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Any contemplation of what it means to think and act radically today must remember that institutional structures *order* the human subject and play a fundamental role in constructing subjectivity. All institutions, all symbolic orders, work in this way. Humans initially—passively, so to speak—learn to perform a variety of the structure's practical deeds or rituals. Through those performances, which negotiate a structure's rules and prohibitions, humans become subjects. In getting a sense of the performed deeds, they also get a sense of their lives—of who and how they are. Mimetically repeating, performing, and *reperforming* acts and/or rituals are the mechanisms through which structural practices achieve their authority. They are also the operations through which humans acquire the individual subjectivities they possess.

The human subject's reliance on repeating already-established practices and conventions renders subjectivity precarious. "We are . . . social beings from the start," philosopher Judith Butler writes, "dependent on what is outside ourselves, on others, on institutions, and on sustained and sustainable environments, and so are, in this sense, precarious."¹ The conditions that enable us to function within society are those that keep us precarious. Factors beyond our actions constitute our agency. This theorization is a large and complicated extension of the traditional subject-object relationship. The problem of subjectivity ceases to be only a question of personal experience, as the ontology of individualism would have it, and becomes part of a more considerable sociopolitical concern.

To theorize the subject as precarious in this way is to acknowledge the relationship between the institutional environment and agency. The subject starts from already established protocols and then excavates and questions what makes these codes and conventions possible. In this sense, subjective experience is a given. One must search elsewhere—in the surrounding environment, in the preexisting institution, in the historical *a priori*—for its conditions of possibility. Theorizations attentive to the relationship between the institutional environment and

¹ Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009), 23.

agency foreground the ways human subjects both shape and *are shaped* by the institutional structures in which they circulate. The subjects that the institutions bring into being enable the institutions to function.

The world is not a static space in which our activities take place. It is an entity actively produced by our actions. Social reality, especially in its ideological form, is a construction. We create the world, and it creates us. A feedback loop between our activity and our material and institutional surroundings characterizes our social condition. The environments produced by our actions set powerful constraints upon subsequent actions. Take the city where I am presently writing this text. Initially, it might seem little more than a large cluster of buildings, streets, schools, parks, and businesses. This description is exceptionally partial, however. The city only becomes a reality as people navigate it to work, study, shop, socialize, rest, and play. We cannot adequately comprehend the city without considering the people who go about “producing” it day after day. But the city also shapes human activity: the city’s physical and institutional structures create the conditions under which people go to work, study, shop, socialize, rest, and play. Our activities produce the city, which shapes our activities. This circuit elucidates the agency we mobilize to create the world in which our actions have meaning. When I write this text and publish and circulate it on an institutional platform such as the one you are reading, I take part in a discussion that informs my own thinking.

Yet, if one accepts my claim that our actions contribute to the production of our surrounding environment, then one must also acknowledge how this applies to our institutional surroundings and how one participates in the production of our world. To intervene in a genuinely liberatory manner in the world in which we live entails producing an environment in which our agency could emerge. Therefore, radical intervention’s essential task is to reconfigure the social realm’s relations and apparatus to reinvent the institutional environment in ways designed to maximize human agency. If institutional structures, like regimes of power, function through repetition and ritualized performances, then in the possibility of swerving or *queering* these mimetic performances is a space for agency to emerge. Structures may constrain us, but we, as human subjects, by performing otherwise can act in ways that could lead to transformation of these structures, and in this manner, open an entirely new field of subjective experience and an expanded range of radical social and political possibilities.

Literary theorist Eve Sedgwick reminds us that identification—“to identify *as*”—is never seamless or unilateral but always includes “multiple processes” of identifying *with* or *as against*. The relations implicit in identification with are “fraught with intensities of incorporation, diminishment, inflation, threat, loss, reparation, and disavowal.”² Identification, then, according to Sedgwick, is never a simple project. It is always relational and situated. To identify with a culture, lifestyle, religious orientation, or political philosophy means simultaneously and partially to counter-identify, or only somewhat identify, with different facets of the social and psychic world.³

Beyond the politics of identification and counter-identification is what performance studies scholar José Muñoz refers to as “disidentification.”⁴ This strategy neither assimilates nor strictly opposes socially prescriptive patterns of identification. Instead, it repeats and actualizes preexisting conventions but transforms them from within by repeating them slightly differently. To disidentify, Muñoz explains, means “to work on, with, and against [the operation of] a cultural form.”⁵ It is a strategy that visualizes identities and culture alike as a loose assemblage of disparate fragments and resists a conception of power as being a permanently fixed discourse. It negotiates resistance within the flux of discourse and understands that, like discourse, counter-discourses can always fluctuate for different ideological ends. To develop differentiating and deviating moments within a nexus of convention and discourse, today’s radical agents must cultivate the ability to adapt and shift as quickly as power does. To think and act radically today is to swerve preexisting conventions tactfully. It is, in a word, to *disidentify* with the dominant discourse and power.

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2 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), 61.

3 José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 8.

4 *Ibid.*, passim.

5 *Ibid.*, 12.