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Performatising the Knower: On Semiotic Analysis of Subject and Knowledge

Abstract *This paper considers epistemological implications of the concept of performative, starting from the elaborate conception provided by Judith Butler's theories. The primary postulate of this work is that various interpretations of the performative, with their semiotic shifting from the notions of truth-evaluability and the descriptive nature of meaning, form a line of abandoning traditional epistemological distinction between subject and object. Through other semiotic concepts which will be presented and analysed, this line reveals the key epistemological issues in the light of semiology, while Judith Butler's concept of performativity is viewed as a possible outcome of this course of semiology of knowledge, resulting in final transcending of the category of subject.*

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Keywords: *performative, epistemology, semiotics, subject, identity, discourse, truth-evaluability, meaning*

Performative Agency

In order to clearly outline the concept of performative in relation to semiology¹ of knowledge, I will first provide several key areas in which Judith Butler's performative may constitute a separate concept which differs from common disputes on the axes between feminism and traditional epistemology, continental and pragmatist, and constructivist and essentialist approaches. Hopefully, this short introduction will also provide the key points of demarcation that indicate semio-epistemological nature of the theory of performative in general.

Two key areas of concern within feminist epistemology are *epistemology of privilege* and *feminist critique of empiricism*². Instead of handling gender difference as having objective foundation and then diagnosing discrepancies in their treatment, from a neutral standpoint which plays a key role in feminist epistemology of privilege, in *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler treats neutral standpoint as a specific method applied by

1 While the term *semiotics* implies a narrower field and its role in linguistics is not predominant, de Saussure's term *semiology* appoints a much broader frame and plays a crucial role in linguistics (de Saussure, 2000: 26). From now on, I will use the term *semiotics*, since it is more common in English, but I will operate with it having in mind its Saussurean purport.

2 For a survey of these positions in feminist epistemology, see Longino 2004: 240-264.

the discourse with the purpose of disclosing performatively constructed character of both sex and gender differences. In *Bodies that Matter*, she deals with mechanisms of power incorporated by the discourse which constructs the opposition between form and matter, and analyses them as originated from and based on the fundamental principles of sex/gender performativity, which operate within a traditional difference embedded in Western ontology and its accompanying epistemology. In this sense, the contribution of Butler's theories possesses epistemological relevancy beyond the borders of feminist epistemology of privilege, penetrating into the basic epistemological categories that influence ontological order and define the general concept of philosophy.

In her *Gender Trouble*, critical focus is aimed at the concept of "naturalness" as a preordained object and a frame of knowledge. Therefore, the deconstruction of gender in *Gender Trouble* penetrates ideological problems of conceptualization of epistemological categories and maps semiotic patterns of naturalisation within the operation of power, providing the fundamental critique of empiricism.

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For the purposes of further argumentation, I would like to propose a dual interpretation of Butler's concept of performative operation of power: first, in the sense of its syntagmatic *outcomes*, and second, in terms of its paradigmatic *mechanisms*.

In terms of *outcomes*, performative operation of power is not understood as an element that subordinates pre-given natural categories of sex and relatively coherent social categories of gender. Butler sees the operation of power as both generative and auto-referential in the sense of masking its own generativeness, i.e. it is seen as having an effect of naturalisation.

On the other hand, the concept of the *mechanisms* according to which the power operates includes a post-structuralist notion of subject and its acting within the operation of power. When analysing the interest-based and ideological foundations of science, feminist epistemological approaches³ commonly claim the right to represent the key aggrieved category of sex/gender binarism (as well as all other categories identifiable as potential *holders of subjectivity* on the deprived or infringed side), so they inevitably enter an interpretational relation with the subjects of their representation. *Gender Trouble* begins with polemical questioning of the subject of feminist representation and results not in

3 For a survey of these approaches, see Anderson 2011.

abandonment, but rather in an original deconstruction of the category of identity and subject within the semiotic terms of Derrida's *différance*.

However, there is an aspect of Judith Butler's theory in which she insists on the notion of localised knower and the limited perspective of the viewer, as well as his or her interest, thus placing critique of objectivity into focus.⁴ If we regard it from within the premises provided by Judith Butler, empiricism (along with its critiques) becomes an integral part of naturalistic paradigm that encloses discursively constructed ontology. Within such discourse, gender and the practices of gender identification are accumulated into an illusion of ontological basis that is *a posteriori* denoted, interpreted and played out as natural and pre-discursive. *Bodies that Matter* goes even a step further: it argues that the entire dichotomy of matter and form, which is implicit in empiricism, also stems out of the constructed sex/gender difference, resulting in bodies both conceived and incorporated by the discourse⁵. In this sense, theories and considerations of Judith Butler, with their deconstruction of the entire naturalistic paradigm of pre-linguistic character of body and matter, belong to the line of feminist critique of empiricism; they simultaneously confirm its objectives and negate its substantialist origins of the identities represented within this line of thought.

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The theory of performative also implies a twofold agency, which I will, for the purposes of methodology, divide into *versive* and *subversive*.⁶ The notion of *versive* aspect provides a version of hegemonic matrix. Hence using performative, Butler explains the genesis and generics of sexual difference and "naturalness" in Western metaphysics of substance, which juridically and generatively establishes the entire symbolic order. In addition to being founded in Nietzschean genealogy, this line of thought is also grounded in continental post-structuralism.

4 In *Gender Trouble*, there is an entire chapter dedicated to critical analysis of DNA research of XX and XY chromosomes for the purposes of biological definition of human sex difference. However, I found it not accidental that this critique seems «parenthetical» precisely within the book that caused the most extraordinary shiftings concerning the notion of empirical elements of sex. The reason for this is that, instead of defining failures of the objectivity ideal, Judith Butler's theories, in fact, operate according to the semiotic criticism of deconstruction of the very categories of «naturalness» understood as basic principles of empiricism, and not according to pragmatist criticism of the presuppositions of concrete empirical research.

5 For an overview of feminist perspectives on the body, see Lennon 2010.

6 This division can be helpful for ascertaining both Butler's and Žižek's positions concerning the place of sex/gender difference in relation to ideology, which is problematized and criticised from the perspective of both Lacanian notions of "Real" and Foucaultian issues regarding subversive practices in: Butler, Laclau, Žižek 2000.

Besides denoting performative character of the matrix that implies compulsory operation that produces the effect of subject, Judith Butler's theory also provides the concept of *subversive* agency of performative kind. However, subversive operations can only be performed from within the system, whose norms can be relocated through application of performatively parodied reiterations. More precisely, this means that use of hyperbole and persiflage and performative denotation of naturalness, entwined with the game of binarisms between sex, gender, sexual orientation and gender identity, can in fact underline the constructed character of naturalness. Besides drawing from Derrida's deconstruction, such approach is also founded in pragmatist thought.

Both of these aspects of performativity, *versive* and *subversive*, are always present and intertwined; however, this does not result in making Butler's theory of performativity binary, but rather in a specific approach spanning over continental and pragmatist feminism⁷, connecting these two traditions.

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To understand and accurately place Butler's theory of performative within the semiotic frame, one should notice that such theory also transcends the "linguistic monism" which perceives sex, nature, body and subject as entirely derived linguistic categories. Constructivism, combined with its own linguistic version, will view sex as a language-given construction. However, if social construction of sex is placed within such context, sex becomes inaccessible except via the very means of its construction – language.⁸

Hence the essentialism – constructivism debate⁹ is actually continued amongst the two versions of constructivism. The first version is governed by linguistic monism that implies a divine performative, and the key problem of this approach is determinism in which the language is conceived of as Aristotelian "unmoved mover". In the second version, construction is figuratively reduced to speech act that implies a subject

7 Basic aspects of the intersections between continental and pragmatist feminism can be found in Sullivan 2011.

8 For harsh critical analysis of this concept, where it is called "semiotic idealism" and seen as analogous to Kantian idealism with its accompanying epistemological repercussions in Saussure's structuralist settings along with their later forms in (literary and philosophical) theories, which are then confronted with certain realist positions in linguistics, see: Freundlieb 1988.

9 In the context of perspectives on sex/gender and identity, this debate is thoroughly analysed in: Stein 1992, especially in the chapter *Conclusion: The Essentials of Constructionism and the Construction of Essentialism*, 295-325.

situated outside and prior to language, a voluntarist subject which establishes its gender through its own agency. For Judith Butler, such subject arises from mistaking grammar for metaphysics.

Judith Butler surpasses both of these semiotic viewpoints by positing simultaneousness of *subjectedness* and *subjectivisation*: “Subjected to gender, but subjectivated by gender, the “I” neither precedes nor follows the process of this gendering, but emerges only within and as the matrix of gender relations themselves.” (Butler 1993: 7) For Butler, naming simultaneously constitutes both delimitation and reiterative enforcing of norm that defines “the human” – hence it is always exclusive, and non-subjectivity of those who do not comply with the gender norms is a necessary and formative exteriority of that very norm, always threatening to be rearticulated and to penetrate into the system. This notion becomes fundamentally semiotic when placed in analogy with Derrida’s *différance*.

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This semiotic character is expressed in the constituted autoreference of an incorporated effect of a subject which simultaneously establishes itself both as a product of linguistic matrix and as the matrix itself, providing the frame of intelligibility whose boundaries are constantly being renegotiated. Butler explicitly refuses to call this approach either constructivist or essentialist – and points out that both of these approaches, as well as the whole debate, simply miss the point of *deconstruction*. With its notion of discourse without absolute control of meaning, deconstruction is exactly about dodging determinism. A *différentiative* constitution of sign presumes an iterative, both repetitive and differentiative relation towards the absent within a sign which is constitutive for its meaning. Such constitution of discourse opens the possibility of new approaches to power and subject, “(...) for construction is neither a subject nor its act, but a process of reiteration by which both “subjects” and “acts” come to appear at all. There is not power that acts, but only a reiterated acting that is power in its persistence and instability.” (Butler 1993: 9)

Feminist interpretation of constructedness of gender implies cultural or social power operating upon and formatting the nature or some natural foundation. However, the concept of sex for Judith Butler represents the stage at which the drama of naturalness and constructedness is played out, resulting in sex becoming an *essential construct*. In her reassessment of radical constructivism, Butler holds that sex cannot be posited

as a mere fiction or a phantasm which lies beyond and against the reality, insisting that these oppositions of phantasm/reality must be reformulated, since if “sex” is in fact a fiction, this fiction must be seen as one in whose necessity we all live and without which the life would be unintelligible and unthinkable (Butler 1993:6).

Here we can ask the following question, for whose implied answer I hope to provide solid arguments: what implies such necessity, if not the fact that it is brought into existence precisely due to semiotic processes governing the most fundamental epistemological categories?

Descriptive Concept of Meaning and the Semiotic Character of Subject

The very fact that the speech act theory by John L. Austin¹⁰ opens the possibility for an utterance to exist in the form of a logical judgment, to belong to a group of declarative utterances, and to be sensible yet neither true or false, raises the central issue of definition of meaning, indicating that this definition might be independent from the epistemological notion of truth. Austin’s performative – constative binary opposition implies further oppositions: truth-value – neutrality, description – action, truth – being. There are two premises operating within these oppositions: first, the implicit presupposition that only speech can be subjected to examination of truth and thus constitutes the only category that has the potential of being true; and second, that being that is described in speech is always positioned beyond truth; neutral, natural, objective and referent for that very truth. Both presumptions are in agreement with the descriptive theory of meaning and with realist and empiricist tradition. However, the very concept of performative, which as a linguistic action, lies at the intersection between being and speech, and at the same time constitutes both, threatens to result in both radically constructivist and extremely antirealist conclusions. On the other hand, these differences explicitly occur *from within* the linguistic activity, thus indicating the possibility that neutral truth-value, being and action actually constitute linguistic elements. Hence, instead of truth-value that performative lacks, Austin introduces the condition of success (happiness, felicitousness). As Derrida references¹¹, the battle for taming the circumstances – or if we use Derridean term, the “context” – for said success, fought either by investigating and defining

¹⁰ Austin 1962.

¹¹ Derrida 1988.

their character or by setting the norms for their occurrences, represents the main concern in Austin's research. And the manner in which Austin shifts between different arenas (legislative, pragmatist, grammarian, analytical), in retrospective, indicates that there might be an implicit but excluded notion of fundamentally semiotic nature of context and subjects operating within it.

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I find that actual key difference concerning two sets of Austin's indicatively ordered heteronomous rules is that the rules listed in Latin letters refer to external or *intersubjective* circumstances, while the Greek-alphabet rules concern exclusively the *performative subject* (Austin 1962: 17-19). In the latter rules, the very procedure normatively gets hold of the inner state of the doer – it conditions the existence of proper attitudes, will, intentions and thoughts of the subject who performs that act. Perhaps the difference between two negative results of these heteronomous groups of rules can be brought into relation with the twofold aspect of Butler's conception of performativity. In other words, there might be an analogy between Austin's concept of *misfires* and Butler's *versive* character of reality, identity and objectivity in performative on one hand¹², and on the other hand, an analogy between Austin's *abuses* and the *subversive* aspect of performativity in the sense of revealing the constructedness of the categories of objective and natural. Misfires do relate to norm prescribed for the context – just as the *versive* character of reality does constitute the objectivity as such; abuses are by their very definition implicitly able to subvert the playing out of the performative just by assuming a “wrong” intention in the “right” action, just like in the subversive parodist performativity in Butler's concept. Although the subversive aspect of performativity does find its more problematized and less systematically interesting analogy in Derrida's critique of Austin's denunciation of “parasite” performatives (Derrida, 1988: 16-17), here it seems that Austin already places this aspect precisely in a systematically defined disruptive potential within the norm, and – even more interestingly – within the very doer.

Later, at the intersections between the concepts of locution, illocution and perlocution, Austin implicitly crosses the borders of the descriptive theory of meaning. The definition of rhetic act (as a key locutionary category) boils down to a pure intention for meaning contained in the

12 This aspect must be understood in the generative-juridical sense of creating gender/sex factuality which can never be completely performed as it holds within itself the essentially semiotic abjection analogous to Derridean *différance*.

basic and “neutral” speech act. This intention, as defined by Austin, is therefore defaulted by the language-system itself. Furthermore, intention, which is inseparable from inevitably unsuccessful control of meaning, as implied in rethoric act, is relevant in terms of deconstruction. Thus the illusion of voluntarist subject in performative underlined by Butler concerns Austin’s systematically and a posteriorly de-performatised locution. This implies two intentions relating to two modes of meaning – the first, locutionary, is “traditional” (which is debatable since here there is an explicit notion of intention entwined with description), and the second is the *illocutionary* “force” of the utterance. So the point of differentiation between locution and illocution would actually constitute a surpassing of the descriptive theory of meaning.¹³ On the other hand, Austin’s *perlocutionary* act is a comprehensive effect toward which the intention of the locutor is directed; it constitutes the result *per se*, the very occurrence of the concrete effect by means of uttering. Therefore, Austin’s tripartite definition of locution, illocution and perlocution results in the following conceptions: a) Austin’s differentiation between locution and illocution implicitly establishes intentionality as responsible for the effect of meaning (which might also imply that meaning is effect whose potential is pre-given within the language-system itself); and b) differentiating between illocution and perlocution implies a distinction between acting with an effect intended, and the effect itself. This can be directly linked with Judith Butler’s distinction of performative act which is necessarily unfinished, and as such, possesses an illocutionary character; while the sediment of performative practices (provided that we understand them as iterative in their Derridean semiotic nature) offers a communicable effect of relatively stable results interpreted as subject, identity, naturalness and objectivity of a

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13 Oswald Ducrot (Ducrot: 2009) insists on necessity of emancipation from the descriptive or informative notion of meaning. That concept is inseparable from the truth-evaluability, and Ducrot explicitly associates it with a long epistemological tradition of distinction between subject and object. In the background of distinction between “dictum” (which is said) and “modus” (how it is said), 17th century Port-Royal grammarians complied with Descartes’ distinction between understanding and will. Cartesian understanding constitutes a passive action, consisting of perception of a certain number of ideas that represent reality, while attitude is formed by will. Therefore, according to Cartesian philosophy, there are always two simultaneous elements contained in reasoning: one objective and passive, and the other subjective and active. Consequently, categories of dictum and modus in fact describe two areas of reality in regard to meaning: while dictum constitutes a description of the outside world (and is thus subjected to truth-evaluation), modus is a description of inner world. According to Ducrot, Austin separates himself from this tradition with his notion of modus – instead of understanding it as an element of psychological nature, he sees it as an element of language itself.

fundamentally perlocutionary nature, and the unfinishedness and iterativity of illocutionary performative towards its perlocutionary result are essentially the same as internal potential of numerous misfires and abuses and similar infelicities listed in Austin's concept.

110 In his lectures, Oswald Ducrot extracts the line of epistemological distinction between subject and object from the descriptive theory of meaning. I consider the exemplary distinction (Ducrot 2009: 15-17) between *modus* and *dictum* a result of the concept of language as a permeable medium between the objectivity of subject's will and the objectivity of the very being. But in addition to this double objectivity (in an interplay between two binary oppositions – subject/object and language/being), we can also derive a double-aspect of subjectivity – the subjectivity which speaks and the subjectivity that is being spoken. This twofoldness is negated or “deflated” in Western epistemology. Deflation of the speaking subject's multilayeredness in fact establishes the subject's proclaimed absolute autonomy on one hand, and on the other, it forms the fundamental otherness of the object. Therefore, voluntarist subject formed in this manner and the otherness of the object constitute the basic epistemological elements inseparably entwined with the descriptive concept of meaning.

Moreover, this may serve as an example of the fact that each particular epistemology necessarily presupposes its own semiology¹⁴. In a more concrete sense, it also applies vice versa: a semiotic shift concerning the concept of meaning will inevitably cause an epistemological shift. This is the reason why Oswald Ducrot, when expositing his concept of argumentative nature of meaning, cannot fail to invoke an *alternative* epistemology.

For the purposes of precise localisation of subjectivity in speech, Ducrot differentiates between three aspects of the subject of an utterance: producer¹⁵, locutor¹⁶ and enunciator. This last category is the one that

14 For an elaborate analysis of the semiotic nature of epistemological categories, along with their extensive philosophical implications, see Mikulić 2004.

15 Producer of utterance is a person performing the phonetic or graphic activity of composing linguistic elements into a statement. Ducrot demonstrates that it constitutes quite an unstable category, due to several reasons which partly correspond with Derrida's deconstruction of the category of presence (both physical presence and presence of intention of a comprehensible meaning); see Ducrot 2009: 30-32 and Derrida 1988: 5-10.

16 Locutor is a category defined precisely by responsibility: in certain linguist conceptions, locutor denotes a person whose responsibility for statement is designated within the statement itself. Locutor is in fact the closest category to Benveniste's lin-

Ducrot remains on: person whose *perspective* the statement expresses. I believe that the other two categories share the same approach towards the utterance – as uttering, an event played out in real-time. Locutor designates the subject at the level of responsibility for uttering. I am going to refer to this subject as the first subject. Enunciator designates an element which I here call the second subject, located in front/behind (depending on whether we perceive it from the standpoint of hierarchy, according to the levels of mimesis, or we see it in terms of layers within an event). This second subject is actually a perspective, and the relation between the first subject and the second is literally the relation of possessing. Does the interplay of these two subjective positions produce the effect of possessing a stance on an argument and does it accomplish it by means of the specific linguistic performance of that very argument?

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Performativity of the act within Ducrot's category of enunciator contains an aspect of performativity that concerns enactment of an argument. We may perceive this enactment as occurring among several different layers (locutor, enunciator, between these two, both of these instances in relation to being, and in the end, in relation to the very instance of the producer of the utterance), while subjectivity of the argument itself might bring additional confusion: when a locutor bears any of the enunciators within the utterance, that enunciator also bears the "as-it-is" reality of an argument – argument is *as-truth* for enunciator and it bears that as its reality. Thereby, the relation between the enunciator itself and the argument in fact constitutes a role, which is nothing else than *an act of presenting an argument as truth*.

Enunciator represents a point of view which favours a particular conclusion, or, more precisely, the point of view represented by enunciator functions as an argument and not as an information or description, which constitute essential elements of descriptive theory of meaning. It should be emphasized that the term "conclusion" does not possess logical meaning here – argumentative functions do not constitute premises for logical conclusions, nor do they in any way correspond with logical reasoning; while conclusion in logic is reasonable, a conclusion in linguistic terms is purposeful (pragmatic). Conclusion is the final instance of "desired result" – which is exactly what Austin's *perlocution* is. In

guistic subject, indicated by a personal pronoun or a morpheme. For further analysis see Benveniste 1971: 198-206.

relation to that, let me present the concept of performative as thus far defined, but now using the terms of Oswald Ducrot, as:

- 1) The essential attribute of *language-system* consisting of
- 2) Presentment or enactment of a performance in speech
- 3) (Through authority which must be here understood as an attribute of the language itself)
- 4) So that this performance is being *taken as* a reality, i.e. it *acts as* real
- 5) Thus constituting a semiotic form of justification
- 6) Within the drama which is constitutive for meaning.

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This implies that epistemological justification exists as the enactment of meaning itself. Departing from descriptive nature of meaning therefore implies abandonment of the concept of *denoting* in the traditional linguistic sense. In Ducrot's works, denoting becomes *acting-as* – just as in Butler's theory performative constitutes its denotations simultaneously making them as-real in terms of objectivity, all existing within the language-system itself.

Now we need to examine the inner mechanics between enunciators and conclusion. Ducrot rehabilitates the term *topos* (pl. *topoi*)¹⁷. The scalarity of *topos* contains the most important distinctive attribute of language and meaning in their relation to logic, since the rules of logic do not tolerate levels and shades of "truthiness".¹⁸

However, making a straight parallel between *topos* and Judith Butler's concept is not going to be simple, since it seems to me that the effect of subject, created by performative, actually implies enunciator, but as enunciator constitutes the location within the language-system, it is not immediately clear whether it necessarily implies the most

17 Taken from Aristotle's rhetoric, roughly speaking, *topos* denotes some general opinion expressed in the form of a premise used as an assisting argument for demonstrating a thesis. This is Ducrot's idea: each time an argument A is given by enunciator leading towards a conclusion Z (which is the case with every statement provided that it possesses a comprehensible meaning), there is a necessary reference to a certain third element, different both from the argument A and the conclusion Z, enabling us to cross over from A to Z. That third element is called *topos*. Characteristics of *topos*, existent in *the background of each segment* of argumentative discourse, are as follows: it is general, it is given in the form of an intersubjective belief, and it is scalar.

18 This also has various implications in Derrida's line of thought, especially his polemics with Husserl and his entire critique of logocentrism (Derrida 1988: 10-12).

elementary form of material identification as postulated in *Bodies that Matter* which (accompanied by abjection) presupposes subjectivation and subjectivity. Nevertheless, certain practices concerning Butler's notion of identification should be relatable to topos, but we need to locate them having in mind their Foucaultian origins¹⁹. I would here propose that, within the overall structure of Butler's work, Ducrot's topos actually acts as a *regulatory ideal*. The question is, however, can an identity, such as gender, for instance, be understood or seen as a particular pole of topos, in which the concept of gender Q is discursively connected with a quality P; say, for example – Q: man is P: rational? Connected in such a way that it in fact shares all the characteristics of Ducrot's topos – it is presented as general, it is shared within a certain social context (or a society), and it is actually given in scalar levels that, interestingly, offer the possibility of the “illusion of choice” – or, in other words, individuality, in terms of having/enacting an attribute in individual degrees by different “subjects” subjected to that ideal. Enunciators would then assume positions of performative identifications which are concealed beneath the illusion of subject, and which are given by the language-system itself – precisely underscoring the necessity which Butler insists on in her attempts to avoid constructivist radicalism. In speech acts, argumentative nature acts exclusively by *illocutionarily aiming* at realization of the effect of reality, never managing to completely establish it, and always circulating. This very circulation of *aiming* could be reformulated as power which is acting, and which establishes the identity through its continuous striving towards Austin's perlocution or Ducrot's conclusion – whose Derridean context cannot be fully controllable.

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Structural impossibility of establishing an integral identity in semiotic field, which Derrida understands as *différance*, while Judith Butler sees it as a complex mechanism of iterative, compulsory and unfulfilled identification-subjection-abjection, is in Ducrot's terms contained precisely in the scalarity – which denies the possibility of expressing a logical operation of identity ($A=A$) from within the very structure of language. Therefore, provided that we accept all the analogies which I have previously postulated, the route from Austin's performative to Judith Butler's performativity, which leads to cancellation of the traditional category of subject, can be traced through certain semiotic positions concerning interpretation of performative that demark the phases in reformulation of traditional epistemology.

¹⁹ For an introduction to Foucaultian influences in Butler's work, see Salih 2004.

Social and Individual in the Concept of Performative

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While establishing grammatical criteria for performative, Émile Benveniste²⁰ penetrates into other, contextual and non-linguistic, conditions and unexpectedly equates these areas of operating, setting the first condition for performative – its *authoritativeness*. The authority of speaking authorities in performative and the authority of speaking individual who obliges his or herself by performative are here equated. Doing so, Benveniste rejects the possibility that an individual subject, while not speaking from the position of authority, might perform a performative that obliges anyone but him or herself. A performative which is not in accordance with norms, consequently not drawing the authority from its own citationality, thus descends to the level of an imperative mode. Can this descent then be equal to performative understood in subversive aspect of Butler's theory, which – to paraphrase in narratological terms – diegetically gives up on authority but retains its citationality – which opens its potential for a relative exposure of citational constitution of any identity? And isn't Benveniste's two-way operation and equation of collective and individual rights figuratively represented in the concept of interpellation, which Judith Butler inherits from Althusser and uses for explaining the simultaneousness of the "subject" and its social context within the operation of performative? By equating of the mechanism of operation of power and the performative actions of individuals in their contexts, as well as with reversing the way we understand how power is originated, in accordance to Foucault's logic, Judith Butler locates this power within the intercepting axes of juridical and generic, which are temporally entwined between speaking individual and the collective by the operation of the language itself.

In the same way, Benveniste's other two conditions for performative, uniqueness and autoreferentiality, make room for the concept of iterativity which Derrida will later define in his theories on performative. These conditions are interesting if examined from the standpoint of citationality – an element defined by Derrida and shared by Judith Butler's concept of performative. This indicates that the authority is in fact an element of Derrida's *différance*.

In his essay *Signature, Event, Context*, Derrida first postulates the impossibility of total control over intended meaning, thus completely negating Austin's demand for total context, and this manoeuvre actually

20 Benveniste 1971.

results in discarding the concept of voluntarist subject who willingly establishes an act by using language. Radical absence of both sender and receiver necessary for any code, the code's potential for citation in new contexts, and the general impossibility of control – are all constitutive for the concept of meaning. Postulating iterativity/otherness, Derrida observes the fact that this type of negative identity, which constitutes the sign whose essence is in its iterativity of the same within the otherness in context that is uncontrollable and impossible to fully grasp, is actually a characteristic of every notion of experience itself that governs forming or conscious extraction of event as event.

If we now apply this concept to the circumstances Austin operates with as external to performative, we may conclude that the very extrapolation of these circumstances as circumstances performs a certain forming of reality. This reality refers to itself as “being real” while it is in fact just an integral part of the sign's structure whose semiosis is established by performative. Such extrapolation of “real” conditions from performative finds its further critique in Butler's detection that the reality of such precursory, objective and natural conditions of identity actually constitutes a part of the performative structure of gender. Continuing in this deconstructionist direction, Butler postulates that the performative part, i.e. utterance, is in fact an element of the preordained objectivity which is altogether performative²¹.

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Hence the goal – the final meaning – which, as I have already argued, Austin himself has completely isolated in the concept of perlocution (thus completely eliminating any possibility of causality, or even connection between cause and effect), always eludes performative or illocutionary performance. This is the reason why performative must always

21 Derrida's critique of Austin's definition of «parasites» (denoted as cited performatives in a poem, monologue or in a stage performance) is grounded in a similar approach. Austin's exclusion of cited performatives and his definition of their «abnormality» are especially relevant for Derrida's thesis on logocentrism which rejects and disregards anything that might threaten with inability to control the context. However, this rejection of citationality within another diegetic universe – which is by definition a comprehensively-semipermeable system of meaning accepted as unreal and simultaneously posited as-real by the recipient, might explicitly attest another of Derrida's positions as I read them: that such definition by Austin in fact constitutes a rejection of uncontrollable conditions concerning the cognition of the very eventfulness, since it has the power to transform the nature of the concept of event and becomes narrative and/or performative. It is my opinion that the famous polemics between Derrida and J. R. Searle would bring interesting implications if one used Genette's model of diegetic universe, thus placing the issue of «parasitism» into much clearer relations. For a comprehensive overview and critical insight on the Searle – Derrida debate, see Halion 1989.

be repeated in the compulsory sense, since compulsion is integral element of semiosis. Derrida sees such repetition (which conceals itself) as a condition for reality's *eventfulness* in contemporary narratological sense²². The eventfulness of performative, which we understand as factual, is an effect of its repetitiveness. So just like Butler postulates that objectivity is an effect of performative, for Derrida, reality is always determined by semiotic nature of performative.

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In citationality or encodedness of iterative utterance (formula), in addition to subjection of participants to iterative model, Derrida also identifies the authoritative force of performative. Hence the authority (authorization), which occurs in Benveniste's essay, again proves its citational character. There are, therefore, two types of authorization that Benveniste operates with, since because of semiotic disruption, referential authorization of linguistic subject over empirical subject contains both individual (autoreferential) and general (institutional) obligatory power.

This is the point in which the version of Butler's generative and juridical performativity coincides with Derrida's. But I would also like to emphasize the subversive aspect of Butler's concept of performativity, in addition to this *versive* concept that here plays part in analogies with Benveniste and Derrida. Precisely in repetitiveness and citationality within a new, diegetic context explicitly defined as parodic, which directly follows Derrida's critique of Austin's exclusion of language "used not seriously"²³ (to which Derrida refers as symptomatic), Judith Butler outlines a possible direction of liberation from the normative forms of symbolic structure, contained in citations of seemingly natural forms of behaviour, thus underscoring a chasm in their structure, and their own citationality; in Judith Butler's terms – their being copies without an original.

In Judith Butler's theory, participation in semiotic structure of reality in the sense of interpellative marking for the right of assuming a position of subject is simply a necessary condition for an intelligible existence of a human being. It is also a necessary condition of its bodily morphology, as well as of its fluid self-awareness through various identities. The nature of this necessity is the same as that of the necessity of connection between signifier and signified as defined by Benveniste²⁴. The absence

22 Demonstrating this assertion would inevitably lead this paper beyond its boundaries; for a starting point to this approach, see Schmidt 2003.

23 Austin 1962: 22.

24 Benveniste's equation of signifier and signified (in terms of his insistence on the necessity of this link for linguistic functionality) results in shifting of focus of

that constitutes any sign is not just a present absence of abjected within the performative acting. It is also the case of absence of the final unambiguity and completion of identity. In this sense, Butler's conception of the compulsory repetition is in fact the only possible form of necessary desire for existence, while that very desire is also produced by Derridean nature of sign whose semiosis operates within performative.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this paper, I have raised the preliminary question which problematizes the character of the necessity postulated by Butler, concerning the existence of certain categories conditioning a thinkable and intelligible life. The hypothesis was that this necessity exists due to the fundamentally semiotic nature of key epistemological categories.

Austin's initial definition of performative not only marks the point of departure from the notion of truth-evaluability, it also results in a heterogeneous character of normativity concerning objectivity. The requirements related to external circumstances turn out to be elusive, since their character, just as the character of their elusiveness, is a priori linguistic, and in addition to that, the normativity defined by rules Austin listed in Greek alphabet dictates a specifically organized subjectivity which conditions the objectivity of performative act.

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Operating with his own linguistic definition of subjectivity, Benveniste implicitly provides a notion of simultaneously individual and collective character of the constitutive force in performative. This introduces the issue of bidirectionality and duality of power that circulates within the language-system, indicating its simultaneously subjective and subjectivating character. In the same way, Benveniste's conditions regarding uniqueness and autoreferentiality of performative open the way for the concept of iteration which is to be defined by Derrida in his analysis of Austin's concept of performative.

Derrida proclaims impossibility of controlling total context and intended meaning, while radical absence of sender and receiver are constitutive

arbitrariness: it is now located between signified in the sign and the reality itself, thus taking a form of a necessary representation. The very notion of reality is determined by language of both arbitrary and necessary character. Within these key post-structuralist tropes circulates the large majority of Derrida's terms, which leads us back to deconstructionist elements in Butler's concept of performative. For the purposes of comparison see Benveniste (1975), especially the chapter: *The nature of linguistic sign*, 55-62.

for code and its necessary potential to be cited in new contexts that reformulate its meaning, but in an independent manner and always related to the sameness of meaning that is prescribed and implied by the very existence of code. The final intended meaning is actually separated as an independent category by Austin himself in the concept of perlocution that implicitly indicates inexistence of causal relation between illocution (performative) and perlocution. So, like in Derrida's conception, final meaning always escapes initial intention, and this fact constitutes the systemic cause of iteration, or – in Butler's terms – compulsion and repetition. Namely, repetition becomes necessary for perceiving a performative act as real, and the form of its realness, i.e. objectivity, has perlocutionary nature of accumulated repetition.

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Here lies the first argument for the answer from the beginning – the necessity of initial sex/gender difference and of other binarisms produced by said difference arises in the form of the fact that reality and objectivity can be defined as effects of performative semiosis.

Besides Ducrot's valuable argumentation in favour of inseparability of the descriptive theories of meaning and Western epistemology of subject and object, along with his definition of argumentative character of language-system whose nature essentially differs from logic, which is especially notable in terms of identity, this paper's derivation of the concept of performative from within Ducrot's concept of argumentative theory of meaning has resulted in several implications. First, that language has a primarily argumentative nature which requires a Derridean character of absent/present enunciatory participation that produces the effects of subjectivity and implies subjection; second, it systematically inaugurates the constitutive role of *topos* as regulatory ideal, and third, it implies a pre-given semiotic nature of epistemic justification. This third implication can be drawn from the concept of language-system whose nature of meaning implies the drama of performing "truthiness", thus providing a notion of the theory of knowledge substantially different from the traditional tripartite theory of knowledge, since now truth, when defined in Butler's terms, arises as iterative sediment of "as-truth" performances which constitute justification that cannot ever accomplish its totality and finishedness as it has the essentially semiotic Derridean nature pre-given by the very possibility of language.

This provides the second argument concerning the initial question: the very semiotic nature of truth includes performance of argument as the

basis of justification. Once again, the necessity which Butler problematizes emerges as an epistemological problem of semiotic nature.

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Performatizujući saznavaoica: O semiotičkoj analizi subjekta i znanja

Sažetak

Rad se bavi epistemološkim implikacijama koncepta performativa počevši od njegove detaljne razrade u filozofiji Džudit Butler. Osnovna teza jeste da, semiološki utemeljenim odmicanjima od pojmova istinosne vrednosti i deskriptivne prirode značenja, različita razumevanja kategorije performativa predstavljaju liniju napuštanja tradicije epistemološkog razlikovanja subjekta i objekta. Kroz ostale koncepcije koje su ovde predstavljene i analizirane, ova linija otkriva osnovne epistemološke probleme u semiološkom svetlu, pri čemu je koncept performativa kod Džudit Butler shvaćen kao jedan mogući zaključni ishod takvog smera semiologije znanja koji rezultira konačnim nadilaženjem kategorije subjekta.

Ključne reči: performativ, epistemologija, semiotika, subjekt, identitet, diskurs, značenje