her and identify with the father - for Butler would not be caused by the fear of being castrated by the father, but because they are fearful of castration itself. As such the choice is one of enforced heteronormativity where to be castrated would be to be seen as feminine. For Butler, this 'fear of feminization [is] associated within heterosexual cultures with male homosexuality' (1990, Butler, p. 80). Butler argues then that castration is more than simply the denial of love for the mother and thus an instantiation of objet petit a which attempts to recover this jouissance through other objects. Instead the incestuous love of the mother is posited and curtailed as the lost object only to obfuscate the fact that it is homosexual desire which is really being denied in castration: 'it is not primarily the heterosexual lust for the mother that must be punished and sublimated, but the homosexual cathexis that must be subordinated to a *culturally sanctioned* heterosexuality' (1990, p. 80).

Butler then, committed to a conception of the subject which emerges within the symbolic upon the condition of foreclosure but resistant to any inaugural foreclosure through castration due to its heteronormative implications, attempts a re-reading of Lacan. This re-reading OR Lacan refutes *any* attempts to universally and ahistorically secure a set of exclusions, prior to the symbolic order, which the subject must adhere to before they can become intelligible. Butler firstly reconfigures foreclosure as the refusal of a set of signifiers and secondly proposes that the act of *verwerfung* in Lacan does not need to be read as an inaugural act of foreclosure

but as a process of perpetual exchange between the real and the symbolic. Consequently Butler positions *verwerfung* as a historically revisable act of foreclosure which takes account of the cultural implications of any given epoch and uses this as the basis for the exclusions the subject forecloses upon their emergence within the symbolic.

### Misinterpreting *Verwerfung*

Butler states quite rightly that, for Lacan, *verwerfung* can be understood as foreclosure or a repudiation, a kind of refusal or exclusion of experience from the symbolic order. However for Butler what is foreclosed in the act of *verwerfung* is, can only be and *must* be a set of signifier. Indeed Lacan describes *verwerfung* as 'the rejection of a *primordial signifier*' (1955-56, p. 143). Secondly it is not only that a set of signifiers are refused through the act of *verwerfung* but that these signifiers were already a part of the symbolic prior to their exclusion or refusal: "what is refused in the symbolic order" suggests that there are a set of signifiers "in" the symbolic order in the mode of refusal' (p. 204, 1993)

In turn then Butler argues that the act of foreclosure does not, as Žižek argues, operate on a more 'fundamental level' (Butler et al, 2000) which is indifferent to the historical, political and social formations of the symbolic. Instead it is these very formations themselves which form the basis of these exclusions which interpolate the subject into the symbolic. Thus the subject emerges into the symbolic upon a set of exclusions which are socially and culturally specific to epoch under which they emerge.

It is this understanding of foreclosure which moves Butler to posit *verwerfung*, not as an inaugural, fundamental and thus determining act of repudiation which sets the subject at an

irrevocable distance to the real, but as a process of perpetual exchange such that:

‘these are signifiers that have been a part of symbolisation and *could be again*, but have been separated off from symbolisation to avert the trauma with which they are invested’ (Butler, 1993, p. 153).

Consequently Butler suggests that the act of *verwerfung* cannot be tied to an inaugural act, firstly because if it is signifiers which are refused in the act of foreclosure and these signifiers were once a part of symbolisation, then they are nothing other than the relation to a social prohibition traumatic investment which can be brought back into the symbolic. Secondly Butler argues that Lacan remains ‘ambiguous with respect to the location of both the refusal and what is refused’ (Butler, 1993, p. 153). The inference here being that *verwerfung* does not necessarily indicate an inaugural foreclosure but that signifiers can be traumatically invested at any point and thus refused from the symbolic.

However Lacan is in fact quite clear about the location, or at least when, the act of *verwerfung* takes place. For Lacan there are two types of foreclosure: *verwerfung* and *veimenung*. The former is a more primitive, primal or inaugural foreclosure which *instantiates the subject in the symbolic*. The latter is a foreclosure which occurs once the subject is in the symbolic. Lacan (1955-56) further argues that *veimenung* is a secondary operation *verwerfung*, inextricably linking the two. Subsequently *verwerfung*, although inaugural and constitutive of the subject and their emergence in the symbolic is not deterring in the sense that the act of *veimenung* will also enact a set of foreclosures.

For Lacan, *verwerfung* is a process of repudiation and exclusion which specifically relates to psychosis. Psychosis and neurosis are distinguished, per Freud, as two different conditions;



structured differently 'with respect to the disturbances they create in the subject's relations with reality' (p. 48). Verwerfung acts as a defence mechanism against the production of psychosis. As Lacan divulges, in psychosis 'reality itself initially contains a hole that the world of fantasy will subsequently fill' (p. 49). However in neurosis reality is *not fully rearticulated* into the symbolic; the 'subject attempts to make the reality that at one time elided re-emerge by lending it a particular meaning, a secret meaning which we call symbolic' (p. 49). Butler's account of the re-emergence of signifiers seems closer to neurosis than psychosis and so given that verwerfung is a mechanism of the latter, Butler's own description of foreclosure is not commensurable with Lacan's own explication of verwerfung.

If the first point of contestation with Butler's interpretation of verwerfung in Lacan is one involving the relation between the real and the symbolic, the second deals with her understanding of verwerfung more directly and the intricacies of its operation as a process of exclusion or repudiation. In *Bodies That Matter* (1993) Butler argues, in order to defend discourse analysis against the reduction to a secondary or supplementary role to a more foundational and thus pertinent formation of the subject, that verwerfung can be understood differently, as a process in which signifiers are refused or repudiated from the symbolic order and then reappear in the real. Michael Walsh's *Reading the Real* is used to support this claim, wherein he describes verwerfung as the 'exclusion of fundamental signifiers from the Symbolic ordering of the subject' (pp. 64-86, 1990). Her second piece of evidence comes in the form of a re-interpretation of Lacan's 'what is refused in the symbolic order returns in the real'. Butler argues that the English translation does not provide an adequate account of Lacan's intention and obfuscates what he attempts to elude. The original French however allows Butler to propose that what is refused *in* the symbolic is actually a refusal of something

*dans l'ordre symbolique* and thus something which is already in that order which is refused or stricken from it. Thus Butler concludes that:

'there are signifiers which have been part of symbolisation and could be again, but have been separated off from symbolisation *to avert the trauma* with which they are invested' (p. 204, 1993, italics added)

There are two main problems with Butler's account of *verwerfung*. The first is that, as previously noted and hitherto shall be explicated, this interpretation is better suited to a description of how neuroses operate than psychosis, and thus *verwerfung*. This either means that Butler is collapsing the two; Lacan explicitly repeats the importance of keeping them segregated, or she is reading one as the other to better suit and bridge the gap with her account of subject, discourse and regimes of power in Foucault. The second problem is that in reading Lacan's maxim of symbolic repudiation and reappearance in the real through this Foucauldian lens or with a view to commensurate the two to defend discourse analysis and this understanding of the importance of power regimes to appearance of the subject upon the horizon of intelligibility, Butler ignores or filters out the rest of Lacan's explication of *verwerfung* in *Les Psychoses* (1955-56).

Butler argues, rightly, that *verwerfung* is a process of exclusion. However her account of exclusion suggests that *verwerfung* repudiates that which is already part of the symbolic. In effect there are a set of signifiers in the symbolic which become invested with a traumatic expression and thus become psychically off limits, ungraspable, unreachable, whose encounter maintains the threat that would 'unravel the subject itself' (p. 204, 1993). Butler's formulation relies as already noted upon the mistranslation of Lacan and that in the original

French lies the possibility to read him differently, to read him in a more favourable light with respect to the political statements Butler wishes to make around the subject of discourse analysis and power. However ambiguous this statement, Butler chooses to find an alternative reading of Lacan, elsewhere in *Les Psychoses*. Lacan is far clearer on what *verwerfung* means thus making it more difficult to commensurate Butler's alternative interpretation of the *verwerfung* as act which occurs repeatedly.

Earlier in his third seminar, Lacan describes *verwerfung* as an operation in which there 'must be admitted a primordial *bejahung*, an *admission in the sense of the symbolic*, which can itself be wanting' (p. 20, 1955-56, italics added). Here then desire, this 'wanting', is circumscribed as an 'admission of the symbolic'. Desire is produced as a desire to cover up this admission, to, as has already been purported, fill up the gap in external reality. Firstly this suggests that this primordial *bejahung*, as the affirmative real, pre-exists the symbolic. Secondly if *verwerfung* is a process of exclusion, then the term *admission* must provide a clue as to the ways in which this exclusion operates in the symbolic. To be excluded by admission suggests, rather than an exclusion by expulsion from the symbolic, that something was not originally brought into the subject's horizon at the point of symbolisation. Thus it is a case of something being excluded by omission rather than expulsion. It is not that there are experiences, already a part of the symbolic, registered as or by a set of signifiers, which then traumatically invested, are repudiated from the symbolic but that prior to one's instantiation within the symbolic order and the signifying network, experiences imbued with a traumatic investment are occluded from the signifying chain, are repudiated from 'without' (p. 50, 1955-56), from the very start. These signifiers are already there, as Butler has noted, but they are not brought into the subject's history by an omission. The signifiers have, as such, not been presented to

the subject in a manner which would cause them to be symbolised *by the subject*. As such they are excluded to the real by an omission or an admission, rather than an expulsion.

Lacan presents the image of a signifier, tied to the subject's instantiation within the symbolic, being rejected from the symbolic order itself. In his third seminar, *Les Psychoses* (1955-56) he writes:

'whatever is refused in the symbolic order, in the sense of *Verwerfung*, reappears in the real' (1955-56, p. 21)

This implies it is not just that a set of signifiers are excluded by the subject and are refused symbolisation and that ushered into or constituting the real. It is in fact the case that these signifiers were already, prior to exclusion, part of the symbolic. That they 'reappear' in the real suggests these signifiers were first part of the symbolic to which the subject is emerging.

### Foreclosure *through* Precarity

Butler's account of precarity offers a way of understanding this omission better. If Butler is correct in that what is repudiated in foreclosure is a set of signifiers then this fundamental level is historically revisable and as such not a 'bar' on *all* subjects, but subject to social and cultural conditions of any given episteme. Rather the act of *verwerfung* seems closer to what Butler describes in *Dispossession* (2013) as a:

'domain of radical impressionability and receptivity that are prior to choice and deliberation...not characteristic of infancy or other primary philosophical forms of deliberation...but recur throughout life as part of a not fully articulate sensibility...to refer to sensibility in this sense is to refer to a constitutive relation to a sensuous outside, one without

which none of us could survive' (Butler and Athanasiou, p. 95)

Butler suggests this sensuous impressionability forms out early understandings, views, beliefs, language and sense of self but not in any determining sense. *Verwerfung*, as that inaugural process of exclusion, comes to represent this domain of radical impressionability determining what is made available to the subject for symbolisation and thus what signifiers can be brought into their history. Consequently those signifiers which are traumatically invested are made available to the subject in this base receptivity, despite being signifiers within the symbolic. It is then, as Lacan states, by a process of admission or omission that signifiers are excluded from the symbolic and refused into the real.

However this radical impressionability and what is made available to the subject is not wholly defined in advance by the act of *verwerfung*. It will inevitably be shaped by what Lacan designates *veimennung* (1955-56). The distinction then between *verwerfung* and *veimennung* turns out not to be one between fundamental and historical foreclosures but of exclusions encased by a radical impressionability and the mechanisms through which radical impressionability is later shaped. The subject then as a receptacle, excludes some signifiers from the very start, wherein this exclusion is performed as an omission by virtue of what is made available to the subject by the dominant mode of representation within the symbolic itself. This content can be 'retrieved' as Butler posits and others disposed of depending on both the subject, the symbolic and the subject's relation to this symbolic; but only through the act *veimennung*. It is a foreclosure then where those signifiers which have been excluded can be symbolised again but this radical impressionability, or act of *verwerfung*, retains an important, if not determining role, to the kinds of signifiers which are made available for exclusion and re-integration. It is an account which attempts to re-address the importance

and necessity of this immediate exposure or inaugural foreclosure without ensuring this receptivity is ossified as determinant and conclusive of the subject.

Firstly he argues that 'one has to assume a prior, and at least partial organisation of language in order for memory and historicisation to work' (p. 148, 1955-56). Herein lies a description of the symbolic which pre-exists the subject, a language which the subject must, through symbolisation, enter into and so to speak, to act, to co-ordinate themselves with others. Thus we see that signifiers, as a part of the symbolic, pre-exist the subject. Consequently if parts of this symbolic are refused, it could be that this refusal is enacted from the omission of that which does not appear upon the horizon of this 'radical impressionability' (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013, p. 95) and receptivity of the subject. As such this act of foreclosure comes to represent what is refused to the subject by virtue of those dominant representations impressing upon this immediate receptivity. That which does not come to be overdetermined in the same fashion through media representations or regimes of power, or perhaps contests these dominant representations, thus that which was part of the symbolic is refused by the subject as it emerges into symbolic by virtue of the strength of this radical impressionability to form impress upon the subject and constitute a 'not fully articulate sensibility' (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013, p. 95).

Secondly Lacan argues that the 'signifier is primitively given, but it remains nothing as long as the subject doesn't cause it to enter his history' (p. 148, 1955-56). This firstly confirms the initial postulation that signifiers pre-exist the subject. More importantly, however, it suggests that these signifiers do not have any traumatic investment. As such this primordial signifier

can exist both as a signifier within the symbolic but also prior to the subject's emergence within the symbolic. Rather than the rejection of a traumatically invested signifier by the subject, this primordial signifier's rejection comes as an occlusion. It is not symbolised by them nor caused to be brought into their history due to an a priori traumatic experience. Recognition of the primordial signifier to the extent that the traumatic experience is symbolised is what is avoided and it is this signification which is omitted, and hereby excluded or rejected from the very start, prior to one's entry into symbolisation.

What most overtly refutes Butler's reading of *verwerfung* is Lacan's 'absolutely essential' distinction (p. 50, 1955-56) between *verwerfung* and *vemeinung*; for him these processes are 'not at the same level' (p. 84, 1955-56). Whilst *verwerfung* is a process which can be said to operate prior to, and in fact inaugurates, the symbolic, *vemeinung* is a process of that very order. Lacan states that *vemeinung* is contrary to *bejahung*, which, as has been shown, acts almost as a centrifugal force around which symbolisation is set in motion. *Vemeinung* is then a process which sits a part and is distinct from any inaugural act of foreclosure or repudiation. Lacan in fact specifically designates it as secondary function or at least one which proceeds after the inaugurating process of *verwerfung*:

“*vemeinung* in its clinical consequences is a sequel” (p. 50, 1955-56)

Thus what Lacan seems to be suggesting is that, as Žižek elucidates (1989; 2000) foreclosure or repudiation occurs on two distinct planes or levels. Lacan argues that there is a need to distinguish between 'something that has been symbolised and something that hasn't' (p. 62, 1955-56) and thus that there are experiences of foreclosure which have already been

symbolised and those which have not been symbolised prior to their exclusion. In other words, there are foreclosures which occur within the symbolic and those which occur prior to the symbolic order. Thus Lacan distinguishes two very different kinds of foreclosure. The first is one which occurs *within* the symbolic. *Vemeinung*, distinct from the inaugurating force of *verwerfung* which acts prior to and as foundational of symbolisation, 'belongs to the order of discourse' (p. 82, 1955-56). This kind of foreclosure is much more closely aligned to the kind of foreclosure Butler specifies in *Bodies That Matter* when describing *verwerfung*: as a set of signifiers which, traumatically invested, are repudiated from the symbolic. And it is this kind of foreclosure which Lacan specifically designates as secondary.

The positioning of *vemeinung* as secondary and successive to an inaugural foreclosure in the form of *verwerfung* does not necessitate, as Butler argues a 'separation between the psychic and the social...[which] does not make clear the place of psychoanalysis for a broader conception of politics' (p. 157, 2000). Butler argues that in determining two different kinds of foreclosure and by positioning one as strictly part of the symbolic, the other thus prior to, constitutively outside or separate from the symbolic, Žižek's interpretation of Lacan constructs universalising claims which pre-exist and thus *pre-determine* one's symbolisation within the symbolic order. Butler suggests that by segregating the symbolic order and thus from the act of *verwerfung*, Žižek disavows any attempts to interpret or understand the manifestations of the subject's psychic reality through the social conditions and political formations in which the subject is interpolated. Instead these are separated and the subject's psychic reality is constituted prior to the formation of the subject's social and political status. In this sense then, Butler argues that any 'symptom' the subject presents is all too quickly reduced to a product of a universal claim prior to the symbolic and thus ignoring the 'messy psychic and social



entanglement that presents itself' (p. 156, 2000) as the effect of a traumatic event or experience.

However when discussing the privileging of the pleasure principle over the reality principle in the secondary literature and interpretations of Freud's work, Lacan opens up the possibility for a reading of foreclosure which refuses this dualism in its strictest sense if not totally disavowing it. It is the destabilisation of this dualism which acts as a foundation to refute Žižek's quasi-transcendentalism, not the interpretation of *verwerfung* as a refutation of a set of signifiers as Butler suggests. Lacan argues that since Freud's pleasure principle has been 'selected and emphasised [within his work] through the claim that it dominates and englobes the reality principle' (p. 82, 1955-56). The reality principle, for Lacan, is fundamentally misunderstood. It is an attempt to 'refind the object, who emergence is fundamentally hallucinated' (p. 82). This object is not the object of the subject's desire but is an object *beyond the experience of the subject*. It has in some ways been transformed, metamorphosed or hallucinated into something else. This transformation of the object is one which fundamentally alters the search itself and ensures that the original trauma is never as fateful nor decisive in its ability to determine in advance the structure of the subject as Žižek suggests. The subject is 'not led [to refind this object], channelled there, by [the] rails of a more or less pre-established instinctual and moreover, more or less stumbling, adaption' (p. 82, 1955-56).

It is here within the dialectic of the reality and pleasure principle that Lacan offers a way to be read differently on originary trauma. In arguing the reality principle is misunderstood, he suggests that the subject is never in search for the object of their desire as presented to them through their original instantiation into symbolisation. Not only is this object itself

transformed beyond comprehension from that originary trauma, but this metamorphosis of the object of desire occurs through act(s) of foreclosure on the symbolic level:

“as for *veimenung*, this belongs to the order of discourse...the so-called reality principle *intervenes strictly at this level*” (p. 82, 1955-56)

Consequently Lacan is proposing, purposively or otherwise, that desire within the subject, and thus their psychical reality, is not produced both through an originary foreclosure into symbolisation and as an ongoing process of the symbolic and thus constituted via those social and political claims Butler wishes to address as part of, and contributing something towards, the subject’s psychical reality. It is argued in *Les Psychoses* (1955-56) that the subject never refinds the object of their desire but that something comes to replace it, to answer the needs of the question desire proposes, more or less satisfactorily.

If *veimenung* is itself both a kind of foreclosure within the symbolic *and* a conduit of the reality principle, which aids the subject to find an object which satiates their desire, ‘more or less satisfactorily’, but never finding the object itself (this is always an impossibility), then it necessitates asking how *veimenung* alters the expectations of the subject’s desire. If Lacan proposes, as he does, that the subject is not guided by a fixed originary desire and that this desire is *not even* an adaptation of an original, but something other, then *veimenung* seems to fundamentally alter the conditions of desire. *Veimenung*, as foreclosure within the symbolic, seems to alter the pathway or rails of desire beyond mere adaptation. This suggests that the question of desire itself, the question that desire proposes, the demand it issues forth, the co-ordinates of this question are re-articulated through *veimenung*. It can thus be implied that acts of foreclosure within the symbolic renegotiate the demands of desire. Hitherto social and political signifiers, experiences of these subject positions and their potentially traumatic

effects upon the subject are reconfigured as constitutive to the subjects' transformative desire.

Butler's conception of precarity offers a way to re-interpret foreclosure most radically however, by relocating the inaugural force of *verwerfung* beyond an originary loss of *jouissance* in infancy and to an ever-present feature of subject-constitution. Lacan states quite clearly and matter-of-factly that:

'symbolisation has to have a beginning' (p. 50, 1955-56)

Now it could be postulated that this beginning need not be constitutively outside the symbolic but in fact symbolise itself, acting as a self-referential axiom or starting point whereby the symbolic order is a chain of effects which sets itself in motion. As Butler argues the performative character of the signifier means that there is no inaugurating moment or beginning which sets the chain of effects in motion other than discourse itself, as regimes of power, which 'materialises a set of effects' (p. 187, 1993) and thus perpetuates the signifying process or chain to materialise another set of effects beyond itself. However Lacan specifically argues that in psychosis, and thus implicated here is *verwerfung*, 'reality itself *initially* contains a hole that the world of fantasy will subsequently fill' (p. 49, 1955-56). When Lacan uses the term reality here, he specifically means external reality. For Lacan this external reality is constructed via a 'storehouse that the subject sets aside in [psychical] reality and in which he preserves the resources to be used in constructing the external world' (p. 48-49, 1955-56). This metaphor of the storehouse irrevocably conjures the image of the symbolic order which is constructed through the material of, and one's instantiation in, the former. Žižek equates the big Other to an 'alienating symbolic network' (p. 46, 1989). The big Other is not synonymous with the symbolic order but is a network of the material of signification which

structures the symbolic and pre-exists the subject. It is the signifying network which the subject enters and must decipher when they, necessarily and without choice, enter the symbolic order through speech, acts, articulation, naming and gestures. (Zizek describes it as alienating because by virtue of entering the symbolic and thus this network, the subject becomes distanced from the inaccessible, primordial real.) Here the storehouse comes to represent the big Other and the external reality is the symbolic order itself. Consequently when Lacan speaks of a gap, a hole, a rupture in the external world which must be filled and act as the starting point for symbolisation, he is speaking about a rupture in the symbolic.

It is this rupture which, for Lacan, acts as the beginning, the start or the inaugural force for the process of symbolisation and thus reveals itself in the form of desire. As he describes early in *Les Psychoses*:

‘behind the process of verbalisation there must admitted a primordial *bejahung* [psychical acceptance/affirmation], an admission in the sense of the symbolic, which can itself be wanting’ (p. 20).

First it is important to note that the verbalisation is here akin to the symbolisation in that it is the act of naming, articulating and the designation of signifiers which marks out both as processes of the symbolic order. Second, that being the case, proves Lacan once again, albeit more obliquely here, confirms that there is a beginning, a point of origin to symbolisation in the form of a *primordial bejahung* – which sits ‘behind’ symbolisation. Furthermore Lacan interchanges *bejahung* with the ‘beginning of symbolisation’ (p. 50, 1955-56) and thus again suggests it as the point of origin for the symbolic order. Thirdly *bejahung* is conceived here as both an ‘admission’ in the symbolic and a ‘wanting’ produced by that very admission. Thus it

is both a gap, a rupture in the symbolic and also desire – but most importantly it is a desire which is *of* this admission and so a desire to cover up this admission, to cover up this gap or as Lacan has put it, a ‘hole [in reality] that the world of fantasy will subsequently fill’ and so, a desire to fill up the hole/lack in the symbolic. Consequently unlike Butler’s account of *verwerfung*, this account takes the rupture as the point of departure to structure the symbolic, to set in motion the process of symbolisation. Lacan professedly designates an inaugural or motivating force behind the veil of the symbolic and discourse. As Žižek emphasizes the big Other, the symbolic, is ‘hindered, structured around a certain “indigestible” rock, resisting symbolisation, symbolic integration’ (p. 178, 1989 – *Sublime Object*) – this *bejahung* as rupture, as that admission of symbolic integration, structures the signifying network. Consequently motivating force for Lacan which instantiates symbolisation is not a symbolisation itself but desire (of the real), a desire to cover up the rupture or failure within the symbolic which points at the possibility of the appearance of the real.

Just then as exclusion of *verwerfung* is to be understood as an admission on behalf of the symbolic, whereby those representations are not made available to the subject to bring into their historicization, *bejahung* is too conceived in this fashion of an admission which excludes by inaugurally disavowing a set of signifiers from the horizon of desire upon the subject’s emergence in the symbolic. This inaugural force of *bejahung* which sets in motion desire is both historically situated and constitutive of the subject. Furthermore by understanding *verwerfung* as a domain of radical impressionability, *bejahung* too becomes the inaugural force by which this domain of receptivity is set in motion. It is therefore a constitutive feature of this impressionability and as such that which instantiates the subject in the symbolic and exposes them to the domains of representations and the over-determinations of regimes of

power. If then Butler situates this radical impressionability as 'not just characteristic of infancy or other primary philosophical forms of experience' (p. 95), *bejahung* is reanimated, beyond any inaugural, primary and determining emergence within the symbolic, towards a constitutive feature of subjectivity whereby the emergence of the subject into the symbolic is a continual process. This beginning of foreclosure, as *bejahung*, is not then a beginning in any chronological sense but acts as a constitutive feature of interpreting and negotiating the symbolic. It is the process by which new modes of representation are made available to the subject through symbolisation and as such 'recur throughout life as part of a not fully articulable sensibility' (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013, p.95).

Understanding foreclosure through Butler's concept is not then an attempt to collapse the two into one other and thereby producing an account of foreclosure which is nothing other than a kind of social prohibition. It is not to reduce *verwerfung* to a process of exclusion wherein those excluded signifiers are only excluded by virtue of what dominant modes of representation are available to the subject; such that excluded material comes to be designated as those signifiers which are not made available to the subject within symbolisation. This in turn would cause the real to be a kernel for all those marginalised, abject and socially prohibited signifiers. Instead by understanding the ways in which precarity offers a way to establish the subject as a sensuous being who is inaugurally, beyond any infantile or philosophical beginning, receptive to the dominant modes of representations. This constitutive feature of subject-constitution thus offers the possibility to retain the act of foreclosure as a constitutive feature of subject constitution without it being reduced to a determining set of exclusions. Furthermore it offers the possibility to view foreclosure as a historically revisable act, removing the heteronormative determinations that the necessity of

an inaugural foreclosure through the nuclear family and the castration complex instantiates, whilst maintaining Lacan's original distinction between *verwerfung* and *veimennung*. Consequently understanding foreclosure, through precarity, wherein the latter is not reducible nor assimilable to the former, allows for the possibility to revitalise Butler's attempt to ascertain an act of foreclosure which is historically revisable but also constitutive to *all* subjects without enacting the same, singular foreclosure and thus determining in advance the kinds of subjects which can emerge into the symbolic.

## **Chapter 2: Sexual Difference as Incommensurability**

In the title of her essay, 'Bodies that don't matter: The Discursive effacement of sexual difference' (1997), Jody Norton summaries quite neatly the most common charge against Butler's early work on gender, sex and the body/bodies. This charge can be synthesised as follows: the focus on language games and the perpetual return to discourse in discussions of the body, as Butler herself notes in the opening pages of the afore-mentioned book *Bodies That Matter* (1993), leads to the collapse of gender and sex as distinctive categories and thus the erasure of the body as a site of suffering, causing it to be discarded as a political statement and tool. Firstly Norton argues that Butler's genealogy of sex, wherein Butler eschews the 'naturalness' of sex and questions the usefulness of a feminism which positions sex as a starting point for political engagement, amounts to a gender and sex becoming one and the same. Norton reads Butler as suggesting that sex 'was always already gender [such that] the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all' (1997, p. 24). Next Norton argues that Butler seeks to reduce sex itself to a discursive category which does not exist beyond its appearance within discourse. For her Butler's account of sex is a claim in the name of an 'absolutism' of social construction wherein the 'representations available to the cultural imagination is generated utterly without regard to the significance of the body itself' (pp. 26-27), instead the sole origination of these representations is environmental influence. Finally Norton states that the 'body precedes its social reading and the conditioning the child receives [is] consequent [i.e. secondary] to that reading' (p. 28). In effect Norton argues that the body exists, and effects of this body can take place, prior to any of kind interpretation, interpellation or representation in the social or political field. Norton thus opposes their position, where sex or the body figures as a transcendental object, to that of Butler, who is



read as figuring 'gender as a transcendental signified' which comes to constitute sex and thus the body.

As Jagger (2015) accurately attests these criticisms against Butler from part of the broader rebuke against the 'linguistic turn' or post-structural influence upon feminist theory. Benhabib (1995a; 1995b), Fraser (1995) and Tyler (1991) all evoke similar concerns regarding Butler's 'postmodern scepticism' which Benhabib (1995a) argues culminates in the 'the myth of the already sexed body' which seeks to dismantle 'any concepts of selfhood, agency and autonomy...intentionality, accountability [and] self-reflexivity' (p. 15) and thereby aid the production of an internal crisis within feminism and feminist political movements.. This refutation of any kind of feminist theory which questions who is being spoken for when the category of women is interpolated and the ways in which this category is falsely produced as universal, normative and stable during this interpolation, and therefore contests the ontological security of the category of 'women' is what Jagger has termed 'new materialism'. New materialism, for her, evokes a 'concern with the agency of matter' (Jagger, 2015, p. 321) and attempts to redress what is viewed as the admission of the body in the process of materialisation. For example Benhabib (1995a) argues that the reduction of female agency and the disregard for ontology of the category of 'woman' produces an effacement of femininity and woman as a 'utopia'.

The necessity for an ontologically secure category of women to which politics can address itself relies upon a conception of sexual difference most attributable to Lacanian. For Lacan (1985) sexual difference is a deadlock inherent in the symbolic order and thus acts as an impossibility as far as the symbolic is concerned because sex cannot be signified. Instead

sexual difference is nothing other than the attempt to overcome this deadlock and how one relates to, becomes or enacts this failure of the symbolic. As has been shown for Lacan the threat of castration brings the subject into the symbolic through an inaugural foreclosure. Lacan further suggests that the positions of male and female are different ways of relating to this omnipotent, mythical force of authority. As Carlson (2010) summarises, 'there are two sexual positions in so far as every subject is either "all" or "not all" under the phallic function' (p. 51). The male position of sexual difference relates to the phallus wholly as all or whole whilst the female position is designated as that which not all or not whole. Thus the masculine position signifies wholly with the phallus only in so far the subject permits themselves the fantasy of the exception to castration, of the mythical primordial father and of unbridled jouissance. On the other hand according to Carlson (2010) the 'feminine way', as Lacan himself terms it, is an infinity beyond or outside the burden of affiliation, identification and signification with this point of exception, the phallus. What then the male positions turns out to be is less a case of anatomical differences and more of one's relation to the concept of the universal subject; wherein the male is figured as the universal subject and the feminine is other, absence, abject.

#### Zirelli and Certainty: Beyond Sovereignty

It is this figuration of the feminine as other which animates both the new materialists work (Benhabib, 1995a, 1995b; Fraser, 1995; Norton, 1997; Tyler 1991) and secures it as foundational to any political claim henceforth. Zirelli (2008) argues that this irrefutability of women as an ontologically secure group which provides a platform for feminist theory and political action forms part of a broader problem within feminism which demands a complete

theory before political action can take place. This demand issues forth that a full and complete knowledge of one's actions in the political sphere must be confirmed in advance before they are carried out. Consequently politics is reduced to a means-end activity whereby action is expected to be known in advance and all of its consequences are accounted for and indeed were intended anyhow. Any political action then which acts without full knowledge and has unintended consequences comes to be seen as the failure of politics rather than its necessary condition to ensure its radical contingency. Subsequently the only form of political action which, under these terms and conditions, can be said to exist consists in the identification of coherent groups and the expansion of constitutional rights to these groups (Zirelli, 2008).

Zirelli argues that in privileging interpretation as a constitutive feature of social transformation and critique and in positioning the act of failure as a constitutive feature in citational practice, Butler becomes embroiled in the very problem of scepticism she set out to dispute. Zirelli writes that:

'the temptation to think about social transformation as requiring a break from the ordinary...is linked to the tendency to imagine that the only alternative to a hegemonic application of a rule is to see it as something that is open to transformation insofar as it can be endlessly interpreted.. to think about rules in this way is to say either they compel in the sense of deciding in advance of the contingencies of any actual practice...or they leave every course of action open' (p. 38).

In essence then Zirelli is saying that to position the act of interpretation and failure as the necessary and constitutive feature of agency as Butler does, is to privilege a concept of theory which can be extrapolated from the conditions of its implementation. As such rules or theories

are produced at a distance to any citation of them. The rule exists prior to its implementation and closes off meaning, denies the particular cases, such that interpretation and the failure of the rule through the strange are its only chance of transformation and are thus set as constitutive features which 'stave off meaning determinism' (2008, Zirelli, p. 38). However Zirelli argues that rule-following is not a form of determinism which closes off meaning nor denies contingency and further interpretation is not a constitutive feature which allows for transformation and perpetually postpones this determinism through endless interpretation and citation. For her language 'is not a cage from which only the essential possibility of failure can save us' (p. 38) because interpretation is not the subject's constitutive and primary relation to the sign. Zirelli (2008) argues, via Wittgenstein, that interpretation is only called for when 'our normal procedures break down' (p. 39).

It is not then that the subject is endlessly interpreting signs but that they follow rules until doubt is raised and only then is this interpretation utilised to discern that it is different from the normal course of events. As such Zirelli argues that rule making is a form of certitude until given reason to doubt otherwise at which point interpretation is utilised:

'we do not encounter objects about which we form hypotheses, which may prove false, as we do when we interpret' (p. 40)

Instead we take things for granted until doubt arises, interpretation is needed and we are proven otherwise. Consequently by positioning interpretation as a constitutive feature of language and the necessary form of agency to avoid any kind of deterministic meaning, Zirelli argues that Butler positions the subject as 'intrinsically uncertain' (p. 44), always at the hand of another interpretation.

Yet simultaneously in extrapolating the rule from its citation provides an account of political action where the rule is abstracted from practice and must dictate it. Consequently a paralysis is formed where on the one hand there is the demand for a means-end politics which instrumentally dictates in advance political action and thus necessitates a coherent group to enact this action, to give them constitutional rights; and on the other hand, there is no coherent group because they are intrinsically uncertain, always at the hand of another interpretation lest they be reduced to a determinism in advance which closes off possibilities for new formations.

It is this problem which Zirelli argues Butler is also embroiled. Butler deconstructs sex and demonstrates that this category, which seemed an immutable and a stable reference for feminist politics and theory, is only 'produced as the truth effects of discourse of primary and stable identity' (1990, p. 36), such that it becomes no stable referent at all. How then to proceed if this stable referent is lost? It is this question which Zirelli suggests that Butler's scepticism cannot surmount an answer for because it is still embroiled in the very same conceptions of subject and politics which produced the necessity for a subject, a group, a category of women for instance, to whom constitutional rights could be pertained. Zirelli, using Wittgenstein's discussion 'seeing', Arendt's account of action-based politics and a re-articulation of Austin's performative, argues that Butler is tied to an instrumental conception of means-end politics which is wholly concerned with identifying subjects as citizens who have, or must obtain, constitutional rights. In de-stabilising the category of women and the immutable character of sex, Butler presupposes the necessity of an indisputable subject of politics. Such that if it is possible to demonstrate the contingent relation of this subject, then a new, better kind of subject will emerge.

Zirelli suggests that a means-end politics reduces critique and engagement to two positions: the first is the affirmation of the category of women as second wave feminists and the 'new materialists' would have, whilst the other is the scepticism Butler propagates which destabilises this category through the inherent possibility of failure as a condition of language. With failure an inherent condition of language then this category will always fail to fully and properly name that which it attempts to because the contingent nature of the category ensures that who can be subsumed under its name is not given in advance but is forever open to new possibilities and formations. Zirelli argues both these positions of essentialism and scepticism are conditioned by the same external guarantee – that politics is 'an instrumental, means-end activity centred on the pursuit of group interests [which] requires a coherent group (for example, women) with shared concerns' (Zirelli, 2008, p.30). As such Butler's deconstruction of sex is embroiled in the very same problem she sets out to question. By demonstrating that this group is insufficient to fully cater for all the *failed* performances or citations of being a woman, Butler presupposes the necessity to exhaustively provide an account of all women in this category and as such a way of delineating and circumscribing *all* subjects prior to any political action. Consequently this firstly sets up the impossible task of attempting to exhaustively account for all subjects positions and secondly it assumes the possibility of guaranteeing these subjects in advance of the mechanisms which produce them; thirdly it assumes the necessity of this exhaustive categorisation as a precondition for political action. As such Butler is embroiled in this means end conception of politics which has at its external reference point the idea that politics is nothing other than the provision of certain rights to certain populations. It is then which fails to move beyond a sovereign account of the subject because it necessitates a coherent subject as the precondition for political action.

## Sexual Difference as Precarity

Notwithstanding in reconfiguring Irigarayan sexual difference as precarity (Parker, 2017), Butler offers the possibility to move beyond this paralysis by disavowing the need for a sovereign subject as the instrumental tool of political action. Instead precarity offers a relational and interdependent conception of the subject. In turn this commands an ethics which attends to the mechanisms by which lives are produced as grievable, as worth living and worthy of caring for and thus as more or less vulnerable. It is then towards this account of the subject, and a vision of politics which does not need a coherent group but instead focuses on the mechanisms of production and representation which promises the possibility to move beyond an instrumental means-end politics.

Emily Parker (2017) postulates that it is 'widely accepted that Judith Butler's work represents a fundamental departure from that of Luce Irigaray' (p. 319). This acceptance of a definitive departure which segregates the two thinkers' work is understandable given that Irigaray takes sexual difference, the fundamental incommensurability between men and women, as her point of departure for questions and relations of ethics; whilst Butler's early work (1990; 1993) deconstructed the very category of sex and demonstrated that it is not an essential, biological fact as much as an overdetermined effect of power and subjection. However Parker also suggests that more recently Butler's work is indebted to Irigaray's conception of sexual difference beyond any purely antagonistic capacity. Parker (2017) argues that the concept of precarity against the backdrop of this sexual difference in ways which 'pluralise Irigaray's own ethics and politics of difference' (p. 319).

In *Senses of the Subject* (2015) Butler suggests that in positioning sexual difference as the point of departure for an ethical relation Luce Irigaray makes 'an original contribution to ethical thinking' (p. 154). It is Irigaray's view of the fundamental difference between men and women within language which acts as this point of departure. For her, it is not just that men and women are different from one another but that this difference represents a reconfiguration of the terms of language itself as a universal concept. Irigaray proposes that the universal concept of language is never a neutral concept but is an esoteric elevation of the masculine *as* this universal language:

'this language, she argues, is not however neutral or indifferent to the question of sex; it is masculinist, not in the sense that it represents the contingent interests, but in the sense that it consistently *disavows the identification of the universal with the masculine that it nevertheless performs*' (p. 152; italics added).

It is not then that the universal of language is a neutral space which has been arrested by a masculinist appropriation and can thus be rescued by a feminine re-appropriation. Instead the ground itself is fundamentally marked by the masculine and as such there is a certain incommensurability with regards to sexual difference which can never be resolved nor overcome because the terrain itself is always, already a masculinist language.

It is then their relation to language itself which, for Irigaray, marks men and women as asymmetrical to one another:

'language [itself] unifies all specific dispositions, but, in Irigaray's view, *what refuses to consider the salient distinction between the sexes as a difference* that establishes different kinds of languages, a difference that contests the very notion of universality, or rather reveals that what has passed as universality is a tacit or unmarked masculinity' (p. 152).



As such if language is the refutation of a salient, singular and thus commensurable distinction between men and women, it is instead then nothing other than the asymmetrical difference between the sexes itself. Language, the universality of language, thus becomes this difference and incommensurability and it is under this incommensurability which all subjects are subsumed. Consequently sexual difference comes to designate incommensurability itself, a difference which disputes the idea of difference itself whereby difference comes to be figured beyond a meritocratic notion of equality wherein all subjects are subsumed equally under a neutral universal language. Instead the universal itself is marked by a hidden or silent masculinity, which then subsumes both the masculine and feminine positions.

Consequently there is a fundamental disjuncture between men and women by virtue of their position within language and relation to this 'universal' terrain. It is not just then that they are different but that they are unequally different; this difference enacts and imposes an incommensurability between the two so that they can never be said to be substitutable for one another as subjects. Each position has a fundamental different relation to language itself; as the universal which subsumes all subject positions, each subject is therefore produced at an incommensurable difference from one another because of this differing relation within language. Irigaray further suggests that this means one can never fully comprehend nor apprehend the other:

'in the case that men and women are positioned asymmetrically, the act by which a man substitutes himself for a woman in the effort to achieve an imagined equality becomes an act by which a man *extrapolates his own experience at the expense of that very woman*' (Butler, 2015, p. 153).

Due to the fundamental incommensurability of their positions, to attempt to understand the

other position would be to efface their experience and thus their position within the universal by positing one's own in place *of* theirs. In essence any account of substitutability, where one attempts to place themselves in the position of another in an attempt to gain their perspective and understand it, is one which is fundamentally flawed because it assumes the translatability of the masculine and feminine position within language. However this act of translation is an impossible task; one is either the masculine or feminine position in relation to the universal, and thus experiences not being a man or a woman differently but *experiences the universal differently*. To assume the other would necessitate a disintegration of oneself in relation to the universal. As such when one attempts to be another position one is always, already marked by their own position, experience and relation to the universal and as such one can only ever replace that position with their own in the act of substitutability.

It is then towards an ethics which does not assume the possibility of translatability and substitutability between subjects which Irigaray promises and it is this which Butler designates as an 'original contribution'. Consequently for Butler, questions of an ethical relation which begin with Irigarayan sexual difference are interesting because her work instantiates a fundamental asymmetry between subjects and thus disavows any attempt to apprehend the Other by virtue of the distance which marks the differing and non-translatable relation to the universal from the subjects own positioning. It is therefore the asymmetry and incommensurability between subjects with which Butler is most concerned in Irigaray's account of an ethical relation of sexual difference. It is this incommensurability of men and women to one another in Irigaray's work which Butler broadens in her conception of precarity so that each subject is constitutively incommensurable to the Other. As such Butler produces this asymmetry as a condition of *all* subjects so that no two subjects are ever translatable:

'I am not the same as the Other: I cannot use myself as the *model by which to apprehend the Other*: the Other is in *fundamental sense beyond me* and in this sense the Other represents the limiting condition of myself' (p. 154)

Butler is suggesting then that Other is not just another subject: a subject just like me but not me, an other me. The Other is the radical otherness of the subject in that the Other represents a fundamental disjuncture of the subject. The Other is all the subject is not. Not in the sense of any oppositional nature whereby the Other is another subject, *just like I am* but a different me, another *kind of* subject. The Other is in fact all that the subject cannot comprehend, utterly foreign and non-translatable. As such the Other can be said to be incommensurable to the subject and therefore every subject is incommensurable to one another in that each cannot be substituted for one another and it is always, forever impossible to apprehend one another. For to apprehend the Other, to attempt to understand them is to substitute oneself into the position of the Other in an attempt to imagine and comprehend their position but to do so is only ever to perform an act of substitutability which becomes and 'act of appropriation and erasure' (Butler, 2015, p. 153) and thus eviscerates the Other in favour of oneself.

It is this extrapolation of Irigaray's ethics of sexual difference beyond any deterministic articulation of sex and towards the positioning of the incommensurability of the Other as a precondition for subject-constitution which Parker (2017) refers to when she suggests that Butler is 'rewriting sexual difference as precarity...[in ways which] pluralise Irigaray's own ethics and politics of difference' (p. 319). For Butler precarity offers the possibility to conceive of a social, bodily ontology which underscores the radical relationality and interdependence of subjectivity and the necessity of the Other as a constitutive precondition of the subject:

'precariousness implies living socially, that is, the fact that one's life is always in some sense in the hands of the other. It implies exposure both to those we know and to those we do not; a dependency on people we know, or barely know, or know not at all. Reciprocally, it implies being impinged upon by the exposure and dependency of others, most of whom remain anonymous' (Butler, 2009, p. 14)

This interdependence therefore ensures that 'a part of who I am is the enigmatic traces of others' (Butler, 2004, p. 46) because it is only through the Other that 'I' am constituted and as such it is the Other who in same fashion or other defines the subject.

Parker (2017) argues that just as Irigaray refutes any kind of universality which posits itself as a neutral sphere for the contestation of positions within this universal, so too Butler's account of precarity 'cannot be thought without difference' (p. 331). For her Butler's conception of precarity institutes a 'primary multiplicity' wherein the subject is at once and therefore constitutively exposed to 'situation of myself outside of myself whose denial produces hierarchies of precarity' (p. 331). Just as Irigaray affirms the futility of an ethics which assumes a symmetrical relation between men and women in language, so too Butler views the denial of the subject's interdependence as the condition by which lives are made unequally vulnerable. For Irigaray when a man assumes the position of woman in language, in attempt to comprehend or apprehend her, he erases her position and experience in favour of his own relation to language and the universal. Similarly Butler argues that demands for 'even the most powerless to take responsibility for their own lives without depending on anyone or anything' (2015b, p. 67) is an attempt to erase the fundamental interdependence of beings. This erasure therefore presumes that all lives are not immediately and constitutive exposed and vulnerable but instead 'illness, injury and natural disaster are treated as accidental aspects of life for

which there should be no collective concern' (Parker, 2017, p. 320). This call for independence is therefore an erasure of the experience of those who are more vulnerable and more precarious by those who are less exposed to forms of precariousness in much the same way that Irigaray understands men to erase women's experience in the act of ethical substitution. Just as this substitution presumes the possibility of a symmetrical positioning with language, so too calls for an independent and ontologically secure, independent body who can purge itself of ill health, famine, disease, poverty, etc. presume that all bodies are firstly produced as constitutively invulnerable (this must something which *happens* to a body, later on) and that they are all produced without difference.

However for Butler precariousness and vulnerability are the constitute basis for subject constitution. Murphy (2011) argues that vulnerability as constitutive to *all* subjects and 'unique [each subject] to the degree that nobody is vulnerable in exactly the same way as one another' (p. 578). Butler's account of vulnerability is one which both acts as a generalizable condition of subjecthood and accounts for the ways in which bodies are vulnerable in innumerable ways. Furthermore this vulnerability is not a happenstance which occurs, or can occur, to a body but is a fundamental constituent of *all* bodies and thus Butler's account is attuned to the ways in which bodies are *produced* as vulnerable by the mechanisms and institutions of power regimes. Consequently the differential distribution of precarity is central to conceptualising the subject. As a generalizable condition where each subject is exposed but each subject's relation to it is entirely different and thus incommensurable with one another, precarity offers a relation to the subject akin to Irigaray's positioning of men and women in language. A universal condition and yet attuned to difference, precarity, as the precondition for subject constitution, *is* sexual difference in the Irigarayan sense: it is that incommensurable

relation of difference which ensures the subject cannot apprehend the Other without eviscerating them and their precarity in favour of one's own. It is thus this primacy of difference which links Butler's work to that of Irigaray: that each subject is constitutively produced differentially and that each is incommensurable to the Other by virtue of this difference.

### Returning to Freud: Sexual Difference as Polymorphous Perversity

It is this incommensurability of the subject to the Other and the primacy of difference which installs within Butler's concept of precarity the possibility to reconfigure sexual difference beyond any determining or binary account by re-articulating sexual difference as Freud's polymorphous perversity whilst also moving beyond a sceptical account which takes the sovereign subject as its focal points for an instrumental politics. Instead precarity offers the possibility for a 'freedom-centred' (2008, p.340) politics as Zirelli describes it which would attend to the mechanisms of power and representation which produces lives as grievable and thus as which are worth living or saving or caring for and those which are positioned more precariously and conditioned as more vulnerable. It is only in positing the primacy of difference through precarity as a constitutive element which *produces* the subject through the mechanisms and institutions of power regimes, Butler offers the possibility for radically reconceptualising sexual difference not just beyond a binarism of 'the sexes' but also as a set of effects which must be 'attended to'. It is only through Butler's conception of precarity that it becomes possible to re-articulate Freud's conception of polymorphous perversity and move beyond a reductive account of sexual difference which emphasises this binarism and ensures that the differences in sexuation and sexualisation are accounted for and that these

differences are not effaced by virtue of their being an effect of materialisation and power regimes.

Just as Butler characterises precarity as the general condition which effects all subjects, so too Freud writes that 'dispositions to perversions of every kind is a *general* and fundamental human characteristic' (1905, 1510). For Freud perversion describes not a judgement upon sexual behaviour but summarises all those behaviours which are considered to deviate from the normative attitude both in cultural and medical circles at the time of his writings. Furthermore Freud suggests that people are innately disposed to being polymorphously perverse in that 'an aptitude for them [sexual irregularities] is innately present in their disposition' (1905, p. 1510). This innate disposition or aptitude for polymorphous perverse does not seek to instantiate a prior nor pre-given sexuality within the subject. Instead this innate disposition reveals the subjects vulnerability to seduction:

'if she is led on by a clever seducer she will find every sort of perversion to her taste, and will retain them as part of her own sexual activities' (1905, 1510).

There is, for Freud, no sexual object prior to seduction; instead the subject is innately disposed to perversion, and therefore to the multiplicitious forms of sexuality and desire, but it is the seduction itself which instantiates the very forms of perversion: 'the effects of seduction do not help to reveal the early history of sexual instinct' (1905, p. 1511). This condition of polymorphous perversity then is at once a general condition of all subjects in that every subject can or will retain some sort of perversion as part of their own sexual activities but specific object or activities of this perversion themselves do not exist prior to seduction. In other words, there is no preference for the object of one's sexual desire prior to its

instantiation through some modality of power and representation as an object to be desired.

If Butler's precarity then is more than the generalised condition of susceptibility to life and death but is attuned to 'both certain socially facilitated modes of dying and death and to other socially conditioned modes of persisting and flourishing' (2009, p. 14), precarity becomes inextricably linked to its own differential distribution through certain regimes of power. Thus, it is not then simply that lives are implicated by and with one another and thus are made vulnerable by this imposition of the other. But that this sense of vulnerable is produced and maintained through various institutional mechanism such as systems of law, governance, parliamentary representation and educational possibilities which are designed to make some lives more precarious or more vulnerable than others. Furthermore Butler underscores precarity as primarily a form of 'radical impressionability and receptivity...part of a not fully articulate sensibility' (2013, p. 95). Precarity is therefore characterised as a generalised condition of receptivity whereby each subject is exposed to modalities of power and representation beyond their control. It is these institutions of power and modality which impress upon the subject and configure their precarity beyond any prior determination or innate disposition. The only constitutive base is that immediate receptivity, that predisposition to being vulnerable and as such being made precarious in some fashion or another by these modalities of power. Vulnerability then, as a constitutive condition, cannot be extrapolated from its own socially conditioned mechanisms of operation. Furthermore it exists beyond any kind of banal, superficial or vague 'generalised condition' but speaks to the specific modalities of power which produce these lives as precarious and as vulnerable, which are immediately and inherently predisposed to this vulnerability by their very implication of one another.



In configuring the subject as susceptible to modalities of power which produce the conditions of vulnerability for the subject, precarity offers a way to rearticulate Freudian seduction not as the will of a singular person who installs perversion in the subject by their interaction but as the immediate receptivity to forms of representation and mechanisms of power which overdetermine and instantiate the subject's 'perversions', preferences, sexual objects, desire and fantasies. It is these mechanisms of power which determine the ways in which subjects are sexed, sexualised, objectified and thus created as both sexual objects and sexual subjects. Consequently unlike Lacan's account of sexual difference or the new materialist's which is determined by and results in the attainment of rights for 'women' and necessitates the category of women, we have an account of sexual difference which attends to the modes of its production and thus account of the subject which is not defined by its sex but whereby the modes of sexualisation and sexualisation must be attended to i.e. rape, sexualisation, abuse, without positing the necessity of 'a sex' in whose name politics fights for to attain rights. Instead the focus is on a politics which attends to bettering the conditions under which sexual lives are produced. So if we are focusing on the effects of sex, the ways in which rape, child abuse and objectification of bodies occurs rather than the equality of sexes, precarity offers a way for reconfiguring sexual difference in order to focus on the mechanisms which produces the subject as a sexual and a sexed being and of attending to ways in which lives are produced differentially produced. In a conversation with Drucilla Cornell (1997), Butler when, pressed suggests, that it is essential to discuss the category of women. This is not a case of undoing her work on sex and gender as the effects of power and revealing that in actual fact she believes in the category of women as a coherent and ontologically stable. Instead Butler reserves this necessity in much the same way that she believes it is essential to use the

possessive 'my gender' (Butler, 2004, p. 23), because she believes we cannot do without it. It is necessary to discuss the category of women and attend to the effects of sex because these effects, instituted by regimes of power, are not fictive but are *real* and have determining consequences and effects lives. In similar fashion then I argue that sexual difference as both precarity and polymorphous perversity, is an essential condition when reconceiving the political subject because it is *essential* to attend to the different mechanisms by which sex and sexuality are produced and the multiplicitious ways these regimes enforce lives as more or less vulnerable. To deny the essential and immediate importance of this would be to efface those lives which are made more vulnerable and susceptible to abuse, rape and the ways in which bodies are effected by others.

Reconfiguring Irigarayan sexual difference as precarity firstly allows Butler to identify sex not as something which is constitutive to the subject nor something that they have and therefore must obtain as a prerequisite to any political engagement in the name feminism. Sex is figured as Butler has demonstrated in both *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993) a set of effects produced and overdetermined by regimes of power which presuppose a heteronormative sexual desire. It is precarity however as the basis for ethics of relationality which is novel to Butler's later work and provide the possibility to move beyond Pirelli's charge of sovereignty which would otherwise reduce politics to an instrumental capacity wherein a subject who can have rights attached or given to them must be pre-given and determined in advance. It is as such precarity in the form of a constitutive relationality which focuses upon the mechanisms of power which coercively produce lives as more or less vulnerable which provides the basis for a re-articulation of the political subject as the effect of these mechanisms. In producing the political subject as an effect of these mechanisms whose

vulnerability is structured by these very mechanisms, precarity offers the possibility for a politics which does not take the subject as its point of reference but focus on mechanisms which produce vulnerability themselves.

### **Chapter 3: Dispossession as Inaugural Loss**

This chapter will consider the necessity of the ways in Butler's more recent work on dispossession (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013), precarity and vulnerable are depicted as the basis for a social ontology and ethics, instantiates an inaugural loss at the heart of the subject and as such limit the radical potential that precarity has thus far offered. In positing this constitutive loss, both Butler construes the possibility of a sovereign subject who can recover this loss and become in full possession of itself, by itself. The subject as a sovereign entity is an unnecessary and dangerous misnomer which firstly denies the fundamental interdependence and inter-relationality of subjects and subject-constitution. Secondly, and subsequently, this denial then reinforces the longstanding liberal and metaphysical claim of the subject, as a being fully in possession of itself and its faculties, who (can) have ownership over oneself. As such if ownership of the self is the primary condition of the political subject the danger is that relations of property, propriety and ownership are re-articulated and reinforced as the necessary constitutive basis for any kind of politics.

In *Contingency, Hegemony and Universality* (2000) whilst in conversation with both Žižek and Laclau, Butler criticises Žižek's positioning of an inaugural and pre-symbolic loss, the Real, which is instantiated as the subject is brought into the symbolic. Her argument follows that by instantiating a universal loss for all subjects prior to the social and political field which then structures each subject, an irreversible limit is placed on all possible subject-positions. Re-reading Hegel's critique of Kant, Butler demonstrates how the Real, figured as the *loss* of a pre-discursive denial of jouissance, is an attempt to impose a culturally and historically

contingent set of normative claims about subjectivity and subject constitution as universal to all subjects and thus enact them as a qualifying criterion for what counts as 'being a subject' in the first place. Butler's Hegel contends that formalism, the creation of a structure, is a form of abstraction which requires the elevation of a *particular* set of content (in this case certain signifiers) to be regarded as the universal form or manner of organising the rest of the particulars. As such the universal claim of the Real as an *ahistoric* structure which constitutes all subjects equally and is enacted without difference nor discrimination, is in fact the elevation of a certain of culturally specific criterion for qualifying as a subject.

It is on this reading of Hegel then that Butler argues that any account of subject constitution which is not historically revisable imposes a certain set of cultural, social and political contingencies as necessary to emergence on the scene of the political. This universalisation performs two operations: it firstly forecloses in advance the possibility to alter these historical norms by suggesting that the universal is not a revisable condition but a fundamental and unchanging one and secondly denies that any cultural and social formulations are relevant to subject constitution by situating them outside this 'framework' or 'structure' and thus as secondary in importance to this originary loss – despite being itself, in any case, only a set of elevated particulars or cultural norms. Consequently that there is a framework which sustains, grounds or acts as 'neutral' in the sense that it is the same for all subjects and secondly that this framework is the elevation of a certain set of cultural, social and political values, Butler argues that Žižek's real thus imposes and regulates these cultural normative aspiration as the qualifying criterion for appearing as a subject in the symbolic.

Notwithstanding, it is not loss, as constitutive to the subject itself, to which Butler is opposed

but the specific way in which Zizek employs this loss as a transcendental structure which does not enact upon and effect each subject differentially. For, Butler has always been concerned with the importance of loss to any account of subjectivity. In *Psychic Life of Power* (1997) she writes:

“in Freud's view, the formation of conscience enacts an attachment to prohibition which founds the subject in its reflexivity. Under the pressure of the ethical law, a subject emerges who is capable of reflexivity, that is, who takes him/herself as an object, and so mistakes him/herself, since he/she is, by virtue of that founding prohibition, at an infinite distance from his/her origin. Only on the condition of a separation enforced through prohibition does a subject emerge, formed through the attachment to prohibition (in obedience to it, but also eroticizing it)” (p. 103)

Consequently it seems that for Butler loss is essential because it is through prohibition, the loss of possibility, that the subject not only emerges on the horizon of desire and thus emerges as subject at all, but is constituted as a reflexive subject who is capable of speaking, thought and decision *and* is also made into a passionate being, a being of attachment. It is thus through prohibition and through loss then that the subject becomes more than a rational subject; more than (or less than) a subject whom is fully known to themselves and one who is not guided by a logical teleology but is formed by and acts with regard to these passionate attachments. Note that decision, thought and reflexivity are inaugurally bound to the idea of passionate attachment. For all intents and purposes the former are made possible by attachment. The idea of loss thus becomes crucial to disavowing any notion of the rational subject: fully known to itself and in *full* possession of all its faculties and actions.

It is an understanding of loss as constitutive to the subject's emergence but also critical of any account which seeks to instantiate this loss universally and indiscriminately to all subjects. In short, Butler seeks to develop an account of subject-constitution whereby loss is figured as constitutive to all beings and thus as a generalized loss but *at the same time* this general condition of loss is figured differentially in each singular subject. This loss comes to be a loss *in and of* the other; as such the subject cannot be *fully known to itself* because 'a part of who I am is the enigmatic traces of others' (Butler, 2004, p. 46). Furthermore this being lost in the other is differential because of the constitutively unknowable, unforeseeable and undecidable position of the other. Seemingly then Butler achieves the double-effect of loss which is general in the sense that it is experienced by all as a loss in and of the other but also different for each subject because of the differential and forever unknowable and indeterminate character of the other. As such it seems that Butler avoids the characterisation of a subject in full possession of itself without retaining a transcendental force such as the real to delimit and foreclose in advance normative limits for the subject.

Diametrically opposed then to any account of the subject which would deny historicity, revisability and difference, but also concerned with the centrality of concepts such as loss, melancholia and the Other to the constitutive nature of the subject, Butler develops her own account of precarity and dispossession. Murphy (2011) best describes this project as a 'new bodily ontology [which] is as attuned to the nonviolent realization of mutual dependence and exposure as it is to those *instances in which availability is abused*' (p. 577; italics added). In essence Butler proposes an ontology which expresses that all persons are vulnerable and co-dependent beings and concomitantly recognises that this vulnerability is unequally distributed. In reading Butler's demand for a social, bodily ontology against the backdrop of

her own re-reading of Hegel (2000) one understands best how her conception of precarity operates or more importantly the ways in which this precarity can be abused. It is the obfuscation of one's own vulnerability which is heralded in attempting to eradicate and annihilate all others or other forms of possibilities, lives or particulars in Hegelian terminology and thus exposing and exploiting their vulnerability. As such the act of sovereign violence is a double bind which at once exposes the precarity of the other and suppress, or rather occludes and hides, the subject's own sense of precarity and the dependence upon others. Violence is then figured as the subject's exposition of a false sovereignty in a vain attempt to maintain the very fragility of that sovereignty intact.

Butler's account of dispossession operates as two valences. The first 'marks the limits of self-sufficiency and that establishes us as relational and interdependent beings. Whilst the second 'is precisely what happens when populations lose their land, their citizenship, their means of livelihood and become subject to military and legal violence' (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013, p. 3). Butler opposes the latter due to its forcible and privative nature but demands the necessity of the former valence because it is this inaugural dispossession of oneself which provides the basis for ethics of vulnerability. It this immediate and constitutive dispossession of the self which, for Butler, denies the subject as an ontologically secure, sovereign subject, a being in and of itself which is in full ownership of itself and all its faculties . As such she writes:

'we are dispossessed of ourselves by virtue of some kind of contact with another, by virtue of *being moved* and even surprised or disconcerted by that encounter with alterity.. experience is not episodic, but can and does real one basis of relationality – we do not simply move ourselves, but are ourselves *moved* by what is outside, by others but also by whatever 'outside' resides in' (p. 3, 2013; italics added).



Consequently Butler figures this *being moved* by an other is inherently a form of dispossession. The subject is torn asunder from its veil of sovereignty immediately by any form of contact with the other, an other, *any* other.

Murphy (2011) argues that what is novel in Butler's account of a bodily ontology is not that the body is susceptible to suffering, injury and violence but that this susceptibility necessitates certain ethical considerations:

'Butler turns to precariousness as a figure that heralds the ways in which we are both constituted *and dispossessed* as corporeally vulnerable subjects...[demanding an] ethics that honours this *constitutive dispossession*' (p. 580).

Murphy (2011) goes on to suggest that by both being anonymous and general, this vulnerability is allowed to be articulated singularly in each subject. This vulnerability as constitutive is thus 'unique to the degree that no body is vulnerable in exactly the same way as one another' (p. 578). As such the ethical imperative which arises from this determination of vulnerability is that 'we must attend to it, abide by it' (Butler, 2004, p. 29). This demand then is one which takes account of the differential distribution of vulnerability, of how some lives are made to be more vulnerable than others and how attempts are made to make some lives less vulnerable by the very (Hegelian) annihilation of those more precarious lives, and will attempt to re-dress this unequal distribution of vulnerability, to ensure that some lives are not made less vulnerable *at the expense* of other lives.

Butler's account of precarity and dispossession thus offers the possibility to radically re-articulate the terms under which the subject is understood. By demonstrating the inherent and immediate *otherness* of the subject, she allows the subject to be shed of its false sense of

sovereignty and demonstrates the necessity of an ethics which would demand the reduction of the institutionalised vulnerability of others by virtue of the subject's own implacability and existence being dependent upon this other. Butler re-articulates the structure of the subject so that one is never from the start fully in possession of themselves. Instead this immanent dispossession attempts to reveal the flawed nature of conceiving the subject as an object of ownership, whereby the subject is the owner of themselves and thus has full possession over their body, its faculties and is the master of all that it does and that is done to it. However there are three tensions in Butler conceptualisation which I argue prevent it from fully subverting this sense of total mastery, sovereignty and full possession which have in liberal and neo-liberal thought structured and structure the subject. The first of these tensions Butler's charge that one is always, immediately dispossessed by virtue of *any* other. The second is her contention that the subject is *inaugurally* lost in the other. The final reservation is with regards to her positioning of dispossession as constitutive over and against an interdependent sense of vulnerability and precarity, as a form of relationality. I argue that these three tensions allow for a re-articulation of Butler's project on precarity and dispossession which would disavow any conceptualisation of the subject as a sovereign entity and thus re-articulate the conditions of its emergence beyond traditional conceptions of propriety which have hitherto denied the relationality of subjects and re-enforced this institutional violence.

If, as Butler argues, dispossession has two modes of operating and that the former is an inaugural form of dispossession which does not amount, nor can even be considered related, to the forcible and coercive second valence, then what is being argued here is that from beyond any kind determination of the interaction itself, the subject is immediately given over

to the other. Athanasiou writes, in *Dispossession* (2013) a co-authored book with Butler, wherein the latter unequivocally and without amendment concurs:

'there is no ontological, causal or chronological link between "being dispossessed" (as a primordial disposition to relationality that lies at a *fundamental level* of subject and signals a constitutive displacement, that is, the constitution of the subject through certain kinds of foreclosure and pre-emptive *loss*) and "becoming dispossessed" (as an ensuing, derivative condition of enforced deprivation of land, rights, desire or modes of belonging)" (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013, p. 5; italics added, brackets are original)

Any form of interaction with the other then, regardless of *both* its intention and its effects, dispossesses the subject. Consequently the underlying presumption here seems to be the subject is 'undone', to use Butler's own terminology in *every* interaction with the other. However to view *all* forms of interaction with the other as a fundamental dispossession of the self, is I argue, an extension of Butler's misunderstanding of Wittgenstein's 'two uses of the word "to see"' (Zirelli, 2005, p. 39).

Critiquing Butler's characterisation of drag performance as a revelatory category which enables a re-articulation of gender norms, Zirelli demonstrates how a misinterpretation of Wittgenstein's perception causes Butler to understand *every* performance of drag as a hyperbolic interpretation of the boundaries of gender. Zirelli argues that this understanding of perception and seeing would determine *every* sign as 'requiring a fundamentally interpretive relation to all signs' (p. 40). When in fact she reads Wittgenstein as saying that: 'we normally understand without interpreting, and that is not a defect of some kind or failing on our part but the non-reflective *basis* of anything we might call critique' (p. 40, 2005).

Just as every interaction with a sign is not immanently interpretive one, then every interaction

with the other is not an immediate form of dispossession. In cases of violence, grief or even love, as Butler describes in *Precarious Life* and *Frames of War*, this most certain is the case. The subject is shown in these instances that one is never fully themselves and in the violent, grieving or loving act, one is certainly dispossessed by virtue of the other. A sense of self is eradicated by the revelation that one is always, inherently of the other and thus this sense of self is taken away if a loved one is lost, if one is addressed violently or abused or if one is passionately consumed by an other. Nevertheless being asked by a stranger for directions or speaking to a shop assistant in the supermarket does not *immediately* and *necessarily* dispossess the subject of their sense of self.

Any interaction then, whilst not a form of dispossession, *is* (or can) immanently reveal the relationality of the other to the subject and as such of the subject's own interdependence, precarity and vulnerable by virtue of this implacability in and of the other. As Butler asserts elsewhere, it can 'establish us as relational and interdependent beings' (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013, p.3). However to assert this immediate sense of relationally and interdependence as a loss, as a form of dispossession, and thus positioning subject as lost *in* and *of* or through the other, retains the possibility of a subject which is found, which is not lost but in full possession of itself and thus retains the possibility of a neoliberal rational subject or a metaphysics of presence – if only in its inverse form, as the trace of its constitutive other. That dispossession, in its first valence, is a constitutively 'inaugural submission' (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013, p. 2) of relationality and interdependence to, of and with the other to which the subject acquiesces, an inherent and immediate loss is established within the subject; a loss through the other. If the subject is always, already inherently lost, then this first valence of dispossession holds out for the possibility of a sovereign subject – which is wholly

itself, which is *without* the other. For if the subject is lost *through the other*, it stands to reason that this subject is sovereign without the other, sovereign in, of and by itself. Consequently the possibility of a sovereign subject resides as a trace in formation of a subject that is inaugurally dispossessed, either as its mythical, to use Lacanian terminology, pre-relational self or in a future anterior state, whereby one will or can eventually become in full possession of itself and recover this loss of the other.

Lloyd (2008) argues that for Butler loss, mourning and grief are forms of dispossession which reveal the 'subject's dependency on an other for its own sense of self and thus for its continued existence' (p. 94). I would go further and argue that for Butler these forms of dispossession do not just reveal that one is dependent upon the other but that one is irretrievably and irrevocably lost *in* the other, that one is inaugurally dispossessed by the other. Firstly in *Precarious Life* Butler writes: 'perhaps we can say that grief contains the possibility of apprehending a mode of dispossession that is *fundamental* to who I am' (p. 28). Secondly in *Dispossession* Butler informs us that 'we are only dispossessed because we are already dispossessed' (2013p, p.5). Furthermore Butler asserts that there are two forms or valences, to use her own terminology, of dispossession: one which is forcible and coercive, in other words externally and purposefully imposed by a figure beyond us, whilst the second is more fundamental. If we only dispossessed in the second instance because we are *already* dispossessed then it figures that this primary, inaugural form of dispossession is what allows us to be dispossessed, feel loss in the form of property, love, grief, inadequacy and so forth. But why do we need to already be, inaugurally, *lost* in the other to feel the kinds of loss mentioned above as well as mourning and grief?

Butler writes, in *Precarious Life*, that 'we are, from the start and by virtue of being a bodily

being, already given over, beyond ourselves, implicated in the lives that are not our own' (2004, p. 28). Surely if I am *of* the other, implicated by them and as such bound to them but also constituted by the other, this does not necessitate loss but rather a form of relationality whereby the subject is necessarily a site of tension. On the other hand, a being who can and must speak in the singular, so as not to be completely given over to the other and thus discomposed in forms of dispossession of the 'second kind' but also a being who is necessarily *of* the other, in fact is nothing other than this relation to the other, and so when we speak of this singular "I", we are always already implicating and pointing to this other because to speak of the "I", of the subject, is constitutively and without qualification to speak of the other. In this sense then we reveal the relationality of the subject, as a precarious and vulnerable being, open to the other and thus open to both injury and care by the other but we do not assume that this "I" is lost. For to assume the "I" is lost to assume that there can be an "I" without the other. That this "I" is possible and exists independent of the other. And so in turn to speak of dispossession as constitutive to the subject is to deny the subject relationally and with the other at the fundamental level and is to posit the possibility of an "I" beyond this relation to and of the other and beyond implication by the other.

### Retaining the Radicality of Precarity

To retain the radical potential of Butler's re-thinking of the subject as an inherently social and thus implicated and relational being, precarity, not dispossession in a primary valence, must become the constitutive basis and possibility for thinking dispossession in its second valence, in its properly dispossessing form – the forcible and coercive which commands populations 'lose their land, their citizenship, their means of livelihood and become subject to military and

legal violence' (p. 3). Similar then to Zirelli's interpretation of Wittgenstein's critique, which retains a non-reflective basis, dispossession, in its second valence has this precarity and vulnerability as its ambiguous and non-dispossessing basis. Precarity, for Butler is more than the generalised condition of susceptibility to life and death, and as such already infers the possibility of an inherent and immediate interdependence which is not reliant upon any kind of inaugural loss. Butler proffers precariousness as a term which 'underscores our radical substitutability and anonymity in relation to both certain socially facilitated modes of dying and death and to other socially conditioned modes of persisting and flourishing' (p. 14, 2009). Murphy, unsure of what this mechanism of substitutability means, proposes it may be attempting to evoke a kind of empathy and understanding as the basis for political engagement.

However Butler's comments moments after this confirm that precariousness is more than a vague attempt to understand that lives are implicated by one another and that subjects need to be empathic to each other. Butler primarily understands precarity in relation to grief, writing that:

'precisely because a living being may die, it is necessary to care for that being so that it may live. Only under conditions in which the loss would matter does the value of life appear. Thus *grievability is a presupposition for the life that matters*' (2009, p. 14)

Consequently the precarity of a life is directly correlative to its grievability if it were to perish and not to flourish. Firstly this suggests that precarity is differentially dispersed. More importantly Butler seems interested in the *socially conditioned modes of persisting and flourishing* i.e. the social and political conditions which make some lives more grievable than others and in turn unequally distribute this condition of precarity. As such it seems that for

Butler, precarity becomes inextricably linked to its own differential distribution. It is not then simply that lives are implicated by and with one another and thus are made vulnerable by this imposition of the other. But that this sense of vulnerability is produced and maintained through various institutional mechanism such as systems of law, governance, parliamentary representation and educational possibilities which are designed to make some lives more precarious or more vulnerable than others. So this sense of precarity immediately and inherently infers that this precariousness is unequally distributed. Vulnerability then, as a constitutive condition, cannot be extrapolated from its own socially conditioned mechanisms of operation. Consequently, already, without recourse to any originary loss it is possible to determine that bodies are both inherently vulnerable and that this vulnerability is unequally distributed. Furthermore it exists beyond any kind of banal, superficial or vague 'generalised condition' but speaks to the specific modalities of power which produce these lives as precarious and as vulnerable.

Murphy (2011) argues Butler's conceptualisation of dispossession as a primary and constitutive submission to the other traces is a move towards a 'necessary positive [ethical] obligations to work to a more egalitarian distribution of precariousness' (p. 581) in *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005) and *Frames of War* (2009). It seems then the move towards dispossession for Butler is one which is motivated by the desire to provide a basis for this bodily ontology and thus positively secure an ontology and consequently an ethics which demands we attend to the inequities that a constitutive vulnerability *can* pose. In turn it is an effort to demand the necessity of restructuring these mechanisms of power which institute forms of dispossession in its second valence through an ethical injunction. This injunction, which Butler institutes, demands then that the processes, which produce and maintain lives



as less grievable and therefore as more precarious, such as media representation, news coverage, political rhetoric and government policy be re-articulated. The representation and figuration of some lives as less worthy of living produces them as more expendable and thus institutionalises their precariousness. For Butler then it is this representation and figuration which must be redressed to configure a political scene which is more egalitarian in its distribution of precariousness.

To the extent that Butler issues an ethical injunction through the concept of precarity, it is essential that precarity itself, and thus the injunction too, remains ambiguous and undecided. For Derrida, the concept of injunction instantiates an inherent responsibility to engage with the political and to decide upon. To be commanded by the injunction is to be placed under an obligation to decide. The injunction itself is nothing other than the requirement to choose, split, filter criticise and sift through the multiple strands and possibilities that are proposed, promised or set out. Injunction is therefore heterogeneous and uncertain; if it were 'univocal, if it did not call for and defy interpretation' (Derrida, 1994, p. 16). Consequently the injunction itself, that which places or commands one as the injunction cannot in itself, already be decided upon prior to this demand. A pre-determined account of the conditions of precarity before the arrival of the injunction would be an inherently depoliticising manoeuvre as it would amount to a 'programmable application or the continuous unfolding of a calculable process' (p. 252, 1990). In other words it would perpetuate current modes of producing lives as less grievable. It is the ambiguity and undecidable nature of the injunction which allows one to sift, filter, analyse, decide and determine these operations and institutionalisations. Removing the undecidability and ambiguous nature of the ethical injunction of precarity would prevent any kind of proper analysis of these mechanisms and simultaneously deny their rearticulation

in a more egalitarian form.

Consequently it seems unnecessary and even dangerous for Butler to posit this constitutive lack of dispossession as point of departure for thinking this demand to attend to inequities. The constitutive nature of vulnerability, which already entails the differential distribution of precariousness as constitutive because each singular body experiences this vulnerability anew, necessarily evokes a response. It asks what kinds of dispossession have thus been set in motion by this vulnerability. From here then we can start to discuss the ways in which inequity has been produced and veiled and how best to attend to attuning these dispossessions. It is thus vulnerability, as ambiguously constitutive, which sets in motion a set of dispossessions; not an originary dispossession which makes us vulnerable subjects. Precarity and vulnerability as a condition which account for the mechanisms of institutionalised power and thus lays the foundation for asking questions about forcible dispossessions seems far more productive than the instantiation of an inaugural loss.

It is an inquiry which asks how are we dispossessed as a consequence of this constitutive vulnerability: what kinds of dispossessions can and do arise out of this necessary vulnerability? It is thus to place vulnerability first, to leave intact the ambiguity of this vulnerability and then to attend to the dispossessions, the ways in which some lives are made more vulnerable than others rather than set a constitutive and thus equalising dispossession at the heart of the subject. To set dispossession as constitutive is to assume that this dispossession is enacted across all subjects and equally across all subjects. It was the ambiguity of vulnerability, as both a productive and curtailing force, which allows one to properly conceive of the mechanisms of the uneven distribution of dispossessions which necessarily and inevitably occurs when

lives are inherently vulnerable. It is also this which allows us to understand the ways in which some lives are made less vulnerable than others and the mechanism by which these processes of increasingly vulnerability are institutionalised, normalised and reified as natural. Rather the productive effect of measure to guarantee the segregation of some lives as proper, normal, liveable, universal lives and others which are to be annihilated (Hegel) in aid of the universalisation and securing of the former set of lives.

Thus it is not that I am contesting Butler's account of precarity nor vulnerability nor dispossession per se but in the way she deploys the term dispossession as constitutive of the subject, rather than its deployment as an effect, or set of effects, caused by the constitutive feature of vulnerability. Butler says it best when she says that:

'to think precariousness in terms of equality emerges precisely from the irrefutable generalisability of this condition. On this basis one objects to the differential allocation of precariousness and grievability' (p. 22, 2009, Butler).

There are thus two operations at work. One is the generalised, yet singular, condition of vulnerability or precarity which enacts this vulnerability *differentially*. The second is then to ask on the basis of this differential distribution, what kinds of dispossession *enact* this difference, what mechanisms are at work to enable and produce this distribution. The distribution itself, the different ways it is distributed, the effects of this distribution, as Butler outlines are not natural nor an inherent feature of vulnerability. The two, dispossession and vulnerability, are linked but determinedly so. It would be a misnomer to assert that dispossession is constitutive, and that thus so too are the mechanisms of this dispossession. It is the concept of vulnerability which is generalizable and the constitutive condition of subjecthood.

Secondly I contend that it is this ambiguity which *must* be retained in order to elicit any kind of truly ethical response. Murphy (2011) argues that it is the 'ambiguous intertwining of ethics and ontology... that we respond to the provocation of the other' (p. 588). Similarly, though on a different tangent entirely, I argue that it is the ambiguity of the vulnerability and precarity which demand the ethical response, 'what kinds of dispossessions?', which allow for a critical examination and re-articulation of the mechanisms by which certain lives are made more liveable than others. Drawing upon Derrida's conception of justice and (in)decision, I propose that it is necessary to leave open the constitutive condition of vulnerability as ambiguous by not collapsing it with dispossession; instead positioning it as secondary, though inextricably, linked moment. This is not to deny the second valence of dispossession. This is wholly real, has concrete effects and is an effect itself of this inaugural, ambiguous vulnerability or precarity. As Butler states, 'we are moved by others in ways that disconcert, displace and dispossess us' (p.3). But be sure this *movement* by and of the other, alone is that which is constitutive and is prior to the conditions and mechanisms of dispossession which can often become intertwined and entangled and thus confused with one another due to inextricable connection and immediacy of one another to each other.

Butler argues, utilising Israeli confiscation of Palestinian land as her example, based upon a theory of Lockean self-possession and the right to own property, that the 'private form of dispossession makes the relational form of dispossession *impossible*' (p. 9). By impossible, I argue Butler means that privation denies our inherent and inaugural dispossession in and of the other by attempting to secure oneself and one's own private form of self-possession

through ownership of land and thus by impinging and denying the possibility of cohabitation and our inherent relationality by firstly suggesting that the subject and other can be separated and then by taking away from this other to give to oneself as such performing the Hegelian task of the universal in attempting to deny the other particular in favour of becoming the universal and thus apart from all other particulars. In essence become the subject, above all others: a self-possessed subject who has no connection to others except that *is* these others in so far as it is the *one* subject, the universal subject which governs all others. Butler can then go on to argue why cohabitation and bi-nationality is both necessary (this is her solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict) but yet also seems impossible because the universal, sovereign nation of Israel must deny its other, Palestine, in order to be sovereign, be the universal state/subject/particular.

However I would argue that far from the privative form of dispossession denying the relational form of dispossession, it is a little more complicated and is a two-fold operation. I would firstly argue that this constitutive relational form of precarity, not dispossession, a precarity which is figured as vulnerability, interdependence and form of relationality wherein the subject is always, already implicated and moved by the other in all its ambiguous configuration, is that which makes the 'second' valence of dispossession, the forcible and privative form, the actual forms of dispossession, and where the term should solely reside, possible. Secondly I would go along with Butler's re-reading of Hegel in *Contingency, Hegemony and Universality* (2000), a reading which is evidently assumed in her view of how property relations and colonialism intertwine to eviscerate the other and instantiate a form of inaugural, necessary and natural self-possession of the subject to legitimate the forcible confiscation of land, with one slight amendment. I would contend that dispossession, as articulated in what Butler terms its

second valence, and I its only possible valence, does not attempt to deny a prior form of dispossession but instead attempts to obfuscate its own possibility, wherein this possibility is figured as precarity. It is the constitutive figure of precarity which makes possible forms of dispossession as discussed and as such it is this possibility which, opens the subject to abuse as well to caring, nurturing, loving, is denied when violent forms of dispossession are imposed. These dispossessions deny the fundamental interdependence of subjects and instead posture self-possession as ontological, constitutive to being whilst abusing the very form which allows it to prosper. In other words, precarity, as a constitutive condition of relationality and being implicated by the other, always already holds the possibility for its own denial and evisceration. But it is only by holding out this possibility, a possibility for abuse, which allows it to remain undetermined and thus remain as a possibility, so that the subject too, constitutively remains a possibility. For if this possibility, were foreclosed in advance, via a dispossession, it would not hold within it, its underside, its inherent otherness, and thus it would no longer be a possibility but would designate in advance a fixed entity, whose own possible forms of subjectivity were already prescribed prior to its own emergence and thus a prescriptive mode of ontologisation which also constructed the self-possessed, rational subject, would be at work in the inaugurally, dispossessed subject which Butler ushers towards after *Precarious Life*.

## Conclusion

Butler's concept of precarity, as segregable, from any account of dispossession as an *inaugrally or originary* loss, provides the foundation upon which it is possible to re-articulate the political subject beyond ideals of sovereignty and propriety. Through reconceiving foreclosure as a historically revisable act, reanimating the incommensurability of Irigarayan's sexual difference and in disavowing any attempts to instantiate a primary and foundational dispossession within the subject, precarity holds out the promise to re-articulate the subject beyond accounts of propriety and sovereignty. As a relational and interdependent subject, open to the constitutive ambiguity of vulnerability, precarity refutes any determining account which would foreclose in advance the ways in which relations of propriety structure the subject. Instead it is in this ambiguous state of precariousness, as both constitutive and conditioned by the institutionalised mechanisms of social and political field, that the possibility for re-articulating relations of propriety to account for the interdependence and relationality of beings. These relations then can be attuned not to the independent, sovereign subject who must defend itself against violences and injustices and to whom rights can be attached. Instead it offers the possibility that politics attends to the ways in which these subjects are produced and focus on these mechanisms of production as their object for re-configuring political activism. In turn this disavows any attempts to de-humanise some subjects in favour of the sovereign self and conceives of any and all accounts of *dispossession* to be a fundamental unethical enforcement of violence through the denial of this fundamental relationality and the instantiation of a sovereign subject.

Precarity offers a way of understanding foreclosure against the background of Butler's salient criticism with regard to the heteronormative determinations Lacan imposes without reducing the complexity of Lacan's account. It is essential for Lacan to ensure foreclosure is a two fold operation; through the inaugural act of *verwerfung* and the secondary act of *veimening*. Butler's collapsing of these operations loses the intricacies of the way Lacan views the subject emerging into the symbolic upon a set of foreclosures but that these inaugural foreclosures are *not* determining. In mis-reading Lacan, Butler would reduce Lacanian thought to a singular *kind* of foreclosure in an attempt to show that this foreclosure is not irreversible limit prior to the symbolic. She re-articulates this foreclosure as socially constituted and thus a perpetual exchange between the real and the symbolic. However this Lacan disavows by determining *verwerfung* as an act solely relatable to any inaugural exclusion or admission of the symbolic. Precarity allows for a possibility to conceive the ways in which foreclosure could exclude signifiers from the symbolic without being tied a chronological primacy. Instead this inaugural act of *verwerfung* can be positioned as a constitutive feature engaging with the symbolic; a perpetual receptivity towards its modes and mechanisms of representations. Foreclosure, through precarity, thus allows for a conception of exclusion which is attuned to the intricacies of symbolic field and the ways in which signifiers are excluded prior to the subjects' appearance within the symbolic.

Reconfiguring Irigarayan sexual difference as precarity allows Butler to constitute the subject as incommensurable to the Other. This incommensurability provides the possibility to move beyond Zirelli's charge of sovereignty which would otherwise reduce politics to an instrumental capacity wherein a subject who can have rights attached or given to them must be pre-given and determined in advance. It is as such precarity in the form of a constitutive



relationality which ensures that the subject cannot apprehend the Other and thus cannot be subsumed by focuses upon the mechanisms of power which coercively produce lives as more or less vulnerable which provides the basis for a re-articulation of the political subject as the effect of these mechanisms. In producing the political subject as an effect of these mechanisms whose vulnerability is structured by these very mechanisms, precarity offers the possibility for a politics which does not take the subject as its point of reference but focuses on mechanisms which produce vulnerability themselves.

Dispossession, in instantiating an inaugural loss, does exactly what Butler criticises Žižek for: imposing and determining loss and constitutive limit. It is this loss which disavows the ambiguity of precarity and determines in advance the relations of property which structure the subject. In effect dispossession, by positing an inaugural loss, re-affirms the subject as an object of propriety. It is an object which the subject itself owns and is in possession of, or at least points to this possibility of recovery and full possession. Consequently dispossession confirms and re-articulates existing relations of property which structure the subject and deny the radical potential that precarity, as the ambiguous, undetermined condition of subject constitution, promises to re-articulate these relations beyond a conception of self-possession. As undetermined, constitutive condition of subject constitution which privileges the immediate, necessary and unequivocal interdependence and relationality of all subject upon one another, precarity proffers the possibility to move re-articulate relations of property beyond ownership to a collective responsibility for the ways in which subjects are produced are some lives are made more vulnerable than others.

It is therefore Butler's work on precarity and vulnerability, if we can segregate this from her

work on dispossession not chronologically but theoretically as has been demonstrated, which re-articulates relations of property beyond ownership, primarily of the self, and as such creates the basis for a new kind of politics which does not seek the sovereign, fully knowable subject as its object but offers the relations of subject-other as constitutively intertwined and the point of departure for doing politics. It is a politics which must firstly and without recourse to anything beyond this relation take account of the subject, and thus the other, as a relational and vulnerable subject – one which is always implicated by and forever implicating the other. It is her move towards dispossession as constitutive of the subject in so far as it installs originary loss which returns us back to the possibility of self-possession and as such ideals of propriety as the condition of firstly the political subject and then more broadly, politics in general.

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