

BETWEEN BUTLER AND BOURDIEU

An examination into how language affects gender

MELLOM BUTLER OG BOURDIEU

En undersøkelse av hvordan språk påvirker kjønn



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ABSTRACT

In this thesis I argue that a co-reading of Judith Butler and Pierre Bourdieu is fruitful in order to understand how language affects gender. I argue for this by focusing specifically on how Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* can bring nuance and flesh out Butler's concept of performativity. The reason for this is that a common reading of Butler's account of gender performativity is that it is simply linguistic and voluntaristic. The concept of *habitus*, on the other hand, grounds it in materiality and underscores the body at the centre of linguistics. I argue this through co-reading Butler and Bourdieu, pointing out their differences and affinities, before going over critique posited towards them, both by their interpreters as well as themselves, before concluding that, despite the slight resistance in bringing them together, their combined accounts better explain how language affects gender. This thesis fits into the context of a feminist reading of Bourdieu, an effort that takes place in both sociology and philosophy alike.

SAMMENDRAG

Jeg hevder at det er nyttig å lese Judith Butler og Pierre Bourdieu sammen for å forstå hvordan språk påvirker kjønn. Jeg argumenterer for dette ved å fokusere spesifikt på hvordan Bourdieu sitt konsept av *habitus* kan nyansere og klargjøre Butler sitt konsept av performativitet. Grunnen til dette er at det er en vanlig feiltolkning av Butler sin teori om kjønnsperformativitet at den kun er lingvistisk og voluntaristisk. *Habitus*, derimot, jorder den i det materielle og understreker kroppen i sentrum av lingvisitikken. Jeg argumenterer for dette gjennom en samlesning av Butler og Bourdieu der jeg poengterer deres motsetninger og tilknytningspunkter. Jeg går deretter over kritikken mot dem, både fra deres lesere og mellom hverandre. Jeg konkluderer med at deres teorier i kombinasjon forklarer best hvordan språk påvirker kjønn, til tross for vanskeligheten ved å føre dem sammen. Denne oppgaven sin kontekst er en feministisk lesning av Bourdieu; en innsats som blir gjort i både sosiologien og filosofien.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I am going to co-read Judith Butler and Pierre Bourdieu, and use their combined theories to understand how language affects gender and gender relations. My argument is that this provides a more complete picture than reading them apart, as they focus on slightly different aspects of the problem. Butler focuses on gender and gender identity, whereas Bourdieu focuses on sex and the relationship between the sexes. Their respective theories also has some holes that the other's theory can cover and improve. For example, Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* can nuance and flesh out Butler's concept of performativity; a concept that many have misread. Butler, in return, provide an anti-essentialist notion of gender that help nuance Bourdieu's claims regarding gender relations.

How to understand the ways in which language affects gender? The question of gender has become a more and more central one in academia, media and popular culture alike in recent years, and this thesis is part of the same phenomenon. It is therefore necessary that we look at the question through a theoretical lense and analyze it accordingly. Philosophy of language is also an ever evolving field, just like language itself. Although Butler and Bourdieu are not philosophers of language per se, they draw heavily on J. L. Austin and his *How To Do Things With Words*. This work forms the basis of the theory of the performative. One can therefore argue that especially Butler's philosophy of gender grows out of a linguistic perspective. Bourdieu's work in the Kabyle must be said to be the start of his research into the relationship between the sexes, and this work is heavily focused on language coded in gendered ways. In other words, both Butler and Bourdieu's projects grows out of gender and language simultaneously, and it is impossible to look at the one without looking at the other.

I stand in connection with the feminist reading of Bourdieu, but from a philosophical perspective rather than a sociological one. This is also the point of view of Butler. I will use Bourdieu's account of *habitus* to understand and flesh out Butler's account of performativity. I argue that Butler's concept of performativity can be seen in connection to Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, and that our interpretation of it can improve this way. This is because *habitus* grounds performativity in materiality through the body, instead of purely in linguistics. It also links it to bodily knowingness, or *schema corporel*, as Merleau-Ponty calls it.

Butler and Bourdieu also draw on each other and use each other to further develop their own theories. Meaning that not only are they able to be brought into dialogue, but that they in fact were in dialogue. Butler and Bourdieu come from different traditions, he from a more structuralist approach, and she from a more poststructuralist approach. This necessitates that they have different interpretations of especially the objectivity of language. Bourdieu is more focused on objectivity and clear conclusions whereas Butler is more focused on the room for movement within norms and language taking on non-ordinary meanings. This shows in the words that she uses in her theory as well, where she brings in terms from different disciplines and fills them with slightly new meanings. This is true of terms such as iterability as well as performativity. This, then, leaves room for interpretation in the reading of her.

My project started with Butler and her book *Gender Trouble*. It was an effort to understand what exactly she was arguing, and Bourdieu therefore came into play as a way of interpreting her. However, I soon found that Butler was helpful in trying to understand what exactly Bourdieu was arguing as well. The project therefore became an effort at bringing them together, grounding Butler's claims of pure theory in Bourdieu's sociological study of gender, while also grounding Bourdieu's class analysis in a feminist theory.

THE THEORETICAL FIELD

The field I am delving into here is interdisciplinary. Butler herself works in philosophy, comparative literature and critical theory, and Bourdieu worked in philosophy and sociology. He also wrote about comparative literature, although this was not his main field of work. This entails that their interpreters come from different fields. Most of the interpreters I am referencing here come from either a philosophical or sociological background, and try to provide a feminist reading of Bourdieu, often through the lense of Butler. There is therefore already an effort at bringing Butler and Bourdieu into dialogue.

While there are several attempts at reading Bourdieu in a feminist way, this does not come without some problems. He concerns himself with the relationships between the sexes, but can be prone to write about women as objects instead of subjects, write about objectivity, make comments about womens 'docile' nature, as well as what can be read as other essentialist

claims. Bourdieu, however, argues himself that these claims are directed at the historical and social conditions that have put women in a certain position that can be called, for instance, more 'docile'. So when Bourdieu calls women 'docile' or 'vulnerable' what he actually says is that women through the historical and social conditions have been categorized as docile or vulnerable, and subsequently have been placed in that position, although they are not essentially so. While this is Bourdieu's aim, it is easy to misread and misinterpret him. So, when reading Bourdieu in a feminist way, one can choose to read him as he intended, or as he comes across. Neither is wrong. However, I think the best reading of him is one that can account for both these aspects. Trying to understand both what his actual claims are, while also keeping in mind the effects his writing could have or has had.

Also, while I posit critique of both Butler and Bourdieu, this is not an effort at 'debunking' either of them, or claiming that one got it more right than the other. What I am doing is bringing them together, while noting the friction in doing so. While I note towards the end of the thesis that Bourdieu has a good point in his critique of Butler, when he claims that the type of symbolic subversion that she argues in favor of actually is not available to all, this does not mean that the rest of her theory is to be discarded. The core of my project is rather to highlight the need for cooperation between theorists, as a remedy for polarization in the field. I therefore call my process a co-reading; a combined reading effort, always looking back and forth between the two of them, in order to understand them both better. Co-reading can also refer to the act of reading alongside someone else, as a way tying closer bonds. I would say that this holds true of my project as well; it is a way of tying closer bonds between Butler and Bourdieu.

LITERATURE AND COMMENTATORS

The literature I am going to use is mainly by Butler and Bourdieu themselves, although I will also use some sections from their commentators. The works by Butler I am going to use is *Gender Trouble – Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, *Bodies That Matter – On the discursive limits of «sex»*, *Excitable Speech – A Politics of the Performative*, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, as well as her article «Performativity's Social Magic». The works by Bourdieu I am going to use is *Symbolsk makt*, *Den maskuline dominans*,

Distinksjonen, Den kritiske ettertanke, Pascalian Meditations, as well as Language & Symbolic Power.

All but one of the works by Butler I am using is from the 1990's. The exception, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, is from 2015. I found it useful to use a later publication to compare and contrast with her earlier writing, as a way to see what ideas have endured and which have been developed. The greatest change, I would argue, is the style of writing. It is less opaque, and more accessible, without being overly simplified. Her focus has also shifted notably, from individuality to community. Or so it would appear.

The works I use by Bourdieu range from being published in the 1970's until the 2000's. The reason I have chosen these specific books is that they give an oversight into Bourdieu's account of both language and gender relations, as well as fully explain his most central concepts. Interestingly, I would argue that there is less of a change in his later work than there is in Butler's. The greatest change would be a shift from a practice that is more purely sociological, to a more philosophical approach. This means that he changes from a style of writing using charts and polls and numbers, to a style of writing focused more on argumentation. This development firmly positions him at a cross point between philosophy and sociology.

This means also that his commentators come from different traditions. The commentators of Butler and Bourdieu's I will be referencing are Lovell, McCall, McNay, Nussbaum, Kraus, and Hollywood. Some of them come from a sociological perspective, and some of them from a philosophical perspective. Some of them have a scolding critique that places them in opposition to either Butler or Bourdieu, such as Nussbaum, while others use their theories to develop their own, such as McNay. Some focus on the gender aspect, such as and some focus on the language aspect. What they all have in common, though, is that they have some useful criticism towards Butler or Bourdieu. This is why I have chosen the commentators I have, as they show the width of the field in which Butler and Bourdieu is relevant, and their interdisciplinary nature.

The dialogue between Butler and Bourdieu was from around the millennium change. Most of the secondary literature I use is also from around that time. This means that I am delving into an over 20 year old debate. However, since some time has passed since the latest development means that we have the possibility to see whose approach has aged well, and whose has not. While Butler's perspective has grown in popularity, almost becoming mainstream, Bourdieu is

still maybe the one most often referenced by name. His understanding of class dynamics is still often referenced by authors and political commentators. His understanding of sex and gender relations on the other hand is not referenced as much it seems. This does not mean that is not valid anymore, but may be because that it is more conventional than Butler's account, which was rather revolutionary at the time.

THE CHAPTERS

Chapter 2 is an overview of Butler's philosophy, where I define and highlight the parts of her theory I will utilize. I go through such concepts as performativity, iterability, and gender, amongst others. I will also present her books and how they stand in connection to one another. Chapter 3 is an overview of Bourdieu's philosophy, where I will also bring some of Butler's commentary of Bourdieu into the forefront. I will go through concepts such as habitus, hexis and doxa, amongst others. Chapter 4 is where I will argue for why Butler and Bourdieu should be co-read, and the benefits this provides. I will be pointing at reasons such as commonalities between *habitus* and performativity, as well as differences in their understanding of gender and gender relations. I argue that their shared understanding paired with their slightly different focus creates an account that covers more ground and paints a more complete picture than reading them separately. Chapter 5 is where I will relay the criticism against their theories, both from their interpreters as well as from each other. Here I will be using sections from Hollywood, Nussbaum, Kraus, Lovell, McCall, and McNay. I will be pointing at issues they highlight, such as Butler's account may be based on an outdated notion of ritual, as well as her account of agency being etiolated. The issues with Bourdieu I will be pointing out is that he can be read as making essentialistic claims regarding gender, as well as him keeping concepts that could support each other separate. Chapter 6 is where I make my conclusion, and relay my findings.

CHAPTER 2

BUTLER BACKGROUND

BUTLER ON LANGUAGE, GENDER & POWER

This chapter will provide an introduction to Judith Butler's philosophy regarding gender and language based on *Gender Trouble*, *Bodies That Matter*, *Excitable Speech*, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, as well as her article «Performativity's Social Magic».

BACKGROUND

Butler is most well known for her book *Gender Trouble* from 1990. In it she proposes her theory of gender, which has been misunderstood by many. The definition of gender, as used by Butler, can be difficult to narrow down. Butler notes that her claim that gender is performative has been misunderstood in several ways. One way of misunderstanding her claim has been to understand it as the statement that we radically choose our own gender. This misunderstanding can be seen in Nussbaum and Bourdieu. Another misunderstanding has been to understand it as the statement that we are completely defined by gender norms. The truth lies somewhere in the middle. These misunderstandings pick up on two aspects of Butler's understanding; namely that there is some personal agency in gender and gender expression, but that gender and gender expression is highly influenced by gender norms. These gender norms comes to us through language, and it can therefore be said that language has a performative effect on the body. The words used to describe us by others influence our understanding of ourselves. Memory is bodily and the body functions as a memory pad, as Bourdieu would say.¹

This bodily memory is part of the formation of gender. Butler questions whether or not being a gender is a 'natural fact' or in fact a cultural performance. She even questions what 'naturalness' is; is it not itself performance?² Butler understands performance as a ritual practice that subjects are formed and reformulated through.³ In this context, Butler uses ritual

¹ Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*. 141

² Butler, *Gender Trouble*. XXXI

³ Butler, «Performativity's Social Magic». 125

in the sense of «the ritual of social inauguration and maintenance», which is a ritual through which subjects are called into being by being called a name and taking on an identity. This is a practice, and not a singular event, and, as such, performance is therefore not a singular act, but instead a citational practice that produces the effects that it names.⁴ Citationality is a term Butler brings into philosophy from her background in comparative literature. In that context it means to cite the work of other authors. In a philosophical sense it takes on the meaning of citing, not literary work, but different contexts.

Butler uses both the terms performance and performativity. There is, however, a slight difference between performance and performativity. Butler claims that performativity cannot be reduced to performance.⁵ This is so because performativity consists of reiterated norms which exceed the one performing and the performance is therefore constituted by the norms that limit and lay the groundwork for the actor.⁶ Meaning that there is more to a performance than just the voluntaristic choice of the one performing. This means that performativity does not necessarily reflect the choice of the performer. Butler notes that the meaning of the performance is not established by the intention of the actor. Instead it is established by the onlookers.

Performance is therefore a citational practice, as one cites norms through one's performance. When Butler says that gender is performative, what she means is that it is a kind of enactment. On her account, gender is a doing, not a being. This means that gender does not come 'before' the enactment; one is not first one's gender before one starts enacting it. This again entails that enactment is part of what gender is, and therefore that the way in which one enacts gender can change what it «is».⁷ This does not mean that one can change one's gender every time one enacts, but rather that one can slowly erode the notion of what gender «is» and how it is perceived. Gender is something more than just performance, or else it would not make sense that one can change what gender «is» through performance. At the same time, Butler's use of the quotation marks around the word «is» suggests that she questions whether one can even claim that gender «is» anything, or that this can be put into words.

⁴ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*. XII

⁵ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*. 178

⁶ Olson, «Changing the Subject». 752

⁷ Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. 61

What does this mean? Butler argues that it is through this enactment, this practice, one reitantes norms in a way that can dissimilate the conventions it repetes.⁸ So performativity is not an event, but a ritualized production.⁹ Performativity to Butler is also a way of acting from and against precarity.¹⁰ One has no power, but by acting and performing one is laying claim to power. This is a central part of the concept of performativity as Butler understands it, and is inspired by J. L. Austin. On his account, one needs a certain amount of power to be able to successfully make a performative speech act. So when one does so, regardless of whether one already is in possession of this power, one lays claim to it. So the link between power and subversion is that by subverting the norms in one's performance, one is laying claims to power. Subversion is claims to power. One can also hold power by conforming to the norms, of course, but this power is not one's own. It is the power of the norms, which still influence one even when conforming to them.

This means that the performance of gender can be subversive, and not only change, but even undo gender norms. Since performance is citational, citing the norms through performance, this means that performance has within it the potential for being subversive, as one can break with these norms and expectations. One such instance of performance that destabilizes gender as a category of analysis is non-normative sexual practices. Butler uses the term normative to mean norms that govern gender.¹¹ In Butler's view, these non-normative sexual practices can potentially blur the question of gender, since gender has historically been partially defined by normative sexuality.¹² Similar claims has been made by Bourdieu. This question shakes the normative understanding of gender.

Butler takes on the distinction between sex and gender. Sex being the physical body and gender being the social identity. She finds the concept of «sex» to be questionable. She claims that sex is not «a simple fact or static condition of a body», but, instead, «a process whereby regulatory norms materialize 'sex' and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms.»¹³ Butler claims that there is no reference to a pure body which is not at the same time a further formation of that body.¹⁴ To Butler, sex is therefore not something that comes before

⁸ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*. XXI

⁹ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*. 60

¹⁰ Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. 58

¹¹ Butler, *Gender Trouble*. XXI

¹² Butler, *Gender Trouble*. XI

¹³ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*. XII

¹⁴ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*. XIX

interpretation, it is not something objective. This means that, on her account, there is no true sex that one later ties a gender to; rather, sex is no different than gender, and assigning a sex is an act of gendering. Butler even uses quotation marks when using the word «sex», implying a distance to the concept, and questioning its legitimacy. She argues that the very concept of «sex» is normative, and a regulatory ideal, a term she lends from Foucault.¹⁵ By creating a category to describe a phenomenon, one is making a choice as to what is included and what is left out of the term. This is enforcing, regulating and normative. This is a linguistic move, something that is central to Butler's account.

BUTLER AND LANGUAGE

While Butler is most well known for her theory of gender, language is an area she dedicates a lot of attention. This link between gender and language in Butler's philosophy is influenced by her not only being a professor in philosophy, but also in comparative literature and critical theory. Butler always uses other books, both in fiction and theory, as a starting point for her critique. She places focus on the text, and the language of the text as a place of discourse. Butler is criticized by Martha Nussbaum in an article published in *The New Republic* for this reason. In the article, Nussbaum charges Butler with removing herself from the real life struggles of women, and instead focusing on the subversive effect of language in an unchangeable world. Part of this critique is rather spot on, while other parts of it are not. This highlights a potential problem with Butler. Her writing does not necessarily tackle the real life every day problems that affect oppressed people partly because she sees the possibility of change and subversion everywhere. Let's see how this comes to be.

To Butler, materiality and language are not in opposition, but instead in a conditional relationship. Butler asks whether language can refer to materiality, or whether language is the condition for materiality to be said to appear.¹⁶ She claims that language in itself is material and that it refers to the material. Butler again questions the meaning of a term by referring to it in quotation marks, this time questioning «materiality».¹⁷ Although she works towards deconstructing materiality in the sense of sex and gender, she still sees the usefulness of the

¹⁵ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*. XI

¹⁶ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*. 7

¹⁷ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*. 4

term. While she is reluctant to accept that something can exist before interpretation, and quotes Derrida claiming that there may not be a ‘concept’ of an absolute exterior¹⁸, she uses the concept of materiality in her theory. This is because language, and the speech acts within it, are physical acts, bodily acts – performatives. They perform certain events, and as such are material. Just Butler using terms from speech act theory in her theory of gender underscores the link between language and materiality, and the space within these where gender resides. Materiality is also, in turn, related to language, since materiality signifies, Butler claims. This claim has been criticized by others, such as Hollywood. This impact that language has on the material is subject for discussion by Butler.

One of Butler’s central concepts, that of the performative, is something Butler takes from J. L. Austin’s *How to do Things with Words*. He uses the term performative to mean utterances that brings something about. That means that they are distinct from statements that are either true or false. To state a performative is to do something; it highlights the act in the speech act. In his book, Austin distinguishes between locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary speech acts. According to Austin, a locutionary act is to say something.¹⁹ An illocutionary act is a performance of an act in saying something.²⁰ And a perlocutionary act functions in the way that by saying something one is doing something.²¹ A perlocutionary act is an act that the speaker has performed in the potential nomenclature to the performance of an locutionary or illocutionary act.²² This entails that there are always some consequences from the perlocutionary act, unintentional or not. Butler references Austin and his understanding of how a performative works. This is related to but different to the way in which Butler uses the term. As we have seen, a performative is for Butler a social ritual and a practice; a ritual through which subjects are formed and reformulated.²³ This forming and reformulation is, in a way, an enacting and production of that which is named by the performance. She uses this in the context of gender. Butler therefore uses Austin’s terms, but reformulates them.

In the Austian sense, then, performativity characterizes mainly linguistic utterances that makes something happen or brings some phenomenon into being. Butler reformulates the concept.

¹⁸ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*. 6

¹⁹ Austin, *How to do Things with Words*. 94

²⁰ Austin. 99

²¹ Austin. 109

²² Austin. 101

²³ Butler, *Excitable Speech*. 160

One such instance of revision of the concept is that Butler's performative theory of speech acts is also a performative theory of gender. She uses the concept of a performative to claim that not only speech acts, but also bodily acts can be performative. She argues for this in her often used example of the naming of the sex of a baby. In it, she claims that it is this act, this naming, which first qualifies us as human beings in the eyes of society. The act of being gendered as a newborn baby, when the doctor pronounces 'it's a girl', is the first situation in which gender is ritualistically repeated.²⁴ By saying which gender someone is, they become that gender. Where does the power of the speaking subject, the doctor in this context, come from?

When speaking about a performative in the Austinian sense, as an utterance that does something, it is necessary to look for where the power that brings this about comes from. Austin explains the force of language as coming from these speech acts. To him, the power of language mostly lies within language itself. He does mention that it also comes from established convention. Butler claims, however, that Austin fails at communicating just how much the force of language originates outside of language. Instead, Butler argues, the power of language is found in materiality. Butler maintains that the power of the subject speaking does not originate within the subject itself, as it draws its power from elsewhere.²⁵ Hate speech illustrates this point. Butler argues that when a speaker injures someone based on systemic injustice it is because the speaker cites the slur and its accumulation of force, and is therefore making linguistic community with a history of speakers, that all have injured systemically.²⁶ The slur is always cited, and it is always from somewhere else. Hate speech therefore does not originate with the subject, even though the subject is needed in order to utter it. Butler holds that the power of the speaking subject exceeds the subject itself, and it is implicated in a language that both precedes and exceeds it.²⁷ She questions whether one can distinguish between the agency of the language and the agency of the subject. She goes on to say that the content of some types of speech must be understood by the action that the speech performs, and that some speech such as hate speech both communicates and enacts the message it communicates. In other words, speech is both communication and conduct. Speaking is therefore a bodily act.

²⁴ Butler, *Excitable Speech*. 49

²⁵ Butler, *Excitable Speech*. 33

²⁶ Butler, *Excitable Speech*. 52

²⁷ Butler, *Excitable Speech*. 29

This focus on the body at the centre of linguistics, and speech as bodily is often an undercommunicated part of Butler's philosophy. The simple interpretation of her is that she only concerns herself with linguistics. The more complex one is that the body is central as well. Or rather, that bodies in the plural sense are. Butler writes in the foreword to *Bodies That Matter* that «Not only did bodies tend to indicate a world beyond themselves, but this movement beyond their own boundaries, a movement of boundary itself, appeared to be quite central to what bodies 'are'.»²⁸ The concept of a body implies other bodies. This is inherent in what a body is. In other words, a body refers to a separate object, which in turn indicates that there is something it is separate from. These bodies, these people, are then influenced by performativity. Bodies in the face of language is the focus for Butler.

POWER AND PERFORMATIVITY

Butler thus claims that speaking is a bodily act and that bodily force is part of the force of the performative. This bodily force of the performative, both in its origin and in its result, can act as a form of social domination. Those in positions of power have the power to resubordinate those which are not in positions of power through the act of speaking. Speech not only reflects a relation of social domination, but actually enacts domination, and in that way reinstates the social structure over and over again. Butler reminds us that this reinstating of the structure is the only way in which it is perpetuated. This mirrors Bourdieu's claims, as we will see later. Language is one way in which this perpetuation of structures happens. In a way, one is created through language, as one is given existence through it; language has a performative effect on the body.

Butler's account of how this takes place is that our own realities are in part structured by others as they project their expectations and fantasies onto us through language. This causes us to adapt to the given norms. These norms both marks us and produces us, by informing our embodiment. Butler writes that in the instance of gender, it starts off as someone else's norm, but that it stays with us as a fantasy that becomes part of our formation as it is formed by others.²⁹ All the same, gender is not simply inscribed on our passive bodies. Instead, we enact

²⁸ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*. VIII

²⁹ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*. 30

gender out of obligation. We are enacting a fantasy that is both our own as well as someone else's. This fantasy is enacted again and again. This enacting, however, can sometimes conflict with the norms, as the norms hold within them the possibility of non-compliance. Our modes of embodiment can, then, also contest and break with these norms.³⁰ As we reproduce the norms, they change slightly in our interpretation of them, as the norms can be opaque and confusing. The compliance with norms then ultimately leads to non-compliance and subversion, as lived reality can never live up to the fantasy of gender.

The reproduction of norms must necessarily involve the material and bodily enactment of norms. Since the material and lived reality can never truly live up to the fantasy of norms, there is room for living gender differently than intended. Butler finds, in other words, inadvertent agency within gender performativity.³¹ This agency arises from within the powerful norms of culture. This is so because, as Butler claims, the acquisition of a norm is also the condition of which a resistance to the norm is produced.³² This relates to her claim that the same room for agency within language that make hate speech possible, are the same ones that make possible a subversive talking back.

Saying that gender is performative means that it is an enactment. This enactment of norms concerning gender will never live up to the standard of the norms, and, therefore, even within the enactment of norms, there is room for alternative ways of performing gender. As we have seen, Butler claims that there is no reproduction of gender that does not risk undoing the norms and remaking the gendered reality.³³ Although one can read Butler here as claiming that we should reject the concept of gender altogether, what she actually means by undoing the norms and remaking the gendered reality is that we should lessen the hold that norms have on gender today. She puts it this way: «The point was precisely to relax the coercive hold of norms on gendered life — which is not the same as transcending or abolishing all norms — for the purposes of living a more livable life.»³⁴ Her point of view is, in other words, that by moving away from the strict gender norms we have today this will then subsequently make the lives of the non-conforming more livable. This focus on the movement within a system is inspired by

³⁰ Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. 29

³¹ Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. 32

³² Butler, «Performativity's Social Magic». 118

³³ Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. 32

³⁴ Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. 33

Foucault.³⁵ It means that there is no oppression without resistance. No compliance without subversion.

When Butler focuses on the ability to move within a system, this begs the question; whose movement? The answer is those that are disenfranchised and subjected, and Butler's focus on their ability to move is an effort to give them agency. Even though they are subjected to the structures that hold them down, they are not entirely powerless. They can, and do, subvert the system, and Butler's project is, in part, involved with highlighting this subversion and assigning them with inadvertent agency. This is a different approach than Bourdieu has, as we will see later, which focuses on highlighting the powerlessness of the very same group. His take is that by focusing on the power and agency within this group, as well as any progress made by it, it can potentially make it more difficult to see just how oppressing the structures at play actually are.

Butler does also focus on the oppressiveness of the norms, and not only the potential for subverting them. While she claims that there is no reproduction of gender without the risk of undoing the norms and remaking the gendered reality of society, that does not mean that gender norms are not in themselves problematic to her. Gender norms are oppressive and strict and not adhering to them can potentially mean that one is put in a precarious position, something that Butler does make clear. She removes herself from the American context and looks to the international stage, and argues that gender norms have everything to do with our appearance in public spaces, as well as how the public and private are distinguished.³⁶ She asks, who will be criminalized by the law because of their appearance or because of the type of kinship relations they have? The answer is, of course, those that are outside of the norm. Those that are outside of the norm struggle to be recognized. Butler highlights that only the recognized is recognizable³⁷; meaning that for something to be recognized there needs to be a mode of representation for it. If something is outside of our vocabulary, then it is not eligible for recognition. While all of this is true, it is also true that norms do not control the sphere of appearance, as Butler puts it. The norms may be strict, but they are not totalitarian. There is some room for movement beyond the scope of the norms and their contents.

³⁵ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*. 93

³⁶ Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. 34

³⁷ Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. 35

So we can move beyond the scope of the norms to some extent in our performativity. But gender performativity is not just something that we do. It is also how institutional power affects us. The effect institutional power has on us influences our own actions, and, therefore, performativity is not only of our own making. Butler illustrates this by claiming that the names we are called are just as important as the names we call ourselves.³⁸ She claims that by being called a name one is given social existence, despite whatever the purpose of the name calling was.³⁹ We are named by others as a particular gender or race, which then in turn affects our understanding of ourselves. In a way, one is created through language, as one is given existence through it; language has a performative effect on the body. Thus speech acts affects us in an embodied way, as they inform our identities and actions. Gender, according to Butler, is an exercise of freedom, but not everything concerning gender is freely chosen.

We do not exist in a vacuum, and we are affected by those around us. Butler calls the body a living set of relations, as it is dependent on others. Butler uses the term interdependency in this context, meaning some sort of co-existence across social lines. All are dependent on each other, despite being part of opposing groups. Even though one may not have the best intentions towards each other, we are all dependent on one another. This is what interdependency is to Butler. Butler further argues that the struggle against gender norms must ally itself with the struggles against other forms of oppression. Butler writes that the body is at the heart of politics.⁴⁰ Our lives and our bodies are central in history and language, and does not exist in a vacuum. Even though we are constituted as thinking beings, Butler claims, that does not get us far if the conditions of life are not sustained.⁴¹ In fact, the body cannot be understood without its dependency on other bodies.

She reflects on this in her book *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. This book stands apart from her other books by being focused on the lived reality and embodied conditions of life in a greater extent than before. It is also written in a different and more accessible way than her other works. This creates a book that is much more focused on political protest and system change. In it, Butler explicitly states that she endorses radical democratic change. This all shows in what she claims is the thesis of her book: «Acting in concert can be

³⁸ Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. 64

³⁹ Butler, *Excitable Speech*. 2

⁴⁰ Butler, *Excitable Speech*. 96

⁴¹ Butler, *Excitable Speech*. 119

an embodied form of calling into question the inchoate and powerful dimensions of reigning notions of the political.»⁴²

So acting in concert can call into question dimensions of notions of the political. Butler writes that while performativity often is associated with individual performance, performativity also can operate through coordinated action between multiple subjects. This form of performativity's aim and condition is the reconstruction of plural forms of agency and social practices of resistance. Butler claims that sudden assembly, without moving or speaking, is «an unforeseen form of political performativity that puts livable life at the forefront of politics.»⁴³ To her, verbalization need not remain the norm for thinking about political action, as a silent gathering of people still manage to 'say' quite a lot. It expresses something without uttering anything.⁴⁴ Is performative assembly, not, indeed, an embodied speech act?

Butler can be, and has been, read as a voluntarist that does not take account of the way in which sex works as a socially determining factor. She does not accept that women necessarily are in a more precarious position than other groups, and writes from an American standpoint which is far from the reality of most people in the world. However, it seems unfair to hold a theory to the standard that if it cannot account for all phenomena and all situations then it must not be valid. In fact, this is a reason that it is beneficial to read similar theories alongside each other, as one theory may complement the other where one is found lacking. This goes for Butler and Bourdieu's theories as well. If read alone, one can interpret Butler in this voluntaristic and linguistic manner. However, if read alongside Bourdieu, the account of performativity and *habitus* complement each other. *Habitus* shows how performativity can be understood as something more than the simplified version that many readers of Butler take it to be, and instead show the nuanced and embodied potential within performativity.

⁴² Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. 9

⁴³ Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. 18

⁴⁴ Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. 161

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The core of what Butler is arguing is that gender is a doing, and this doing is informed by language through the iteration of norms. Butler draws on Foucault to understand power, and on Austin to understand language. This is an example of materiality in Butler, as the speech acts of language create and impact physical results. To Butler, materiality and language have a conditional relation. This means that gender on the material plane is conditioned by language. The names we are called inform our identities, and influence our choices. Performativity is both bodily and linguistic. In the next chapter I will look to Bourdieu, and work out what he has to say about language, sex and power.

CHAPTER 3

BOURDIEU BACKGROUND

BOURDIEU ON LANGUAGE, SEX & POWER

In this chapter I will present an introduction to Bourdieu, and dive into his claims regarding language, sex and power. I will define the many terms he uses and relate these to Butler. The books I will use to do this with is mainly *Distinksjonen*, *Symbolisk Makt*, *Den maskuline dominans*, *Den kritiske ettertanke*, as well as *Language & Symbolic Power*.

BACKGROUND

Pierre Bourdieu is maybe most well-known for his concept of *cultural capital*, meaning those cultural assets one has at one's disposal that can be used to leverage one's position. His philosophical project was focused on describing people's lived realities, with the goal of system change. A main theme in his work was how oppressed people take part in their own oppression. He focused, amongst other things, on the position of women in society, also in a class perspective. A central concept associated with Bourdieu is *habitus* and he describes how people's *habitus* cause them to remain in their social positions and behave accordingly.

Habitus is word that comes from Latin, and means habit, as well as to have or maintain. It has the same etymology as *habitude* and *habit*, and therefore refers to both appearance and mode of life. For Bourdieu, *habitus* is a socialized subjectivity that is the ways in which people behave and subconsciously understands themselves in different parts of society. He plays with its etymology when he writes that «(..) he inhabits it like a garment (*un habit*) or a familiar habitat. He feels at home in the world because the world is also in him, in the form of *habitus* (..)»⁴⁵ To speak of the *habitus* is to say that the individual, the personal and the subjective is, in fact, social and collective.⁴⁶ *Habitus* is therefore socially embodied. It is a product of history, and is an open system of dispositions. It is constantly exposed to new experiences, and therefore is

⁴⁵ Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*. 143

⁴⁶ Bourdieu, *Den kritiske ettertanke*. 111

constantly influenced by these. Habitus is therefore something generative, a creative ability inscribed in a system.⁴⁷ Habitus is lasting, but not unchangeable. In fact, Bourdieu claims, habitus is constantly changing in response to new experiences.⁴⁸ Habitus is not destiny.⁴⁹ While habitus bears within it the possibility of change, Bourdieu claims at the same time that people are most likely to meet the same circumstances that originally formed one's habitus in the first place, and in that way their dispositions are constantly reinforced. The defining trait of the habitus is in other words its lasting potential. This means that there is no personal choice involved in the habitus.

So how does habitus impacts one's actions? Bourdieu argues that having an easy and 'light' life creates a 'light' habitus, meaning that one bears one's body in a light manner, prefers to eat light food, decorates one's apartment in a light style, and a light outlook on life. This is because life seems light to the person with the light habitus.⁵⁰ For a person with a 'heavy' habitus on the other hand, a person who leads a difficult and heavy life, this is not so. The person with the heavy habitus prefers heavy dishes, decorates their apartment in a heavy style, bears their body in a heavy manner, and has a heavy outlook on life.⁵¹ The habitus and its style and taste is created by the social contingencies.⁵² One of the functions of habitus is to explain what binds subjects together. Habitus works subconsciously and cannot be changed by one's will. It impacts the way we walk and talk, use our hands and sneezes. The different habituses can be distinguished from each other in a moral sense, where one is considered 'good' and the other is considered 'bad'.

By having a 'bad' habitus one has a greater risk of being the victim of *symbolic violence*. Bourdieu defines symbolic violence as that violence which is inflicted upon a social agent which is itself a part of that violence.⁵³ This means that the oppressed are themselves partaking in their own oppression. The social agents are conscious agents that, even though they are subject to exterior powers, contributes to producing the effects of the powers controlling them. Bourdieu describes symbolic violence as mild form of violence, in the way that it is invisible

⁴⁷ Bourdieu, *Den kritiske ettertanke*. 107

⁴⁸ Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*. 161

⁴⁹ Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*. 180

⁵⁰ Bourdieu, *Distinksjonen*. 26

⁵¹ Bourdieu, *Distinksjonen*. 26

⁵² Bourdieu, *Distinksjonen*. 36

⁵³ Bourdieu, *Den kritiske ettertanke*. 153

and unnoticeable, and that it is performed through the channels of communication and recognition.⁵⁴ Language, in other words.

Bourdieu argues that symbolic violence is most evident in what he calls the *masculine dominance*. This is his term for describing sexism faced by women. To understand this form of oppression, one cannot put the oppressor on one side, and the oppressed on the other; both are active in perpetuating the relations of power and violence, on his account.⁵⁵ Since the relations of power and violence are one and the same, Bourdieu also uses the term *symbolic power* to describe symbolic violence. This makes it clear that while the objects of it are also part of its (re)construction, this is because they are in a powerless situation, where, without noticing it, they take on this role. Still, the only reason they do so is because the power structures are so engrained in the bodies of the victims that they are particularly sensitive for these manifestations of power. Bourdieu claims that symbolic power is invisible and can only be exercised with the unknowing complicity of those that are subjected to it.⁵⁶ In this way, by being subjected to symbolic power, one is also by definition exercising symbolic power unto oneself. There is no subjection without participation and perpetuation on this account. Symbolic power is therefore a power of constructing reality.⁵⁷

For Bourdieu, social agents are neither matter which is controlled by exterior circumstances, or monads which are only controlled by interior reason. Instead, social agents are a product of history and the experience gathered throughout a lifetime.⁵⁸ The concepts of habitus and symbolic violence/power embodies this. These concepts are intended to describe how social conventions affect bodies, which then, in turn, reproduce and ritualize these social conventions as practices.⁵⁹ This means that habitus is both formed and formative. It goes both ways; the body is influenced and shaped by the social conventions, which then feeds back into the social conventions and strengthens them. Structure creates habitus, which in return perpetuates structure. In this way the social order is reproduced. Bourdieu therefore understands the body as an engagement with the world.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Bourdieu, *Den maskuline dominans*. 10

⁵⁵ Bourdieu, *Den kritiske ettertanke*. 157

⁵⁶ Bourdieu, *Language & Symbolic Power*. 164

⁵⁷ Bourdieu, *Language & Symbolic Power*. 166

⁵⁸ Bourdieu, *Den kritiske ettertanke*. 121

⁵⁹ Butler, «Performativity's Social Magic». 116

⁶⁰ Butler, «Performativity's Social Magic». 115

Bourdieu, therefore, assumes that the subject is in a rather fixed position on the social map and that social conventions make their mark on the body. This comes to expression in his concept of *doxa*, amongst other things. *Doxa* comes from Greek, meaning belief or opinion.⁶¹ Bourdieu uses it in the sense of our belief and opinion, the very understanding of us and the things outside of us. *Doxa* is an subcategory of *habitus*, and represents the conscious understanding of ourselves, while *habitus* is generally subconscious. Bourdieu claims that the social order writes itself into our brains through the conditions of life. Through being treated differently, inclusions and exclusions, hierarchies, and language. Through all this, one gets a ‘sense of one’s place’, as Bourdieu calls it, where one senses the limits of one’s place, and in turn starts to exclude oneself from certain places one feels one will be excluded from.⁶² The way in which Bourdieu describes this and similar phenomena can give the impression that it is more or less impossible to escape from one’s place in society. It is ingrained in one’s body, one’s language, as well as one’s aesthetic taste as he (in)famously describes it in his book *The Distinction*.

In this book, Bourdieu argues that the consumption of art has as a function the legitimization of social difference, because it is only available to those who are distinguished and sublime.⁶³ Those who are coarse and simple, as he puts it, cannot access it. Those who are coarse and simple are of course the working class. Bourdieu therefore claims that the working class is oppressed by the norms of culture and language.⁶⁴ This makes them sensitive to cultural authority. This is connected to the school system, where the working class is taught to revere distinguished culture, but not taught to understand it. Since they revere it, but cannot understand it, it is not available to them. This perpetuates this relation of inequality, one that keeps the oppressed in their oppressed position.

Doxa comes into being through being treated differently in a hierarchy. A place where this happens is the school. To Bourdieu, the school is a central actor and institution that influences society. It even influences our language in the way that through the school, children are taught an official language, which is legitimized and imposed on them.⁶⁵ And by teaching children the same official language, one teaches them the vocabulary for their understanding of the world; these are the words that they will think. They will think and feel in the same way. On

⁶¹ Blackburn, *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*. 140

⁶² Bourdieu, *Distinksjonen*. 225

⁶³ Bourdieu, *Distinksjonen*. 53-54

⁶⁴ Bourdieu, *Distinksjonen*. 214

⁶⁵ Bourdieu, *Language & Symbolic Power*. 48

this topic Bourdieu also claims that women are more inclined to accept an official language, as they are more ‘docile’ and more «predisposed to accept, from school onwards, the new demands of the market in symbolic goods.»⁶⁶ How should we read this? When Bourdieu calls women ‘docile’ and more inclined to acceptance, does he mean that they are essentially so?

Here it is relevant to bring in Butler. She notes that a sociological claim can easily turn into a normative claim.⁶⁷ She uses the example of describing women as vulnerable. While the statement is meant to express that some groups, in this case women, are more vulnerable under certain regimes of power, it can turn into a defining feature of that group. The problem is reproduced and ratified, according to Butler.⁶⁸ So when Bourdieu describes women as docile, no matter if it is meant as a neutral statistical observation, it can turn into a claim that women *should* be docile. This is a reason why it is useful to get Butler’s perspective alongside Bourdieu’s, to bring nuance to statements like these.

One charge against Bourdieu is that his description of the systems of power takes on a element of seeming inescapable through his insistence in the sedimented quality of its structures. Butler’s critique is part of this charge. Bourdieu addresses this charge against him. He claims that his critics, without mentioning names, argues that he should acknowledge in a greater extent the actual developments in women’s situation today, in order to counterbalance the normative element in his descriptions.⁶⁹ This critique misses the point, according to Bourdieu, by focusing on the movement within a system, instead of system change. Bourdieu claims that it is crucial to place this institutional power imbalance in a historic setting, in order to emphasize that it is not unchangeable, and that historic action against it is possible. This means that while he can be read as positing essentialist claims, that is not his intention.

One such instance of Bourdieu placing institutional power imbalance in a historic setting, is through describing the different markets of social power. The *market* is a subset of *social fields* and is defined by Bourdieu as «a multi-dimensional space of positions such that each actual position can be defined in terms of a multi-dimensional system of co-ordinates whose values correspond to the value of the different pertinent variables.»⁷⁰ In other words, the social field

⁶⁶ Bourdieu, *Language & Symbolic Power*. 50

⁶⁷ Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. 139

⁶⁸ Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. 139

⁶⁹ Bourdieu, *Den maskuline dominans*. 7

⁷⁰ Bourdieu, *Language & Symbolic Power*. 230-231

holds different and homologous positions. The ultimate social field is the market. It is an autonomous universe; an arena for a game, which is different from the one being played on a different arena. The difference between these are the rules by which they play. These fields, markets, arenas, can correspond to each other. Bourdieu uses examples such as the political right and left, as well as the rich and the poor. These groups all play by games with different rules. Butler claims that Bourdieu's philosophy reads the market as the context of social power, as well as that this social power cannot be reduced to the social practices they inform.⁷¹ What Butler means by this is that Bourdieu is informed by the Marxist conception of class, although he reformulates it in less substantializing terms.

This relates to another central term for Bourdieu, namely *hexis*. It is another subcategory of habitus. Bourdieu takes the concept of the hexis from Aristotle. The hexis is the bearing of the body. Bourdieu writes that hexis is an expression of one's social value. What relation one has to the social world, and the place one allows oneself within it comes to be expressed in the hexis.⁷² It is maybe in the hexis that Bourdieu's inspiration from Merleau-Ponty comes most clearly to the forefront. Merleau-Ponty wrote about the *schema corporel*, or body schema. Shaun Gallagher writes in «Body Image and Body Schema» that body schema is «a performance that is not an intentional object present to my consciousness.»⁷³ The schema is present in a marginal consciousness, and is the way in which the body experiences its environment. The body schema influences what one sees as possible for oneself, and both opens and closes the field of possibilities. It is a sort of bodily knowingness, that is not fully conscious. This knowingness of the body, the *schema corporel*, inform our actions and movements, and is as such motoric. Merleau-Ponty's *schema corporel* is «an experiential and dynamic functioning of the living body in its environment», as Gallagher puts it.⁷⁴ Iris Marion Young puts it like this: «the possibilities which are opened up in the world depend on the mode and limits of the bodily 'I can'.»⁷⁵ If one does not think oneself capable of a task, one will not fully commit to it. This is true for hexis. Bourdieu calls it motoric schema and bodily reflex, and thus connects himself to Merleau-Ponty.

⁷¹ Butler, «Performativity's Social Magic». 113

⁷² Bourdieu, *Distinksjonen*. 229

⁷³ Gallagher, «Body Image and Body Schema». 548

⁷⁴ Gallagher. 542

⁷⁵ Young, «Throwing like a Girl». 146

This again informs one's language. If one believes oneself to play an important role in the social world and have much social value, one speaks loudly and for a long time. If one on the other hand believes that one has little social value and does not play an important role in the social world, then one will speak softly, and only for a short while. This shows that language is material, and that it is a body technique, as Bourdieu call is.⁷⁶ Through one's language, one's body technique, one's relation to the social world is expressed. This mirrors Butler's claim that language and materiality condition each other, and that one implies the other. Language is a body technique, and the body signifies. Since the body signifies, and one's relation to the social world is expressed, language can work as part of the social practices of distinction.⁷⁷

LANGUAGE IN BOURDIEU

Language to Bourdieu is therefore much more than just the words uttered. Bourdieu claims that the illusion of a 'pure' linguistic hides how language is affected by history as well as social and economic circumstances.⁷⁸ Bourdieu looks to Austin, and criticises him for being victim of this illusion. One expression of this is that Austin uses a special type of plain English, that is as simple as childrens language, as Bourdieu calls it.⁷⁹ Another expression of this is that Austin looks within words in search of the illocutionary force of speech acts. Rather, Bourdieu claims, the illocutionary force of words is the delegated power of the spokesperson talking.⁸⁰ In other words, the power always comes from the outside of language. There is nothing magical about language, and the power of language and the effects it produces comes not from the illocutionary speech acts that Austin proposes, as this effect is only power being delegated to the institution. He argues that the power of language comes from the relation the speaker has to the listeners, and only works if those listening actively submits to the power of the speaker. This account highlights the participation of the oppressed in their own oppression, which is a core argument from Bourdieu, as his concept of symbolic violence shows.

⁷⁶ Bourdieu, *Language & Symbolic Power*. 86

⁷⁷ Myles, «From habitus to mouth». 884

⁷⁸ Bourdieu, *Den kritiske ettertanke*. 126

⁷⁹ Bourdieu, *Den kritiske ettertanke*. 155

⁸⁰ Bourdieu, *Langugage & Symbolic Power*. 107

Bourdieu charges Austin with placing too much power in the words themselves instead of in the driving forces and dispositions of society.⁸¹ In other words, it is not the ritual in which the words are uttered in that is meaningful, but instead the context in which the ritual takes place in which is meaningful. On Bourdieu's account, the symbolic power is not located in the symbolic systems in the form of an illocutionary force, but instead in the relationship between those that act on power, and those that have power enacted upon them.⁸² This relationship of power is characterized by the belief in the power, both by the powerful and particularly the powerless. According to Bourdieu, the systems of symbolism have a structuring effect because they themselves are structured. This structure is therefore reproduced by the communication of the systems of symbolism. Language is therefore constructed, as well as something that constructs.⁸³ This mirrors Butler's claim that the only way a structure is perpetuated is through the structure being reiterated again and again.

As language is constructed, as well as something that constructs, habitus is both formed and formative. Within language there already exists binaries and constructs that affect the way it is possible to speak about and understand the world. So by naming something, one brings it into a new existence. It changes from simply existing into a state of elevatedness and starts to fill a function. Its social existence has been recognized.⁸⁴ Bourdieu writes that linguistic exchanges, speech acts, is an economic exchange. This exchange is between a producer and a consumer, and is a sign of wealth and authority. It has an intention of being evaluated and obeyed. It is rare, in everyday life that is, for language to act as pure communication, and not take on a social value and be filled with the charged intent of power. How does this relate to gender?

SEX AND RELATIONS OF POWER

So this is how Bourdieu understands how language acts. This relates to gender. Where Butler focuses on the fluid nature of gender, and explores what gender *is*, Bourdieu focuses on the relationship between the genders/sexes. It is not always clear whether Bourdieu refers to gender or to sex when he writes. Ultimately it seems like he takes sex and gender to be the same things,

⁸¹ Bourdieu, *Symbolisk makt*. 36

⁸² Bourdieu, *Symbolisk makt*. 45

⁸³ Bourdieu, *Den kritiske ettertanke*. 223

⁸⁴ Bourdieu, *Distinksjonen*. 239

since gender/sex to him is objective, pre-given and precedes interpretation. When he describes the relationship between the genders, it is also the relationship between the sexes he writes of.

In his book *La domination masculine*, Bourdieu delves into this institutional power of masculine dominance and attempts to describe the power structures between the sexes, and the symbolic violence that occurs because of this very power structure. At the very start of the book, he critiques Butler for writing about the importance of *periodic performances*.⁸⁵ According to Bourdieu, these periodic performances are too demanding with a too small payoff to be fruitful. He calls them periodic, as he understands performance to be single events, actions one does sometimes, to subvert the norms. Bourdieu claims that one must instead mobilize in order to move history onwards through neutralizing the mechanisms that neutralize history. I believe that what he means by this is that one must mobilize and act against the institutions that structure society. So instead of doing small subversive performances in one's everyday life, one must instead organize and act against the source of the oppressive regimes.

This is an interesting point, as Butler, in most of her most well known works at least, has a greater focus on the room for movement within systems of power, instead of focusing on 'neutralizing the mechanisms that neutralize history'. To Bourdieu, identity and social status is largely fixed, whereas for Butler, identity is largely in perpetual flux, always shifting and changing. To Butler, one mobilizes against the 'mechanisms that neutralize history' through performativity. Butler defines the performative as a social ritual and practice; a ritual through which subjects are formed and reformulated.⁸⁶ This reformulation is central to the difference between Butler's and Bourdieu's understanding of how language acts. To Butler, the performative has the political promise of speech acts taking on new meanings and in that way being reformulated. To Bourdieu on the other hand, the speech act is an expression of institutional power over the subjects, and the force behind it is not their own.

Butler claims that performativity is informed by social norms, and that performance can be then subversive if one appears in non-ordinary modes of appearance. This is part of how Butler understands relations of power; the channels through which oppression is enacted are the very same that make subversive action possible. This separates Butler and Bourdieu, as Bourdieu

⁸⁵ Bourdieu, *Den maskuline dominans*. 8

⁸⁶ Butler, *Excitable Speech*. 160

does not see the habitus as a subversive tool. It can change, yes, and become influenced by the different experiences of the subject, but it can never be used to subvert these same experiences and norms. It is informed by institutional power.

Institutional power is at the core of Bourdieu's project. He describes power as being constituted by several independent institutions of power, such as the Family, the School, the State, and the Church. The way these institutions of power uses their power creates power structures in a non-coordinated way. Power structures between the genders is the product of a never-ending reproduction of themselves done by both individuals and institutions like the Family, the Church, the School and the State. This is Bourdieu's echo throughout his works; the Family, the Church, the School and the State. These are the independent institutions of power that creates the society we live in. Bourdieu understands institutions as that which is already instituted. He does still argue in favor of system change though, even though he does not have faith in Butler's account of performativity as a form of subversion. Instead, he claims that it is the social agents who are the most visible who are best placed to change the categories of perception. At the same time, these are the very agents who are least inclined to change them.⁸⁷ These, as well as all other agents, are making the social world at every moment. On the other hand, they are not able to unmake and remake it, as they do not possess the relevant knowledge of it. This is precisely because of the position they occupy in the social world.

Bourdieu notes that the established order provides some advantages that is difficult to do without, even if the established order is particularly harsh.⁸⁸ He draws lines from this to the act of striking, a form of subversion. Even though one strikes to improve one's, as well as other's, situation, this comes at a large cost. This cost is both material and psychological, Bourdieu remarks. All the same, Bourdieu does allow for some subversive action despite of this. He describes what he calls one of the rare principles of effective resistance against the dominant manners of speech and action.⁸⁹ This is 'the slang of the underworld'. This slang of the underworld, as he calls it, is a real transgression of the fundamental principles of cultural legitimacy. This makes it a subversive performance according to Butler. So even though Bourdieu can be accused of being too rigid in his understanding of institutions and the room for subversive action within them, he does explicitly allow and endorse it. If we are to use

⁸⁷ Bourdieu, *Language & Symbolic Power*. 239

⁸⁸ Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*. 231-232

⁸⁹ Bourdieu, *Language & Symbolic Power*. 98

Bourdieu's example of slang, we may say that the 'people of the underworld' can reform and reformulate themselves. They shift their roles through the slang. They are no longer people who do not master the official language, with all its intonations and demands of dialect. They create their own language, one in which they are the ones who fully master it.

But then again, Bourdieu highlights how this slang, this cafe banter, often is derogatory to women. Their power comes from kicking downwards, not only upwards. The dimension of gender therefore comes in here also. This slang of the underworld, becomes another form of symbolic violence. It is invisible and is performed through the channels of communication and recognition. By reminding themselves that they are above someone else, they feel empowered. Their standing does not actually change, they are still subjected to the oppression and lack of power as they have been all along. In fact, they are actually worsening the standing of those among them who do not master this slang and banter. Bourdieu notes that this form of subversion, through slang, often does not target the institutions, but rather targets persons.⁹⁰ This culture is also often hypermasculine, and, therefore, is an affirmation of the stability of the world. It is aggressive towards all forms of difference. As Bourdieu puts it: «(T)his world-view is profoundly conformist(..)»⁹¹

Bourdieu claims that for subversion to be effective and actually contribute to change, the structures that are contested must be in a state of crisis that leads their arbitrariness to becoming obvious. By subverting these structures, one opens up the possibility that others can subvert it in their minds, which is generally the hardest limits to transgress, Bourdieu claims. As he puts it: «The symbolic transgression of a social frontier has a liberatory effect in its own right because it enacts the unthinkable.»⁹² By showing the fragility of the structure, the subversive action becomes legitimate and reasonable. At the same time, Bourdieu notes that it is not sufficient to change language in order to change reality.⁹³ This means that one cannot only do textual critique in order to subvert the structures. In fact, Bourdieu claims that it is down right dangerous to claim that one can deconstruct social constructions such as gender or race. He acknowledges that these are, in fact, social constructions, but that does not mean that they can be destroyed simply by deconstructing them. As he puts it, these things are inscribed in the

⁹⁰ Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*. 232

⁹¹ Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*. 232

⁹² Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*. 236

⁹³ Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*. 108

objectivity of institutions, meaning things and bodies.⁹⁴ So subversion is possible but works best when the structures at play already are destabilized, and cannot only deconstruct social constructions.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

How to interpret Bourdieu? He describes how systems of power makes their mark on their subjects. Through concepts such as habitus, doxa and hexis, he shows how institutional power impacts one's belief systems, language and even the way one bears one's body. This description both shows the oppression as ingrained in our system of power as well as highlight the need for system change. This is partly how consistency presupposes change. This is different from Butler's account. In the next chapter we will see how their different accounts work together to form a common account of language and gender.

⁹⁴ Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*. 108

CHAPTER 4

A CO-READING OF BUTLER & BOURDIEU

In this chapter I will present my main argument which is that a co-reading of Butler and Bourdieu better explains the ways in which language affects gender than reading them apart does. Butler's focus on the fluid nature of both gender and positions of power combined with Bourdieu's insistence on a class perspective and the criticism of the established institutions substantiate each other. Bourdieu's account of habitus contributes to bringing nuance to Butler's account of performativity.

AFFINITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Butler writes about how gender comes to be expressed. Bourdieu, on the other hand, writes about the relations between men and women. Their different angles of looking at gender and sex come together to show what gender it is on a theoretical level, as well as what the actual lived reality of gender relations is today. Butler argues for the plasticity of institutions, while Bourdieu holds that they are difficult to change. Butler writes pure theory, while Bourdieu bases his theory on empirical research. Despite of these differences, Butler and Bourdieu are connected through their shared focus on the effects of language on gender. Their different focus actually completes each other's analysis. Butler has the philosophical analysis, and Bourdieu has the data and the focus on the lived reality. Bringing Butler and Bourdieu into dialogue therefore expands their philosophies and political projects.

So what do we get when co-reading Butler and Bourdieu? We get an account of gender, both understood as identity and as relations. As well as an account of language, understood as signification, capable at once of resubordination and subversion. This paints a diverse picture composed of various aspects, that I would argue completes the whole instead of negating each other. So Butler and Bourdieu's accounts of gender fit together in a way that makes sense. They both acknowledge that the borders between the genders are placed in an arbitrary manner, as well as that heterosexuality is constructed to some degree. Bourdieu insists that sex is objective, while Butler insists that it is up to interpretation. It is useful to get both these different accounts

regarding sex side by side. What they agree on, is that gender norms influence us through language, and partly is what informs gender itself.

But what about their accounts of language? They understand the potential for subversion through language differently. For Bourdieu, language is a tool through which systems of power re subordinate its subjects. Although some subversion is possible through instances such as slang, he understands the actual political effect of it to be minimal. Striking, on the other hand, is an effective subversive tool, although it has its costs. For Butler on the other hand, subversion through language is almost inevitable. She claims that the same room for agency in language that makes oppression possible, for example through hate speech, is the same one that makes possible a subversive talking back.⁹⁵ To her, resignifying speech is a way in which one can change the order of things, and this done done through «the opening up of the foreclosed and the saying of the unspeakable.»⁹⁶ This means that Butler understands the way in which power works through language as a two-way street, as opposed to Bourdieu's understanding which is that language is more of one-sided relation.

There are already several scholars reading Butler and Bourdieu together and bringing them into dialogue today. Scholars such as Lovell and McNay, amongst others, creates fruitful discourse by drawing on both Butler and Bourdieu. There is also a kind of dialogue between Butler and Bourdieu. Butler and Bourdieu did read each other, as well as criticize each other publicly. They both mention each other several times, using each other as examples to drive their own argumentation forwards. Butler did so in her book *Excitable Speech* as well as in the article «Performativity's Social Magic». She claims that Bourdieu's understanding of the positions on the social map is too rigid and does not allow for enough room for movement by subversive performance. For Butler, this could read as a normative claim regarding the current state of gender relations. She is not the only one presenting this reading of him, with writers such as Terry Lovell doing the same thing.⁹⁷

Bourdieu has acknowledged these claims, without necessarily legitimizing them. Bourdieu himself delves into the problem of being prescriptive and normative when the intentions are to be descriptive. Bourdieu actually charges Marx with doing exactly this in his descriptions of

⁹⁵ Butler, *Excitable Speech*. 26

⁹⁶ Butler, *Excitable Speech*. 42

⁹⁷ Lovell, «Thinking Feminism with and against Bourdieu». 15

class. Bourdieu claims that there is a dimension of 'ought-to-be', as he calls it, present in the Marxist analysis of class.⁹⁸ Bourdieu has an alternative account of class, one that leaves more room for movement within the system. He claims that when one states that there are these social classes, the upper class and the working class, one creates these very classes and brings them into being. Society could have been divided up into other groups just as readily, Bourdieu claims, but since this is not the political consensus, it becomes a truism that there are these social classes. The political consensus dictates that there are these social classes, and so there is. This is very similar to the critique posited by Butler towards normative sociological claims. It seems to fit Bourdieu, although she does not explicitly mention his name in this context. She claims that making a sociological observation can easily turn into a norm of description, at which point a group becomes defined by the trait assigned to them.⁹⁹ She uses the example of describing women as vulnerable. So when one, Bourdieu for instance, states matter of factly that there are objective differences between men and women, these statements have an legitimizing effect. So just as it becomes a truism that there are certain social classes, it becomes a truism that there are certain objective differences between men and women. These traits then define men and women. At the same time, one could argue that it is not problematic in itself to state that there are certain objective differences between men and women, but, rather, the problem is when that statements is based on an essentialistic understanding of gender, with the implication that one is better than the other.

Bourdieu has some criticism of Butler as well. He mentions her a couple of times in *La domination masculine*. In one such instance, he claims that what he calls 'periodic performances' is not a particularly fruitful source of subversive action. Such subversions are examples of a kind of 'heroic' break with the daily routine, but no more than that.¹⁰⁰ In an other instance of Bourdieu mentioning Butler, in a footnote later on in the book, he includes a quote by Butler from *Bodies That Matter*, regarding the misunderstandings of her theory of gender: «The misapprehension about gender performativity is this: that gender is a choice, or that gender is a role, or that gender is a construction that one puts on, as one puts on clothes in the morning.»¹⁰¹ Bourdieu interprets this as an admittance from Butler that she herself got it wrong in *Gender Trouble*. He claims that this quote by Butler shows that she discards her

⁹⁸ Bourdieu, *Language & Symbolic Power*. 243

⁹⁹ Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. 139

¹⁰⁰ Bourdieu, *Den maskuline dominans*. 8

¹⁰¹ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*. 94

‘voluntaristic’ view of gender posited in the book. He mentions this in the context of ‘postmodern’ philosophers (meaning Butler) rejecting dualisms (meaning the man/woman binary) as an act of subversion.

It is interesting to note the nature of their criticisms of each other. Something that immediately stands out is their differing attitudes and differing levels of care taken towards the others work. While Butler criticizes Bourdieu, she reads him with good will and takes care to understand what it is his claims actually imply, and then uses his claims to further her own. Bourdieu’s criticism of Butler, is, however, limited to a foot note and an introduction to a second edition of *La domination masculine*. Here, he mentions her in a few passing sentences, rejecting her understanding of performance as a subversive tool. Where Butler sheds light on Bourdieu’s philosophy and tries to use and reuse the material, Bourdieu mentions what he takes to be Butler’s understanding of the performative in a few sentences, before rejecting it, and moving on to something else. His critique of Butler touches on something interesting, however, although he does not expand on it. Interestingly, it also shows that Bourdieu read both *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter* shortly after they were published. This shows that he followed her writing closely, although he put himself in opposition to it. That leaves the rest of the interpretive work to us. Let us bring Butler and Bourdieu further into dialogue and debate, first by looking at their neighboring concepts of habitus and performativity.

HABITUS AND PERFORMATIVITY

While Bourdieu criticizes Butler for the way she uses the concept of performativity, his concept of habitus is closely related to it in several regards. Habitus is thus a virtue of necessity.¹⁰² In a way, this is a neutral phenomenon; one has a habitus no matter what position in society one has, in other words, one’s habitus is not just an expression of one’s oppression. This holds for performativity as well; one is always performing, as Butler claims that gender is not a being, but a doing. Another affinity between them is that both habitus and performativity is informed by others, and inseparable from the structures that produce them.¹⁰³ Meaning that neither

¹⁰² Bourdieu, *Distinksjonen*. 186

¹⁰³ Bourdieu, *Den maskuline dominans*. 51

habitus nor performativity is fully consciously and freely chosen, but, in fact forced onto one by the prevailing norms as well as one's living conditions and experiences.

Here it is useful to shed light on what Butler actually understands performativity to be. As she puts it: «The reduction of performativity to performance would be a mistake.»¹⁰⁴ Performativity is not just the act of performing, it is also the norms inhabiting the body. Therefore, Butler also claims that the meaning of the performance is not established by the intention of the actor. Instead it is established by the onlookers. The performance is constituted by the norms that limit and lay the groundwork for the actor.¹⁰⁵ This distinction between performance and performativity thus highlights the connection between performativity and habitus. Neither are of our own subjective making, but rather influenced by others through norms and rules. They are both the subconscious result of outside influence from norms and hierarchies.

Yet another affinity between habitus and performativity is that they both involve the linguistic effects on the body. Both performativity and habitus are physical expressions of our own interpretation of our position in society, regarding both gender and class. Bourdieu, for example, writes that women, as a group, more easily absorb norms concerning language. These language norms influence women's habitus and the way they speak. Butler writes that Bourdieu, by focusing on his concept of habitus in relation to language, underscores the place of the body as the site of reconstruction of a practical sense that is essential for the social reality.¹⁰⁶ This is an example of the link, rather than opposition, between language and materiality that Butler puts forward in her book *Excitable Speech*. Meaning, that while Butler criticizes Bourdieu, she still takes inspiration from him.

Butler dedicates substantive space to discussing Bourdieu, especially his understanding of the bodily force of the performative. She calls it a theory of bodily knowingsness.¹⁰⁷ Norms become embodied in the habitus of the body. Butler describes Bourdieu's term of habitus as «those embodied rituals of everydayness by which a given culture produces and sustains belief in its own 'obviousness'.»¹⁰⁸ Non-intentional and non-deliberate incorporation of norms takes

¹⁰⁴ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*. 178

¹⁰⁵ Olson, «Changing the Subject». 752

¹⁰⁶ Butler, «Performativity's Social Magic». 114

¹⁰⁷ Butler, *Excitable Speech*. 153

¹⁰⁸ Butler, *Excitable Speech*. 153

place in the habitus. Still, Butler criticizes him for not taking into account how these same norms can be subverted and resisted as well.

Butler is not in full agreement with Bourdieu on the matter of the performative force of language. Butler criticizes him for having a static view of social institutions, and discounting the possibilities of resignification and revolt. As Butler writes, «Bourdieu fails to take account of the way in which a performative can break with existing context and assume new contexts.»¹⁰⁹ Bourdieu himself would not agree with this critique. Although there is some sort of paradox in the sense that Bourdieu both claims that an inherent part of habitus is its ability to change, as well as that it is self-enhancing and self-reproducing, it is actually central to Bourdieu's thinking that constancy may presuppose change.¹¹⁰ Bourdieu himself makes this claim in the context of changes in language. He argues that when a certain group changes its style of speaking as a way of annulling distinctive deviations, they are actually reproducing them.

While Bourdieu himself claims that constancy may presuppose change, and that an inherent part of the habitus is its ability to change, Butler claims that Bourdieu assumes that the subject uttering the performatives is in a fixed position on the social map.¹¹¹ This, according to Butler, is a mistake, as the subject is, in fact, not in a fixed position, but rather has the potential to move. For Butler, it seems like Bourdieu does not account for the possibility of discursive agency, and the room for movement within the norms. Butler also claims that Bourdieu does not see that the body exceeds the speech act it produces. I would agree with this claim by Butler, as Bourdieu does not mention that the norms change in our interpretation of them, or that the body is more than just the speech acts it is constituted by.

Butler further criticizes Bourdieu for only acknowledging the performative utterances that are spoken by those already in positions of power as effective. To her, this eliminates the possibility of linguistic subversion. This still holds, despite Bourdieu acknowledging the subversive power of «the slang of the underworld». Central to Butler is words being reappropriated and take on meanings that were never intended.¹¹² Butler writes that she does agree with Bourdieu on the

¹⁰⁹ Butler, *Excitable Speech*. 151

¹¹⁰ Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*. 64

¹¹¹ Butler, «Performativity's Social Magic». 122

¹¹² Butler, *Excitable Speech*. 161

charge against deconstructive positions that claim that the speech act can break with all context. All the same, she holds that the speech act's contexts are not determined beforehand, and that this is where the political promise of the performative lies. Butler ends *Excitable Speech* by writing «Insurrectionary speech becomes the necessary response to injurious language, a risk taken in response to being put at risk, a repetition in language that forces change.»¹¹³ This claim, that a repetition in language forces change, mirrors the claim by Bourdieu that constancy, in the context of language, presupposes change.

Butler therefore both borrows as well as departs from Bourdieu. According to Bourdieu, the speech act is a rite of institution, but according to Butler, speech acts can also be insurrectionary acts. Butler recounts Bourdieu's critique of Austin, which is that Austin refers to the force of tradition and the theory of social context, but without explaining how this force of tradition has come to be or what it consists of. This is central to Bourdieu, and represents to him a major flaw in Austin's theory. To Bourdieu, language represents and manifests authority. The authority of the speaker, then, comes not from inside the speaker itself, but instead from the outside.¹¹⁴ Since language both represents and manifests authority, it can be difficult to combine his view with Butler's claims that language can be used in subversive ways and change contexts.

Let us return to the quote by Butler from *Bodies That Matter* mentioned earlier: «The misapprehension about gender performativity is this: that gender is a choice, or that gender is a role, or that gender is a construction that one puts on, as one puts on clothes in the morning.»¹¹⁵ It gives us a good opportunity to see that the concept of habitus gives us another way of understanding performativity. The simplistic understanding of Butler's account of gender performativity is, as she comments on in the quote, that gender is a role one actively chooses to play. If one rather thinks of it in connection to habitus, the complexity of it becomes more apparent. Habitus includes the way the body looks as well as how the body moves.¹¹⁶ It is both appearance and mode of life. It is one's subconscious understanding of oneself and one's place in society. It is therefore not simply something one chooses to put on in the morning, and not something that one can pick and choose which type of habitus one wishes to

¹¹³ Butler, *Excitable Speech*. 164

¹¹⁴ Butler, *Excitable Speech*. 147

¹¹⁵ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*. 94

¹¹⁶ Bourdieu, *Den maskuline dominans*. 73

have. This is also true of gender performativity. While it involves the enactment of gender, it is in an embodied way, and not a voluntaristic manner. Gender performativity involves the linguistic effect on the body, just as habitus does as well. Performativity is part of the formation of the habitus as well as its reproduction. This means that since performativity forms and reproduces the habitus, it cannot be this conscious and voluntaristic concept that some take it to be.

Performativity therefore is a part of both the formation of the habitus as well as its reproduction. Performativity, through the norms society push on its subjects, are what informs the habitus, which becomes the bodily expression of performativity. However, on Butler's account, performativity and norms are not identical, as all performativity deviates slightly. While habitus is expressed in a physical manner through subjects, it is not what we would normally call «a performance». Butler and Bourdieu have slightly varying accounts of how this relates to gender and gender relations.

GENDER VERSUS GENDER RELATIONS

When reading Butler and Bourdieu together, one thing that immediately becomes clear is that while they both write about gender, they focus on very different aspects of gender. Butler writes pure theory about gender performativity, whereas Bourdieu writes theory based on empirical research into gender *relations*. This may seem like an obstacle in bringing them together, but, in fact, it is one of the core reasons for doing so. By shedding light on what gender is and how it comes to be performed, as well as how it affects relations between people, the account of how language affects gender in various ways becomes richer.

Bourdieu describes the process of gendering. Through direct commands and the 'symbolic construction of the biological body', the female and the male habitus are differentiated and differentiating.¹¹⁷ The male body is masculinized and the female body is feminized through a laborious process with many participants. All the same, Bourdieu regards the biological difference between the sexes as a preexisting difference that precedes interpretation.¹¹⁸ This

¹¹⁷ Bourdieu, *Den maskuline dominans*. 64

¹¹⁸ Bourdieu, *Symbolisk makt*. 30

does not mean, however, that it cannot be interpreted or used for strategic purposes. In fact, Bourdieu claims, the most successful social distinctions are those that appear to have objective difference as their base. Meaning that the biological difference between the sexes is objective, but the way one interprets that difference is not given by nature. In other words, the body is neither completely determined nor completely indetermined.¹¹⁹ This seems inspired by Simone de Beauvoir and her claim that one is not born a woman but rather becomes one.¹²⁰

So biological nature is a naturalized social construction, which can be used to legitimize the relations of domination between the sexes, Bourdieu claims.¹²¹ The difference that is already there is reinforced and made part of one's nature in the embodied habitus. Although Bourdieu describes the difference between men and women as natural and objective, he also writes about it in a way that allows for some interpretation. For instance, he describes the physical difference between men and women as objective, but not so in its reinforced and almost parodic state. He points out that men are generally bigger and stronger than most women, but not to the extent that one is given to believe.¹²² He describes how a line is drawn, so that one can separate the two groups. Bourdieu claims that part of how gender relations have come to be is that to create an identity, be it man or woman, rich or poor, one must create borders in order to separate groups from each other. Where the border is set is arbitrary. This border is then legitimized through instances such as marriage and circumcision. These rites of passage then consecrate and institute the differences, whether the differences pre-existed the consecration or not. The individual, or the subjected subject as Bourdieu would say, is then identified by the group they belong to. As Bourdieu notes, the act of identifying someone is an act of communication.¹²³ It tells the individual not only who they are, but who they should be. So the border between man and woman is there to keep the other out, as well as to keep the ones already in from escaping. It is there to keep people from treading wrong. In fact, Bourdieu claims, the more painful the rites of institution is, the less likely one is to leave or criticize the institution.¹²⁴

Butler's account differs from Bourdieu's. As we have seen, she argues that sex is not a simple fact or a static condition of the body. This means that there is room for change inbedded here.

¹¹⁹ Bourdieu, *Den maskuline dominans*. 18

¹²⁰ Beauvoir, *Det annet kjønn*.

¹²¹ Bourdieu, *Den maskuline dominans*. 31

¹²² Bourdieu, *Language & Symbolic Power*. 119

¹²³ Bourdieu, *Symbolisk makt*. 31

¹²⁴ Bourdieu, *Language & Symbolic Power*. 122

This is so because, according to Butler, the concept of sex needs materialization and rematerialization over and over again. Since a reiteration is never an exact copy, change is an undeniable fact. She notes how bodies never seem to comply with the standards imposed on them. This leaves room for subversive change. When it comes to gender, she writes that «Femininity is thus not the product of a choice, but the forcible citation of a norm, one whose complex historicity is indissociable from relations of discipline, regulation and punishment.»¹²⁵ This relation of discipline, regulation and punishment is related to the masculine dominance that Bourdieu writes about. The painful rites of institution one must go through in order to comply with the norms compels one not to break them. Performativity marks up what is acceptable and what is not. Butler writes that «The normative force of performativity – its power to establish what qualifies as ‘being’ – works not only through reiteration, but through exclusion as well.»¹²⁶ In other words, the gender normativity of performativity not only reiterates the acceptable, but excludes the unacceptable. Still, there is some personal agency at play. This personal agency in the face of the relations of dominance, is more of a focus for Butler, than it is for Bourdieu. On his account, individuals appear to have less choice agency when it comes to living up to the norms, because the norms themselves are embodied in habitus.

It is relevant here to refer to Bourdieu’s claim that women are more docile, and more likely to accept the norms regarding language.¹²⁷ This is an example of Butler’s argument that sociological claims can be interpreted as normative claims¹²⁸. While Butler’s argument is not directed at Bourdieu in particular, Terry Lovell makes the same argument directed at him, namely that he is making normative claims in his sociological theory. So there could be a dimension of ‘ought-to-be’ in Bourdieu’s account of gender relations, or at least room for reading him in that manner.

In the same context as her claim that sociological claims can be interpreted as normative claims, Butler notes that the idea of women as especially vulnerable is not entirely helpful. She argues that women should be thought of as capable of resistance as well as vulnerability, and that only focusing of the latter provides a limited language for understanding feminist forms of resistance.¹²⁹ She also writes that «some provisionally bound group called ‘women’ is neither

¹²⁵ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*. 175

¹²⁶ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*. 140

¹²⁷ Bourdieu, *Language & Symbolic Power*. 50

¹²⁸ Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. 139

¹²⁹ Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. 141

more vulnerable than a provisionally bound group called ‘men’ nor is it particularly useful or true to try to demonstrate that women value vulnerability more than men do.»¹³⁰ However, she is not entirely opposed to the term ‘vulnerability’. She argues that when used correctly, the term can claim that the body is vulnerable to economics and history. This is more accurate than claiming that women are inherently vulnerable in themselves, or that they have a greater connection to vulnerability. When saying that the body is vulnerable to economics and history, vulnerability takes an object and is formed in relation to conditions both outside and part of the body, Butler claims.¹³¹

It is interesting to note that this is exactly what Bourdieu himself claims that he does. Bourdieu writes that one can acknowledge the permanent and unchangeable factors which are a part of history and reality, while also avoiding essentialism.¹³² Meaning, describing women as docile or vulnerable does not necessarily mean that they are essentially so, but that in an historic setting, there are certain factors which have put them in that position. To Bourdieu, it is crucial to reconstruct history and figure out how these relations of dominance has come to be. Trying to understand something is not the same as agreeing with it. While Bourdieu’s world view asserts that women are part of their own oppression, it is the Family, the Church and the School which are the historic actors that creates the relations of power and dominance that persist till this day. In fact, it is the Family which is the main instance of (re)creating masculine dominance on his account. He also refers to men as docile at a certain point¹³³, showing that his description of women as docile did not come from an essentialist standpoint.

Bourdieu himself acknowledges that there is a potential for his scientific analysis of masculine dominance to have a legitimizing effect of the concept, and indeed strengthening this relation of dominance. He writes that his analysis can easily be misunderstood and be used for something else than he intended. Still, he stresses the importance of describing the victims participation in their own oppression. According to him, not doing so would paint a faulty picture. Bourdieu defends himself against the charge against him by claiming that the relations of dominance is the product of a historic labor that is reproduced by both subjects as well as institutions: The Family, the Church, The School, the State.

¹³⁰ Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* 142

¹³¹ Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. 148

¹³² Bourdieu, *Den maskuline dominans*. 91

¹³³ Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*. 169

At the same time as Bourdieu writes of the permanent and unchangeable factors in history, he does note that things have changed, and continues to change. In his book *La domination masculine* from 1998, he writes of women's progress. He claims that masculine dominance is no longer self evident or a given in all instances. He credits the women's movement for their hard work and he lists some advances in women's position in society, such as a higher degree of participation in higher education, more women having paid work outside of the home, as well as a broader use of birth control. Women are getting married and starting families later in life, as well as a general incline in marriage and an increase in divorce. These factors are both the result of and the drivers of a change in women's position.

Despite of all these changes, there is some delay in the habitus. These changes in the conditions for women hides lastingness in the relative positions.¹³⁴ For example, Bourdieu writes, women with the same qualifications as men do not get the same jobs, or even equal pay for the same work. Women tend to get lower positions, while men get leading positions. Women are in general in a more precarious position in the job market, as they earn less, work more part time, and have a higher degree of unemployment. At the work place women also often face sexual harassment. The careers that women pursue are different from those that men pursue as well. This is in part the fault of the Family and the School, as they both often urge women to go into certain careers, and men in others. The doxa also comes into play here, as women stop themselves from pursuing certain jobs or career opportunities as they consider themselves underqualified or not right for the job, without even applying. So even though they themselves hinder their own career advancement, this is only so because of the norms they have been subjected to their whole lives. Although they choose to do so themselves, the voice telling them to do it is the voice of the Family, the Church, the School and the State. All of this goes to show that simply measuring the increase of women in paid labor is not enough on its own to show improvement in women's position, or a reduction in masculine dominance.

Another way that the delay in the change of habitus comes to be expressed is not just in the position of women in society, but in their actual physical position. Iris Marion Young provides several examples of this in her article «Throwing like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment Motility and Spatiality». The most obvious example is the one her paper is named after; throwing like a girl. This is not just some insult taken out of thin air, there is

¹³⁴ Bourdieu, *Den maskuline dominans*. 99

actually something to it. Young notes how women tend to make smaller movements than men, involving only one body part at a time. They stop themselves from fully committing to the movement, and do not «make full use of the body's spatial and lateral potentialities.»¹³⁵ This extends to the ways in which one walks, stands and sits. Men usually take longer strides, swinging their arms more: generally moving more in all directions. Women, on the other hand, tend to cross their arms and legs, folding in on themselves. Young points to a need in women to protect themselves from the outside world because of their situation in it. This culminates in them physically holding themselves and thus shielding themselves from the world around them. Women also tend to perceive themselves as not capable of performing tasks that require strength, such as lifting, pulling and shoving. The result is that women tend to not use their full muscular potential, as they stop themselves from committing fully to the task. Young puts it this way: «For many women as they move in sport, a space surrounds them in imagination which we are not free to move beyond; the space available for our movement is a constricted space.»¹³⁶ Young is influenced by Merleau-Ponty and the 'knowingness' of the body. His *schema corporel*, or in Bourdieu's case, the gendered hexis, informs our actions and movements, by restricting what we think ourselves as capable of.

Examples like this are necessary to look to when trying to understand the status of the relation between the genders today. Both of the relative positions of women in society, but also the physical positions that women hold. It is on this basis that Bourdieu criticizes Butler and other 'postmodern' philosophers like her for considering the rejection of dualisms, meaning men and women, as an act of subversion. Bourdieu claims that this view of gender does nothing to change the relation of masculine dominance. In fact, stating that gender does not exist in the traditional sense makes masculine dominance invisible. Bourdieu points out in an obvious reference to Butler, but without mentioning her name, that a certain feminist critique which puts the status of women «a pure product of performative social construction and which, forgetting that it is not sufficient to change language or theory to change reality».¹³⁷ Meaning that reality must first change, and then language.

¹³⁵ Young, «Throwing like a Girl». 142

¹³⁶ Young, «Throwing Like a Girl». 143

¹³⁷ Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*. 108

He further comments that one may doubt the reality of a resistance which ignores the resistance of 'reality'.¹³⁸ He claims that gender is more than just some roles one can play if one feels like it in an voluntaristic manner. It is something other than drag. He claims that what must be done instead is to acknowledge the historic structure and adopt a relational view of the dominance between the genders.¹³⁹ One must look to the different social fields such as the School, the Family and the State for the construction of dominance. By doing this, Bourdieu argues, the traditional normative idea of what a woman is will fall apart. And when it falls apart, one will see that despite advances in womens positions, there is a relation of dominance behind everything. This will then highlight the need to fight against it. To Bourdieu, this is the way forward. Not 'rejecting the dualisms' (meaning rejecting the gender binary) or understanding gender as mere roleplay.

This interpretation of Butler's account of gender, as posed in *Gender Trouble*, is a common misconception. She addresses it herself in *Bodies That Matter*. Butler writes that «Performativity is neither free play nor theatrical self-presentation; nor can it simply be equated with performance.»¹⁴⁰ In relation to this, Butler writes that drag is not necessarily subversive, as has been an interpretation of her claims posed in *Gender Trouble*. Drag may actually be used to idealize heterosexual gender norms, Butler claims.¹⁴¹ However, drag expresses an ambivalence. Butler writes that «identification is always an ambivalent process.»¹⁴² Through drag, one idolizes something which one is not part of but at the same time also cannot escape from. This duality leaves room for subversive action, Butler notes, while at the same time holding that drag is not inherently subversive as parody itself is not inherently subversive.¹⁴³ This does not mean that it can never be, as drag reflects the structure that produces gender as well as questioning heterosexuality's claims on naturalness, as Butler puts it.¹⁴⁴

This structure that produces gender is influenced by language. Bourdieu presents sociological data detailing the effects language have on gender. He refers to studies that show that women have a greater ability to describe people and their surroundings, than men do. Women are also more sensitive to non-verbal language, such as tone of voice, as well as a greater ability to

¹³⁸ Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*. 108

¹³⁹ Bourdieu, *Den maskuline dominans*. 111-112

¹⁴⁰ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*. 59

¹⁴¹ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*. 85

¹⁴² Butler, *Bodies That Matter*. 85

¹⁴³ Butler, *Gender Trouble*. 189

¹⁴⁴ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*. 85

understand implicit meaning. Bourdieu connects this to their oppression, as this is a coping mechanism used to reduce conflict and pay attention to the men in their lives.¹⁴⁵ This form of symbolic violence is not always consciously enacted from the perpetrators side, as well as not consciously experienced by the victim.¹⁴⁶ Symbolic violence often functions through the channels of communication, meaning language. Another way that language affects gender, as described by Bourdieu, is that one speaks differently to the different genders. For instance, it is considered tactful to take account of the senders sex, age and class when speaking.¹⁴⁷ Gender, or sex as Bourdieu writes, informs both what is uttered to one, and, consequently, what one utters oneself. In this way, one can argue that the ways in which language affects gender are connected to the ways in which gender affects language. It is a self enhancing circle. It is the same structures at play in both instances.

So how does language affect gender? If we read Butler and Bourdieu together, we see that it does so by informing the performativity of the habitus. Language affects our understanding of ourselves, as well as a subconscious embodiment of the norms. Habitus is a social category that puts the individual in connection to a collective of others, and is therefore is a socialized subjectivity.¹⁴⁸ Bourdieu writes that «The body is in the social world but the social world is in the body (..)»¹⁴⁹ and that «(..) The social is also instituted in biological individuals, there is, in each biological individual, something of the collective (..)»¹⁵⁰ Habitus is, in other words, socially embodied. Language affects gender by informing what we think of as possible for us. It influences our habitus, our hexis and our doxa. Performativity is at its core. This entails that both sex and gender, no matter what one thinks of the distinction, comes to be expressed in the habitus as the habitus is both gendered and gendering.¹⁵¹

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In conclusion, what we see is that Butler and Bourdieu not only have affinities in common, but that they, in fact, are in dialogue. They read each other, and referenced each other in their

¹⁴⁵ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*. 40

¹⁴⁶ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*. 68

¹⁴⁷ Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*. 80

¹⁴⁸ Bourdieu, *Den kritiske ettertanke*. 111

¹⁴⁹ Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*. 152

¹⁵⁰ Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*. 156

¹⁵¹ Bourdieu, *Den maskuline dominans*. 11

works. Although they critiqued each other, they followed each others writing closely. This opens up for interesting analysis, especially when they differ in opinion. Their understanding of the way in which power works through language is in dialogue. This is so because their understanding is closely related, inspired by the same theories, but differs slightly. They also use each others accounts to further their own. Their motivation for discourse is the same, which is to criticize the establishment and institutions that perpetuate oppression. However, their approaches to it differ. Where Butler highlights the possibility of change, and turning the methods of oppression into methods of subversive action, Bourdieu highlights the difficulty of escaping one's oppression. Interestingly enough though, they both claim that they work against the naturalization of the gender differences by looking to the historic conditions that have put women in the position they have. They also both claim that the other does not do this. In the next chapter, we will look more closely at the criticism against their accounts. Both by their interpreters, but also by themselves.

CHAPTER 5

CRITICISM AGAINST AND BETWEEN BUTLER AND BOURDIEU

In this chapter I will explore what is missing from Butler and Bourdieu's account of how language affects gender. While there are many reasons for co-reading them, there are also some reasons not to. This is the place where I will be tackling these. Most theorists I will be referencing here have a feminist reading of Bourdieu, often with the help of Butler. This means that inevitably there will be some friction, some resistance in that reading of Bourdieu.

CRITICISM FROM CRITICS

So far, we have seen that a co-reading of Butler and Bourdieu enables us to understand the ways in which language affects gender and gender relations in a bigger picture than before. But is there something missing from their theories? Some theorists think so. Amy Hollywood, for instance, critiques Butler in her paper «Performativity, Citationality, Ritualization». In it, she claims that Butler bases her theory on the ritual on a misunderstanding. This misunderstanding is that Butler conflates bodily acts with speech acts.¹⁵² Meaning, while all speech acts are bodily acts in some way, not all bodily acts are speech acts. No matter if they signify. For instance, Butler writes: «It is not simply that the speech act takes place *within* a practice, but that the act is itself ritualized practice.»¹⁵³ So Butler argues that speech acts themselves are ritualized practice. Hollywood remarks on this claim and notes that, in a recent development, rituals are now usually considered speech acts, and not the other way round. In that case, this makes Butler's reasoning circular. If this holds, then that turns Butler's claim into something like this: that speech acts are speech acts in practice.

Hollywood claims further that Butler only concerns herself with linguistic performativity, which results in her not being able to account for how actions as well as language signifies. Signification does not equal language on Hollywood's account. Butler, in other words, conflates signification with language. This can be illustrated by her claim that materiality and language has a contingent relation, as all speech is material, and everything material signifies.

¹⁵² Hollywood, «Performativity, Citationality, Ritualization». 95

¹⁵³ Butler, *Excitable Speech*. 51

I find this criticism by Hollywood to be valid. Especially in the case for her second point, that Butler conflates signification with language. However, I find that it is not necessarily damning of Butler that she uses a different definition of ritual than the newest one within religious studies.

Another critic of Butler, that we have come across earlier, is Martha Nussbaum. She charges Butler with removing herself from the real life struggles of women, and instead focusing on the subversive potential of language. According to Nussbaum, Butler writes in an inaccessible and illogical manner, without explaining her concepts. Because of Butler's background spanning across several fields, she also draws on so many, and so different scholars that the meaning of what she is trying to say is lost. These charges are harsh and not necessarily all valid. Butler actually refers to Nussbaum's criticism of her, and believes it to come from ill will and bad faith.¹⁵⁴ Butler says that she believes Nussbaum's critique has nothing to do with her work. She says that Nussbaum's reading is neither engaged nor careful, and that it must come from a frustration against liberal American politics. To Butler, it is a kind of displaced animosity. I think Butler's take here is rather spot on. Nussbaum charges Butler with ill intentions and the setting back of women's rights by removing herself from real life. These claims cannot come from anything else than a misreading of Butler. Nussbaum's claims, though rooted in frustration and a misreading, does mimic some of Bourdieu's claims against Butler as well. However, even though he also has a somewhat flawed understanding of Butler, his reading of her is not done with the same ill will that Nussbaum appears to have.

Another critic, Beate Kraus, focuses on Bourdieu. Kraus claims in her article «The Gender Relationship in Bourdieu's Sociology» that Bourdieu does not substantiate his claim that gender relations are at heart relations of domination.¹⁵⁵ I would disagree with this claim, as Bourdieu does, in fact, go to to the very origins of masculine dominance in history. Bourdieu actually charges Foucault with a similar critique to that of Kraus against Bourdieu, namely that he does not go to the very origin of masculine power. Bourdieu connects Foucault to Butler, or rather, Butler to Foucault, and describes Foucault's project of placing sexuality in an historic context. He credits Foucault with having seen the relation between sexuality and masculine power from the ancient Greece and onwards. At the same time, Bourdieu criticizes Foucault

¹⁵⁴ Olson, «Changing the Subject». 764

¹⁵⁵ Kraus, «Gender Relationship in Bourdieu's Sociology». 60

for starting at the wrong place in his analysis in *The History of Sexuality*. Bourdieu claims that it is wrong to start with Plato, as Foucault does, when looking for the start of masculine dominance. Instead Foucault should have started with Homer or Hesiod, as these are the true start of masculine dominance in writing, or so Bourdieu claims. While this may be true, one could argue that finding the true start of masculine dominance in writing is not the same as delving into why gender relations are at heart relations of domination. In that case, I would argue that by looking to the historic conditions that have shaped the power relations between the genders today is sufficient explanation, at least of the scope of Bourdieu's project. Kraus even admits that it is not common for other projects to delve into why gender relations are at heart relations of domination either.

Another critic of Bourdieu's, Leslie McCall, also tries to read Bourdieu in a feminist perspective. There are a few things that make that difficult. McCall notes in her paper «Does Gender Fit? Bourdieu, Feminism, and Conceptions of Social Order» that Bourdieu uses words such as 'truth' and 'objective', which stands in opposition to a feminist approach to sociology. According to her, his use of such words can be interpreted as masculine, disembodied and detached.¹⁵⁶ This criticism pairs well with the criticism posited by both Butler and Lovell amongst others, that Bourdieu has a normative and deterministic dimension in his theory of the relation between the genders. By using words such as 'truth' and 'objective', as well as simply calling women 'docile' without further explanation, puts him in a position where such charges may stick. At the same time, this charge is something he anticipates and defends himself against. He does this by claiming that he is simply describing the historical forces that have put women in that position. Other places he does make clear that while there are some objective physical differences between the sexes, these have been exaggerated and used in a strategic manner to oppress women and legitimate masculine dominance. While this defense may excuse him from charges of normativity, they do not excuse him entirely from charges of writing in a masculine, disembodied and detached manner. Part of the reason why he could be read this way, is that he uses sociological studies and field data as the basis for his theory. I would argue that while Bourdieu may write in a masculine, disembodied and detached manner, his theory and his findings are not so. This means that while a feminist reading of Bourdieu might encounter some tensions in the process, the end result is so valuable that the tension met cannot

¹⁵⁶ McCall, «Does Gender Fit?». 856

discount it. This does not mean that one should not point out the tension, as this is an essential part of critique.

Yet another feminist reader of Bourdieu, as well as of Butler, is Terry Lovell. She tackles them both in her article «Thinking Feminism with and against Bourdieu». Her charge against Bourdieu is that the scope of Bourdieu's assertions regarding masculine dominance poses a problem for his work in a feminist context, as it assumes that women function as objects, and not as subjects. This shows in his theory when he describes women as quietly accepting the norms without any subversion or resistance. Lovell further charges Bourdieu with several of the same charges that Butler posits against him. Being, that his sociological account of gender relations has a normative function rather than a descriptive one, and in relation to this, that he understands subjects as holding fixed positions on the social map without much room for movement.

Nonetheless, Lovell has some criticism against Butler as well. Lovell claims that while Bourdieu reads as a determinist and with a normative element in his theory, Butler reads at times like a voluntarist, focusing on individuals rather than social movements.¹⁵⁷ Another contrast between them that Lovell draws up is that Bourdieu ties up sex, sexuality and gender too tightly together. Butler, on the other hand, separates sex, sexuality and gender too freely. Despite these oppositions and differences, or maybe because of it, Lovell argues that a positive engagement between Bourdieu's sociology and contemporary feminist theory, exemplified by Butler, is fruitful. She brings Butler and Bourdieu together, highlighting their shared inspiration by Austin. When Lovell brings Butler and Bourdieu together, it is with the caveat that not all boundary crossing is within reach for all across historical and cultural circumstances. Meaning, Butler's ideas of subversive performance is possible, for a certain group of people. This is in line with Bourdieu's own claims, that, while they are not necessarily aimed at Butler, function as a way to oppose some of her claims regarding subversive performance.

Another critic, this one of both Butler and Bourdieu's, is Louis McNay. McNay argues in her article «Agency and Experience: Gender as a Lived Relation» that, in a way, Butler and Bourdieu both gets it wrong. Her take is that they have useful ideas regarding performative agency, but this is where their main disagreement lies. McNay argues that the difference

¹⁵⁷ Lovell, «Thinking Feminism with and against Bourdieu». 15

between Butler and Bourdieu's accounts is «the way in which they develop a concept of agency to think through the connections between discursive and material power relations.»¹⁵⁸ She also writes that Butler and Bourdieu's exchange is about what constitutes the efficacy of a performative speech act, and that subsequently, these ideas can be developed. McNay points to Butler's theory of agency as something that needs to be developed, as it is an alternative, 'anti-essentialist' theory of agency that is conceptually etiolated.¹⁵⁹ What she means by that is that it is drawn out and weak. McNay argues that Butler's theory of agency is not a theory of agency at all, but instead a theory of structural indeterminacy.

McNay relays some of Butler's criticism against Bourdieu, that McNay can stand behind. Such as that the concept of symbolic violence is problematic as «it ties the speech act too closely to its institutional context and misses the processes of temporal deferral and dissemination that are constitutive of the indeterminacy of the performative»¹⁶⁰, as McNay puts it. This is the usual criticism from Butler against Bourdieu, that he does not take account of the way in which speech acts can take on new meanings and break with existing norms. Butler also has a problem with that the habitus does not take into account that «corporeal inculcation is never straight-forward or complete.»¹⁶¹ This is part of the same picture. According to Butler, Bourdieu is too rigid in his understanding of embodiment. To him it is necessarily normative and subjecting, whereas to Butler, there is room for movement and subversive action within the norms. McNay claims that Bourdieu reduces symbolic relations to pre-given social relations, causing him to underestimate the autonomy of agents.¹⁶² Despite these differences in understanding, McNay points to some affinities between Butler and Bourdieu, such as their shared avoidance of asserting the primacy of different types of power relations over another. As well as them both having an embodied account of agency, acknowledging both material and symbolic power relations.¹⁶³ McNay develops both Butler and Bourdieu's ideas regarding gender, and uses them for her own theory which is that gender is a lived social relation.

I find McNay's criticism against both Butler and Bourdieu to be the most valid out of the ones I have covered here. She highlights the flaws and the benefits with both their accounts, and

¹⁵⁸ McNay, «Agency and Experience». 182

¹⁵⁹ McNay. 178

¹⁶⁰ McNay. 180

¹⁶¹ McNay. 180

¹⁶² McNay. 182

¹⁶³ McNay. 182

uses them to forward her own development. This is an example of the fruitful discourse between Butler and Bourdieu. Despite Butler having an conceptually etiolated theory of agency, and despite Bourdieu missing the indeterminacy of the performative.

These claims, made by Hollywood, Nussbaum, Kraus, Lovell, McCall, and McNay are just some of the many made against Butler and Bourdieu; both in combination and as separate entities. They offer some interesting takes, that are useful for understanding both the limits and potential of their respective theories. Such as Butler maybe having based her theory of ritual on a misunderstanding; the conflation of bodily acts with speech acts. Or that her theory of agency may not be a theory of agency at all, but instead an account of structural indeterminacy. Bourdieu may not look to the origins of masculine dominance and may be deterministic in his understanding of social positions. Moving forward, it is also useful to note that Bourdieu may be charged with separating social and linguistic levels, as well as tying sex, sexuality and gender too closely together. Butler may be charged with the exact opposite, by separating sex, sexuality and gender from each other in too much of an extent, as well as tying social and linguistic levels too closely together. Does this not mean that when reading them together, a more nuanced picture emerges?

CRITICISM BETWEEN BUTLER AND BOURDIEU

So there are several points, some valid and some less so, made against Butler and Bourdieu by their critics. Several theorists bring them together in dialogue, and develop their shared theories, such as Lovell and McNay. As we know, Butler and Bourdieu brought themselves into dialogue, criticizing each other, but drawing from each other as well. Some of their claims against the other are spot on, while others seem like they are based on a misreading. Now it is time to judge the validity of their claims.

One criticism Butler has against Bourdieu, is that he distinguishes between the linguistic and social dimensions of performative acts.¹⁶⁴ She questions whether or not «the social and linguistic dimensions of the performative speech be strictly separated if the body becomes the

¹⁶⁴ Butler, «Performativity's Social Magic». 116

site of their convergence and productivity».¹⁶⁵ It is not clear to her that these dimensions are possible to keep separate. Butler claims that Bourdieu's dualism between the linguistic and social dimension is potentially problematic and undermines the political promise of his analysis. This is so because, as Butler claims, interpellation «sets the scene for the misappropriation of interpellating performatives that is central to any project of the subversive territorialization and resignification of dominated social orders.»¹⁶⁶ Since interpellation is at once both linguistic and social, and Bourdieu does not consider these dimensions to coexist in the same way she does, he also does not allow for this resignification of dominant social orders. Or so Butler claims.

It is interesting to note that Bourdieu posits the claim that linguistic and social dimension are distinct in the context of criticism directed at Butler and philosophers like her. Butler's answer can therefore be interpreted as some sort of defense against this charge. Butler argues that being called a slur is at once a social and linguistic occasion, and that this example disproves Bourdieu's distinction between social and linguistic dimensions.¹⁶⁷ At the same time, Butler writes in *Excitable Speech* that: «Maintaining the gap between saying and doing, no matter how difficult, means that there is always a story to tell about why speech does the harm that it does.»¹⁶⁸ Butler consequently both argues that there is a gap between saying and doing as well as that the distinction between social and linguistic dimensions is problematic. This complicates the critique by Hollywood that Butler conflates linguistic and social dimensions. However, I find her critique of Bourdieu on this count to be accurate. A connection between social and linguistic dimensions does not have to negate a distinction between saying and doing. Her example that interpellation, in the form of being called a slur, is an instance in which the social and linguistic dimensions converge shows that these dimensions cannot be kept separate in an account of social effects of language.

Another charge Butler has against Bourdieu, is that he does not take account of the way in which the habitus and the field can mutually influence each other. The market, or the field, is the context of social power, and agents are both defined and confined by their relative positions in this field, Bourdieu claims.¹⁶⁹ He also claims that practices comes from the interplay

¹⁶⁵ Butler, «Performativity's Social Magic». 115

¹⁶⁶ Butler, «Performativity's Social Magic». 120

¹⁶⁷ Butler, «Performativity's Social Magic». 126

¹⁶⁸ Butler, *Excitable Speech*. 101

¹⁶⁹ Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*. 230

between the habitus and the market.¹⁷⁰ The field is the condition on which the habitus can exist, as it is created and developed by the field, and develops the field in turn, Butler claims. There is therefore a mutually formative relation between habitus and field. This relation, however, is occluded by Bourdieu describing their relation as an event, Butler argues. This makes it so that the relation seems one-sided, with the field being able to edit and alter the habitus, but not the other way round. This highlights the objectivity of the field, avoiding a subjectivist account, but also, Butler argues, causes the field to be read as inalterable. This is the background for her critique that Bourdieu describes subjects as fixed on the social map. Butler interprets the possibilities here differently than Bourdieu, and claims that the «mimetic acquisitions of a norm is at once the condition by which a certain resistance to the norm is also produced.»¹⁷¹ This possibility is left unaddressed by Bourdieu, and therefore represents a flaw in his account. Butler further argues this point by claiming that since the field informs the habitus, the ‘encounter’ between a fully formed habitus and the field is misguided. She instead argues that the field and the habitus are part of each others (re)formation. The habitus presupposes the field from the start, as she puts it. This means that the objectivity of the field, as Bourdieu describes, is in fact the condition of the habitus in the first place.¹⁷²

These two charges, as well as the next one, all have something in common. It is that Butler claims that Bourdieu either fails to see the connection between two concepts, or does not link them closely enough. Just as she claims that he distinguishes between the linguistic and performative dimensions of speech acts, and that he does not take account of the way in which the habitus and the field mutually influence each other, she claims that Bourdieu does not link bodily knowingness and the performative. Butler argues that Bourdieu misses that the body exceeds the speech acts it is constituted by. Meaning, there is more to the body than just speech, more than just norms. There is some personal agency and personal identity present as well. How else to explain the natural variations in gender identity and non-normative sexuality? This leads Butler to claim that Bourdieu has no room for agency from the margins of power in his theory and that he does not recognize that some performative force comes from the unconventional practice of the conventional.¹⁷³ As we know, this type of agency obviously exists.

¹⁷⁰ Butler, «Performativity’s Social Magic». 114

¹⁷¹ Butler, «Performativity’s Social Magic». 118

¹⁷² Butler, «Performativity’s Social Magic». 119

¹⁷³ Butler, *Excitable Speech*. 147

While this critique seems spot on, it is complicated by the fact that Butler argues in *Gender Trouble* that gender is a doing, not a being. While this can be read in several ways, one reading of it is that there is nothing to gender other than the norms that influence its performativity. This reading is further strengthened when Butler puts quotation marks around the word «is» when using the term ‘gender «is»’. One could interpret this as meaning that gender «is» nothing, or at least nothing other than performance. And since performance signifies, this makes it linguistic on Butler’s account. If all there is to gender is then a linguistic act, how can she critique Bourdieu for missing the fact that the body exceeds the speech acts it is constituted by?

Butler also moves away from Bourdieu’s claim that the speech act is rite of institution and that ordinary language is structured by political and sociological oppositions between groups.¹⁷⁴ Butler claims that Bourdieu understands language as a static and closed system. She argues instead that it is not social positions which exclusively determines the force and meaning of the utterances, but rather that the break with this context may create its force.¹⁷⁵ However, Bourdieu does acknowledge that performative utterances, in an Austian sense, are claims to power.¹⁷⁶ This is so because one needs a certain power to be able to command and make things happen, so when one makes a command, one claims the power that usually goes with it. This is central to Butler’s account of the performative and its subversive potential. Nevertheless, Bourdieu claims that to bring something into existence in a verbal manner takes a formidable amount of social power in the first place.¹⁷⁷ Meaning, that while he acknowledges that performative utterances are bids to power, he claims that one must already inhabit this power to be able to wield it.

Another point in which their interpretations are very similar, but nonetheless different, are their interpretations of how discriminatory words lose their old meaning and takes on new meanings. Bourdieu claims that words that are popularized are consequently perceived as banal and common and thus lose their discriminatory power.¹⁷⁸ One can tie this to several words, but it seems to hold true for words such as ‘queer’ or ‘gay’. Butler also dives into this topic, and writes of the potential problems and advantages with the use of the word ‘queer’. Previously a

¹⁷⁴ Butler, *Excitable Speech*. 145

¹⁷⁵ Butler, *Excitable Speech*. 145

¹⁷⁶ Bourdieu, *Language & Symbolic Power*. 73

¹⁷⁷ Bourdieu, *Language & Symbolic Power*. 236

¹⁷⁸ Bourdieu, *Language & Symbolic Power*. 64

slur, now a token of identity. She calls the reappropriation of words such as 'dyke', 'queer' and 'fag' parodic.¹⁷⁹ And as she has stated previously, parody is not in itself subversive.

That does not mean, however, that since parody is not in itself subversive, that it can never be. For example, Butler uses these words herself. She argues that one can appropriate the terms one has been abused by and deplete these terms of their degradation. Again in this context a crucial difference between Butler and Bourdieu makes its way to the forefront. One focused on collective action, and one focused on subjective action. To Bourdieu, it is through popularization, a collective phenomenon, that a word may lose its discriminatory power. To Butler, it is a choice taken by an individual to reappropriate a term, and subjectively deplete it of its degradation. Although the end result is the same, that slurs lose their discriminatory power, they come at it from different angles and understand the mechanisms in different ways. These words are now just words, and not slurs (at least to a much greater extent than before). It is interesting to note how the gap between saying and doing in this case has been widened so much so that by saying, one is no longer doing. In other words, by stating the words, one no longer has the power to harm. Is this the work of anything other than performative action and subversive performance?

Bourdieu does not think so. He is not convinced by the potential of subversive performance. Bourdieu writes of what he calls the symbolic crossing of a boundary. He uses the example of someone from the aristocracy giving a stable boy a pat on the back.¹⁸⁰ It is a crossing of a boundary as it evades the boundary between rich and poor, at the same time as it is completely symbolic in nature. The pat on the back does not change either's standing or position on the social map. The stable boy could never return the pat on the back; doing so would cost him his job. Only those in a privileged and secure position can allow themselves to cross the borders set for them, Bourdieu argues. It is possible to draw lines from this to Butler's subversive performances. The symbolic crossing of boundaries and the subversive performances are both small gestures that subvert the societal norms, without actually changing either one's own or other's position on the social map. This form of subversion is also not available to all; just like Bourdieu's example of the aristocrat and the stable boy, some people have higher stakes tied

¹⁷⁹ Butler, *Gender Trouble*. 167

¹⁸⁰ Bourdieu, *Symbolisk makt*. 34

to their subversion. Those in already relatively safe positions have the privilege to subvert the norms, whereas those in precarious positions have not.

I find this critique by Bourdieu to be very convincing. It touches on something that stands out when reading Butler, which is that it can seem like there is no real stakes tied to the subversion of norms. Although she does point out that we are in different states of precarity, and that non-normative presentations of gender and kinship struggle to be recognized, it seems like her solution to that is subversion of the norms. The example of the aristocrat giving the stableboy a pat on the back also brings the element of class into this. It is central to Bourdieu's negative understanding of the subversive potential of performance, as is shown by this example of the aristocrat and the stableboy, as well as his example of the 'slang of the underworld' and striking. The matter of class is something that one could argue that Butler does not take sufficiently account of. Since only those in a privileged and secure position can allow themselves the subversion of norms without fear of consequence, this subversion does little to change the social positions. Bourdieu further writes that «Political subversion presupposes cognitive subversion, a conversion of the vision of the world.»¹⁸¹ Meaning, for political subversion to be effective, the ones performing it must already have subverted what they are rallying against in their minds. Bourdieu therefore also claims that dominated individuals are less likely to act up, as they are not likely to know how dominated they are. Bourdieu writes that they lack the cultural and economic conditions for them to be able to realize how deprived they are of cultural and economic capital.¹⁸²

According to Bourdieu, the privileged person that has cultural capital can also take some liberties regarding their knowledge of culture. They can admit to not knowing much or caring much about culture such as language, literature or classical music, as they already have cultural legitimacy. Someone without this cultural legitimacy, someone without cultural capital, may not. They need to assert their knowledge of culture as well as their admiration for it, in order to mimic the closeness to culture that cultural capital provides. Culture can be reduced down to one's relationship with culture, as Bourdieu writes.¹⁸³ Therefore, despite their efforts, and partly because of their efforts, those without cultural capital cannot make up for it by clinging

¹⁸¹ Bourdieu, *Language & Symbolic Power*. 127-128

¹⁸² Bourdieu, *Language & Symbolic Power*. 131

¹⁸³ Bourdieu, *Distinksjonen*. 148-149

onto knowledge about culture. By working hard to maintain that relationship to culture, they confirm that they do not possess cultural capital, and therefore cultural legitimacy.

Bourdieu further remarks that «one can see in passing that strategies for the subversion of objective hierarchies in the sphere of language, as in the sphere of culture, are *also* likely to be strategies of condensation reserved for those who are sufficiently confident in their position in the objective hierarchies to be able to deny them without appearing to be ignorant or incapable of satisfying their demands.»¹⁸⁴ In other words, subversive language entails breaking with linguistic norms, something that can be read as not simply mastering the linguistic norms. This reaffirms one's social position if one is not expected to master the linguistic norms, while breaking with one's social position if one is expected to master the linguistic norms. This is an interesting point that Butler does not cover to the same extent. Bourdieu focuses on people from the districts or former colonies speaking with an accent or dialect, but this can be applied to gender as well. Women typically break with existing linguistic norms by speaking in a different manner than men do. Typically in a softer voice and in a higher pitch, with statements phrased as questions («Isn't it true that...»). It might even include a negation at the end («... Though I might be wrong»). Often, other women will hear these as statements nonetheless, while many men hear it as questions posed to them.

To combine this with Bourdieu's claims regarding linguistic subversion, one can argue that when women break with existing linguistic norms by speaking in a «feminine» manner, they are reaffirming their position on the social map. This functions as a double bind; even if women rebel against this by speaking in a less feminine manner, raising their voice, interrupting others and speaking assertively, they would often be seen as aggressive and out of line. Whereas if a man were to do those same things, he would be seen as assertive and in control. Bourdieu therefore argues that people who do not feel that they master the official language are more likely to correct both themselves as well as others when speaking, and that women more readily accept the demands of the market in a docile manner. One's sense of one's place in the social field causes one to avoid rebelling against it, as one thinks that one cannot allow oneself such a luxury. Bourdieu claims that central to how one 'knows one's place' is knowing the value of one's own linguistic products. This again feeds into one's own social worth and the bearing of

¹⁸⁴ Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*. 69

the body. Meaning, language has both direct and indirect implications on the body. Language itself is a body technique.

Bourdieu's critique of Butler is therefore that subversive performance does little to change the norms and values in society, and that those that are in a position to do so are not those who would have the greatest benefit from it. Actually, Bourdieu argues that linguistic subversive performance can sediment one's social position in the field. As we have seen, Bourdieu also criticizes Butler for understanding performativity as consisting of voluntaristic and periodic performances. This critique may be based on a misreading of her. Performance is not something one necessarily switches on and off periodically; all modes of appearances is some form of performance. Performance can then be a constant. This shows that Bourdieu may, in all his criticism of Butler, actually have an incomplete understanding of her theory. Despite him following her writing closely, and read her books soon after they were published. This does not mean that all his criticism of her is unfounded though. In fact, if he had taken greater care when reading Butler, his critique would probably have been even greater.

While Bourdieu's take on Butler's performance can be flawed, that does not mean that his perspective is not useful alongside Butler's. She herself does not comment directly on his claims regarding gender relations and the sex versus gender debate. She mostly focuses on the performativity of the habitus, as well as pointing out where his distinctions between concepts are unnecessary. They have several of the same influences, and often reach the same conclusions, while having different arguments for it. For example in their understandings of censorship.

Bourdieu writes of censorship in *Language & Symbolic Power*, and Butler writes of it in *Excitable Speech*. In it, she references Bourdieu and an essay found in his book *Language & Symbolic Power* called «Censorship and the Imposition of Form». Butler writes that censorship is not only a way of limiting speech, but also a way of producing speech, by controlling what can and cannot be said.¹⁸⁵ When speaking, one speaks «in the context of an already circumscribed field of linguistic possibilities.»¹⁸⁶ Meaning, that censorship is not only something that happens after an uttering, but is what makes possible the uttering in the first

¹⁸⁵ Butler, *Excitable Speech*. 128

¹⁸⁶ Butler, *Excitable Speech*. 129

place. Censorship also produces that it wishes to censor; by stating what it wishes to censor, it reproduces it, brings focus to it and defines it. It is in this way that censorship produces subjects, according to Butler. She puts it this way: «To become a subject means to be subjected to a set of implicit and explicit norms that govern the kind of speech that will be legible as the speech of a subject.»¹⁸⁷ Butler claims that hate speech, in a way produces the subjects that it mentions.¹⁸⁸ This take seems to be inspired by Foucault again. It is also a take that implies that censorship can have subversive effects. The way this takes place is through words taking on new meanings as an act of subversion. Butler claims that it is political for terms to acquire non-ordinary meanings. She writes that new invocations is reiterations of what has come before, and as such can challenge existing legitimacy.

Censorship is also not primarily involved with speech, but rather involved with culture and legitimacy. Butler claims that «On the assumption that no speech is permissible without some other speech becoming *impermissible*, censorship is what permits speech by enforcing the very distinction between permissible and impermissible speech. Understood as foreclosure, censorship produces discursive regimes through the production of the unspeakable.»¹⁸⁹ Butler draws lines between censorship and habitus from this position. She writes that habitus is a form of subconscious self-censorship.¹⁹⁰ What she means by this is that while self-censorship usually is thought of as something fairly conscious, habitus impacts one's room for movement, and what one sees as available to oneself. If one does not believe something to be available, one will not go for it, and in that way censor oneself. Norms inhabits the subjects bodily life, as censorship produces the subject. Butler claims that to Bourdieu, the implicit operation of censorship operates within a bodily understanding, for instance through the habitus.¹⁹¹

Butler, however, disagrees with Bourdieu on the point of how little resistance is possible. She claims that Bourdieu puts too much weight on the social dimension of the performative, something that stands in the way of its ability to transform.¹⁹² Butler writes that Bourdieu does not relate habitus and the body to performativity, but that there is a link there. She writes that the habitus operates according to a performativity, and because of this, it is impossible to keep

¹⁸⁷ Butler, *Excitable Speech*. 133

¹⁸⁸ Butler, *Excitable Speech*. 26

¹⁸⁹ Butler, *Excitable Speech*. 139

¹⁹⁰ Butler, *Excitable Speech*. 134

¹⁹¹ Butler, *Excitable Speech*. 141

¹⁹² Butler, *Excitable Speech*. 152

the distinction between the social and the linguistic.¹⁹³ She claims further that social performatives are central to the habitus.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

As we can clearly see, Butler and Bourdieu's account of how language affects gender is far from conclusive or all inclusive. There are unclear areas and things still in need of definition. Still, it is far more complete than if reading them separately. It is my experience that after having read Bourdieu, I understood Butler at a deeper level. By reading Bourdieu and Butler together, one rereads them in a way, and comes at their works in a new way. This opens up for new understandings and interpretations.

Their critics charge them with not understanding the concepts they are working with, with being normative and determinative, or simply not having a complete theory at all. They charge each other with either keeping concepts separate that in reality have a symbiotic relationship, or with understanding symbolic performance as subversive. These charges may all be true. Still, what makes reading Butler and Bourdieu together worthwhile is that they are, in their own way, exploring the field of gender, language and power, and questioning the social norms that make up these fields. Their critique of each other strengthens the others theory, as they perfect it and use it to bolster their own theories. Their contributions have driven the field forward, to such an extent that they cannot be left out when discussing it. Therefore, despite their incomplete account, I claim that a co-reading of Butler and Bourdieu is necessary in order to understand how language affects gender.

¹⁹³ Butler, *Excitable Speech*. 154

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this chapter I will conclude, and present my final remarks. My conclusion is that Butler and Bourdieu should be read together, as a co-reading of them answers the question of how language affects both sex, gender, and gender relations much better than when reading them separately.

Let us go over again some relevant aspects of their respective theories, to see why I came to this conclusion. Gender, for instance. Gender, to Butler, is performative. It is a doing. It is not «a set of free-floating attributes.»¹⁹⁴ She argues that the common conception of what sex is reflects back to gender. Meaning, sex does not come before gender, but is in fact formed by it. It is not an objective concept that comes before interpretation. As she puts it «(Is there a) physical body prior to the perceptually perceived body? An impossible question to decide.»¹⁹⁵ Bourdieu, on the other hand, writes in *The Distinction* that the biological differences between the sexes are pre-given.¹⁹⁶ This must be said to be one of their most fundamental differences, but also what makes reading them together the most beneficial. Their conclusions are strengthened by their different points of view. For example, while they have this fundamentally different understanding of sex, gender and biology, they agree that heterosexuality is socially constructed and socially constituted as a universal model for a ‘normal’ sexual praxis.¹⁹⁷ This comes as no surprise from Butler, but it is more surprising that she is paraphrasing Bourdieu.

Butler claims that Bourdieu does not take account of the way in which the body is more than just its physical expression. But in fact, it is central to his concept of habitus and hexis. Bourdieu calls the hexis ‘the bearing of the body’ and the habitus is the bodily hexis. The body itself is formed in the hexis.¹⁹⁸ It has to do with the physical incarnation of one’s own subconscious beliefs about one’s own position. This must be said to be in part a linguistic phenomenon, as social conventions affect the bodies, which then reproduce and ritualize the

¹⁹⁴ Butler, *Gender Trouble*. 34

¹⁹⁵ Butler, *Gender Trouble*. 155

¹⁹⁶ Bourdieu, *Distinksjonen*. 230

¹⁹⁷ Bourdieu, *Den maskuline dominans*. 93

¹⁹⁸ Butler, «Performativity’s Social Magic.» 116

social conventions as practices.¹⁹⁹ It goes both ways; the body is influenced and shaped by the social conventions, which then feeds back into the social conventions and strengthens them.

The potential tension between linguistics and materiality comes to be expressed by Butler when she claims that ‘women’ is a potentially problematic term as it cannot reflect the multitudes of experience that belongs to the people it encompasses.²⁰⁰ She notes that by insisting upon a coherence and unity among ‘women’, the actual multiplicity of that group is refused.²⁰¹ At the same time, one could easily point out that this is true for all terms; by including something, something else is inevitably left out. This is even remarked upon by Butler herself in *Bodies That Matter* when she writes that «Identification is implicated in what it excludes.»²⁰²

However, Bourdieu has a supporting argument for Butler’s claim that the word ‘women’ cannot reflect the actual multitude of that group, when he claims that the order of words never exactly reproduce the order of things.²⁰³ Meaning, language cannot exactly replicate action. Especially unconventional action. In relation to this, Butler writes that «It would be a mistake to think that the received grammar is the best vehicle for expressing radical views, given the constraints that grammar imposes upon thought, indeed, upon the thinkable itself.»²⁰⁴ Language impacts the way we think, as the words we see used, are the ones we are likely to use when thinking.²⁰⁵ If we are to draw on Baudrillard for a bit, we could say that it is language that thinks for us, as words are bearers of and generators of ideas.²⁰⁶ Butler draws on Wittig when she claims that since gender is naturalized through grammatical norms, one can alter gender through contesting that grammar.²⁰⁷

This idea, that gender can be altered, is central to Butler. Or, rather, that the gendered reality, meaning the hegemony of gender norms, can be altered. Change and subversion is at the heart of her theory. Bourdieu, on the other hand, is more sceptical of this insistence on personal subversive action, especially in a linguistic sense. He thinks that it can potentially be dangerous to change language without changing reality first. This causes the problems not to stop existing,

¹⁹⁹ Butler, «Performativity’s Social Magic». 116

²⁰⁰ Butler, *Gender Trouble*. 2

²⁰¹ Butler, *Gender Trouble*. 19

²⁰² Butler, *Bodies That Matter*. 80

²⁰³ Bourdieu, *Distinksjonen*. 240

²⁰⁴ Butler, *Gender Trouble*. XIX

²⁰⁵ Gunnerud, *Ord er makt*. 70

²⁰⁶ Baudrillard, *Passwords*.

²⁰⁷ Butler, *Gender Trouble*. XX

but, rather, for them to become invisible and erased. For example, he thinks that moving beyond the binary of man and woman can make it more difficult to see that there is a relation of domination between men and women. This can then lead the problem to worsen. One cannot create a perfect future by erasing the language of the past. At the same time, one must acknowledge that language partakes in structuring our beliefs about ourselves and the world around us. As he claims, symbolic violence functions invisibly through the channels of communication.

However, while the question of gender is covered by Butler and Bourdieu, the question of language leaves something to be desired. Neither of them are language theorists, even though language is central to their theories. Bourdieu subscribes to neither ordinary language philosophy nor a structuralist approach to language.²⁰⁸ They are both heavily inspired by Austin and his *How To Do Things With Words*, despite them both criticizing it and developing it further. They see the power of language as coming from external relations set in history and practice, in contrast to Austin's claims that the power of language comes from the words themselves (spoken in the correct circumstances). However, Butler does argue that some of the power of language comes from within the subjects themselves, through subversive claims to power. Language is presented by them in a more rudimentary way than gender is, and not developed in the same manner.

Despite of this, or maybe because of it, there are several interesting points to be made regarding their theory of language. Bourdieu writes that the social uses of language are organized in systems of differences which reproduce systems of social differences. He writes: «These styles, systems of differences which are both classified and classifying, ranked and ranking, mark those who appropriate them.»²⁰⁹ This entails that the social use of language necessarily reproduces the systems of social differences and makes it mark upon those who appropriates it. This breaks with Butler's understanding of the use of language. She criticizes Bourdieu for not recognizing the necessarily norm-breaking quality of the bodily aspect of speech.²¹⁰ She claims that he neglects the performativity of the habitus. She writes that he «will seek to expand the 'ritual' sense of 'convention' and exclude any consideration of the temporality of logic of performativity. Indeed, he will contextualize ritual within the social field of the 'market' in

²⁰⁸ Myles, «From habitus to mouth». 881

²⁰⁹ Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*. 54

²¹⁰ Butler, *Excitable Speech*. 142

order to more radically exteriorize the source of linguistic power.»²¹¹ Meaning, Bourdieu radically places the source of linguistic power outside of the subject, and inside the social field. Butler further notes that he «amplifies the social dimension of the performative at the expense of transformativity.»²¹² So Bourdieu places too much weight on the social circumstances surrounding the subject, instead of within the subject itself. This causes the ability to transform to be lost in the process. Butler argues that performatives not only reflects the social field that Bourdieu speaks of, but that it also produces it.²¹³ Butler agrees with Bourdieu on the count that the speech act cannot break with every context. Still, she claims that the political promise of the performative is that speech acts can take on non-ordinary meanings and that it is not fully determined in advance.²¹⁴

What about the language that Butler and Bourdieu uses themselves? Butler can be, and has been, accused of writing in an opaque manner that is not easily deciphered. She has even won a prize for bad writing. In her later books, however, she writes in a much more accessible style. She also has a lesser focus on pure theory, and more on integrating current events. This, combined with a less complicated language, makes her later writings more accessible, and as such, more political. Bourdieu also writes in a manner that can be difficult to understand. He criticizes Heidegger for using a writing style where he plays with words, uses alliteration and bends the meaning of words. Bourdieu can, ironically, be accused of a similar thing. He often uses both -ed and -fying when describing the aspects of something. Such as classified and classifying, ranked and ranking. He does this to such an extent, as previous quotes by him has also shown, that it goes beyond simply being a descriptive tool and turns into a specific style of writing. His style of writing can also be misunderstood, as is shown by many taking him to posit essentialist claims. Even Bourdieu himself acknowledges that his analysis can easily be misinterpreted and be used for something else than he intended. Although he does not believe himself to write in a way that promotes essentialist views regarding gender, he can be interpreted that way.

Both Butler and Bourdieu write what they know; she comes from a background as a queer woman, while Bourdieu comes from a background as someone from the province getting

²¹¹ Butler, *Excitable Speech*. 151

²¹² Butler, *Excitable Speech*. 152

²¹³ Butler, *Excitable Speech*. 159

²¹⁴ Butler, *Excitable Speech*. 162

access into the realms of the wealthy and privileged. This forms their outlooks as well as their point of departure in their philosophical research. Bourdieu did a sociological study of his own home town of Bearn. He did this after having done studied the gender relations in the Kabyle. Bourdieu's research into the relations between men and women has been part of his sociological and philosophical project from the start. His research in the Kabyle is an example of this. Butler references her background as a queer woman, involved in academia and feminist organization alike. This has shaped her political and philosophical praxis.

Bourdieu describes a society from around 1970's until the early 2000's. Still, much of what he describes persists today. Women working part-time against their will, as well as getting sexually harrassed at their place of employment. In recent years, the metoo-movement has shed a light on this very problem, and shows that it is still taking place to this very day. This shows the value in Bourdieu's project which describes specific situations that women face. Such as sexual harrassment and limited career options. This is in line with the rest of his method, an interdisciplinary project, combining philosophy with sociology. Butler sets herself apart from Bourdieu by not focusing on describing specific situations that women face. This is in line with her claims that there is no political promise in describing women as more vulnerable. She even claims, as we have seen, that women is not the main focus of her theory; gender in general is. This does not mean that all are equal or that there is no gender bias, but instead that those in precarious positions because of their gender are not all women. Some would argue, such as Nussbaum, that her focus on gender in general instead of women in particular, makes it more difficult to see that women are generally in a more precarious position than men. This is also implicated by Bourdieu's claims; that by denying the dualism of men and women, the relation of domination becomes invisible. However, Butler's approach is also important, as one not only needs data, but also theory.

By looking to habitus when trying to understand performativity, the concept becomes grounded in subconscious bodily memory, rather than in voluntaristic performance. While Butler can be read in several ways, so can Bourdieu. This means that when reading them together, their accounts influence the other's, and a shared reading emerges. Because of their tensions, the possibility of a fruitful debate emerges. Since Bourdieu is no longer living, it is up to his interpreters to continue this debate.

What I have done in this thesis is to connect Butler and Bourdieu together. I did this by focusing on the relation between habitus and performativity, as well as the distinction in their understanding of sex and gender. I then looked to their critics and interpreters to find flaws in their theories, before looking to their criticism towards each other. This leads me to conclude that reading Butler and Bourdieu together gives a better account of how language affects gender, despite the flaws in their theories, both apart and in combination. This is because Bourdieu's concept of habitus grounds performativity in materiality, and therefore shows that performativity is not only a linguistic phenomenon, but also a physical one. It is in this way that the link between linguistics and materiality is underscored, with the body at its centre. Language therefore affects gender by informing the performativity of the habitus, and is therefore part of the formation and the reformation of gender.

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