

‘SOCIAL TEMPORALITY’ OF GENDER
&
‘GENDERED CORPOREALISATION OF TIME’
two parallel analyses of identity as performative transition.

ELIA NTAOUSANI

We venture here today our wanderings into the maze of notions -such as ‘identity’, ‘ground’, ‘gender’, ‘space’, ‘sex’ and ‘transition’- holding in our hands as an enigmatic Ariadne’s clue some kind of new-wave discourse, a mixture of theoretical and empirical process. It is all about Judith Butler’s performative theory of gender, which was presented in her book *Gender Trouble* in 1990s, broadly discussed, interpreted, expanded and applied on different social structures and levels of life onwards.



Motivated by Nietzsche’s ideas, which predicate that *there is no ‘being’ behind (the) ‘doing’* and that *‘the doer’ is merely a fiction added to the deed - the deed is everything* (Butler 1999^a [1990], p. 33 || Nietzsche 199-?, p. 91), Butler manages not only to legitimate the withdrawal of the sequence *subject => deed*, but also to release the notion of ‘gender’ as an attribute of the self from its ontological and substantial status.

According to the **theory of performativity**, ‘gender’ is not a noun that acts but is always a doing. It is neither considered as an immutable *identity* nor construed as a settled *locus* of agency from which various acts follow and derive - or where several others are taking place and finally getting accomplished. ‘Gender’ is rather understood as an *identity tenuously taking shape through time*; but because here the very notion of continuous alteration and transition leads to the denial of this identity as such, [gender] is better conceived as *a mutating, transitory cultural intelligibility of agency*, within the frame of social temporality that renders the (already and ever-gendered¹) *self* culturally ‘coherent’² (Butler 1999^a [1990], p. 179).

¹ It is to be mentioned here the semantic difference between ‘gender (identity)’ and ‘gendered (identity)’. About the ‘gendered self’: *It would be wrong to think that the discussion of “identity” ought to proceed prior to a discussion of gender identity for the simple reason that “persons” only become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility* (Butler 1999^a [1990], p. 22). In short words, the subjects are already and ever-gendered.

² Butler defines as ‘intelligible genders’ *those, which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire* (Butler

In this sense, ‘intelligibility’ does not refer to (gender) features that are supposed to externalize and express³ an inert core or substance of a so-called abiding self. It is, on the contrary, rather constructed progressively and empirically by itself through a regulated process of *stylized repetition of acts* (Butler 1999^a [1990], p. 179 / 1999^b [1990], p. xv II Marnelakis 2003, p. 12) which are inscribed on the *surface of the body*; where the ‘body’ is conceived neither as a ‘being’ that antecedes nor as *a ready surface awaiting signification* but rather as a set of variable and permeable boundaries, individual and social, already politically signified, that are formed together with and through these repeated acts (Butler 1999^a [1990], pp. 44, 173, 177).

Within this context, we are nowadays legitimated to foreclose the approach of identity as a seamless certainty, namely acquired through traditional knowledge and experience but now frozen in time. For such an articulation of an ontological substance is thus leaving -from its very definition and in advance- no place for transformation, withdrawal, expansion or subversion of the existing form. Besides, it renders the emergence of a *new* identity a possibility already out of question, even if we assume that the sociocultural norms and practices allow -or even impose sometimes- such a process of renewal (Butler 1999^a [1990], p. 21).

On the other hand, we get rid of the ‘given ground (site and frame)’⁴, on which we would be otherwise tied down if accepted the *ontological status* of identity. We are thereby appropriating instead the **idea of ‘gendered corporealization of time’** (Butler 1999^a [1990], p. 179) that serves as a spatiotemporal base constantly formed and reformed together with the acts. In their turn, these acts are getting stylized through repetition and, thank to this stylization, they constitute (not any more a gendered abiding self but) the **gender social temporality of cultural intelligibility**; scheme already prone to, and flexible for, expansions and subversions. Besides, this very feature of repetition bears the meaning of a ritual, performed and presented in specific normative ways (Marnelakis 2003, p. 13)⁵; it is indeed exactly this very mechanism that renders the constitutive process of gender construction as cultural intelligibility, possible and competent - therefore guaranteed.

1999 [1990], p. 23). We are going to refer to the two last issues later on, when speaking about the ‘heterosexual matrix’ (p. 5).

³ We point out here the difference between the externalization-expression and performance. Something is ‘expressed’ when it preexists, but the one that ‘performs’ is at that very time constituted and instituted.

⁴ Spatial metaphor of ‘ground’, Butler 1999^a [1990], p. 179. The issue is going to get further analysed in the last unity of the article, about performativity of space.

⁵ It is now that we understand clearly why Butler’s theory speaks about ‘gender performativity’ (and not ‘performance’). But we retain to refer later on to the kind of those normative ways that are mentioned here.

We thus come here to conclude that, although preserving -even if with deliberation- a *sort of relative*⁶ sexual duality based on anatomical characteristics in a large amount of cases⁷, **Butler denies the transition or passage to a second social antithetical duality (that is, bipolarity)**. Renouncing the ‘being’ of gender and taking side with its ‘doing’, she upholds namely a **gender multiplicity**, because *‘even if the sexes appear to be unproblematically binary in their morphology and constitution (which will become a question), there is no reason to assume that genders ought also to remain as two’* (Butler 1999^a [1990], p. 10). **We moreover notice that this multiplicity approaches to infinity not only as for the different subjects (there are as many sexes as the individuals, according to Wittig⁸) but even in the case of this same (also mutating) subject of the self.**



While the theory of performativity seems to work out indeed, and actually subvert, the immutability of the biologically constructed gender ontology, we wonder if -and to what extent- is this very theory capable of releasing gender from the sociocultural determinism as well. Thus the question that arises is:

The (multiple) ‘intelligible genders’ of performativity or else **the ‘gender social temporality’ of the co-mutating spatiotemporal ground**, according to which (normative) alphabet and from whom... are *read* and judged as *intelligible* - or not?

In other words, even if performativity releases both genders and their sociocultural frame of reference from ontological determination, it seems we still need a set of regulatory norms to preserve the system intact. Ideal dimorphism, heterosexual complementarity of bodies, ideals and rules of proper and improper masculinity or femininity, the incest taboo and the prior taboo against homosexuality, are only some examples that roughly cross our mind and conduct our present discourse (Butler 1999^b [1990], p. xxiii). To the extent that these gender norms will keep on imbuing the free-floating ground as primitive letters in the social alphabet of acts (Butler 1999^a [1990], p. 172), the -seemingly impulsive-process of gender construction will... keep on, be it so unconsciously, getting motivated by the very Law of *compulsory heterosexuality*.

⁶ We speak here about a *sort of relative* biological binarism, because Butler utters the following thought about the distinction between ‘sex’ and ‘gender’: *If the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called “sex” is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all* (Butler 1999^a [1990], pp. 10-11).

⁷ Although the sexual binarism (biologically masculine or feminine) is the common sense and rule, it is yet not the only reality. Let us refer here to the cases of hermaphrodites, see for ex. J. Eugenides’ novel *“Middlesex: Between the two sexes”*, or to the research of Dr. David Page in the late 1987 claiming that *a good 10% of the population has chromosomal variations that do not fit neatly into the XX-female and XY-male set of categories* (Butler 1999^a [1990], pp. 136-7)!

⁸ Butler 1999^a [1990], p. 151.

But we do not want this analysis of ours to be taken as superficial or judged as misinterpretation of Butler. For we make clear we embrace and adopt the lack of ‘doer’ behind the ‘deed’. We totally comprehend that *gender* and *subject* are instituted, according to Butler, simultaneously and that they are both mutating tenuously through the performative process - which they *don’t* choose, being already and always inside it (Butler 1999^a [1990], pp. 173, 185, 189). Nonetheless, the fact that the ‘gendered subject’ is not in position to choose the scheme through which it is repeatedly constituted, does not necessarily imply the *inexistence* of a Law, whose letter would merely guarantee the process of stylization - yet without determining it. In any case, *even if* this very Law is also (co)mutating inside the same procedure⁹, there is still need of a settled center of reference; an alphabet, whose knowledge will guarantee to the ‘reader’ the decoding of the stylized set of gender social and temporal acts.

SUBVERSION OF DETERMINISM IN THE PROCESS OF GENDER CONSTRUCTION

Nevertheless, when mentioning the **primordial value of repetition** in the constructive process of gender, we didn’t indicate it is paradoxically this *same* repetition that allows the subversion of the gender social temporality it guarantees! For the *performative* character of repetition encourages the occasional **discontinuity** within the repetitive process; what reveals and certifies the contingency and temporality of this very ‘ground’. Notwithstanding, this discontinuity does not foreclose *a priori* each and every kind of ‘initiative’. Actually it is all about subversion of the binary ‘free will/ determinism’¹⁰; for the performative gender, despite its *constructedness*, is no more a biological or social deterministic reformation of sex but a ‘cultural (intel)legibility’, leaving enough place for alteration, extrusion or *variation on repetition*; features on which exactly the very possibility of **agency** rely (Butler 1999^a [1990], pp. 179, 185-7).

⁹ Referring to the subject of feminism, Butler utters that *there may not be a subject who stands “before” the law, awaiting representation in or by the law. Perhaps the subject, as well as the invocation of a temporal “before”, is constituted by the law as the fictive foundation of its own claim to legitimacy. The performative invocation of a nonhistorical “before” becomes the foundational premise that guarantees a presocial ontology of persons who freely consent to be governed and, thereby, constitute the legitimacy of the social contract* (Butler 1999^a, p. 5).

¹⁰ If the body comprises, as we have indicated, the means upon which cultural significations are dynamically getting inscribed, then there may actually be no free will in the process of gender formation; for the determinism reappears - even if of a sociocultural and not biological mode this time. The primary model that reflects this philosophical binary refers basically to the system ‘sex-determinism / gender-free will’, where the free will is established on the multiple possibilities of constructible choices within the cultural discourse, while the determinism on the base of the given from ‘nature’ sexual features. Within this context, *gender dominates on sex, abolishing the self-existence of the latter* and, consequently, so does ‘master - (social) free will’ on ‘slave - (biological) determinism’.

We thus believe that, although Butler does not exactly deconstruct the gender norms in the same way as for genders and for ground, she subverts at any rate their immutability, indicating the premises that accentuate their contingency and allow their destabilization. The final scope is not to celebrate each and every *new possibility qua possibility, but to redescribe those possibilities that already exist, but which exist within cultural domains designated as culturally unintelligible and impossible*, as Butler puts it (Butler 1999^a [1990], p. 189). The examples of the hyperfeminine ‘lipstick lesbian’ or the hypermasculine ‘gay skinhead’, as thoroughly examined in the article “all hyped up and no place to go” by Bell, Binnie, Cream and Valentine, could give us a representative outline. Eventually this indirect deconstruction derives, but is also followed, from tenuous dislodgement of our given discourse’s limits, that is of the exclusively binary frame of heterosexual woman and man.

‘HETEROSEXUAL MATRIX’ AS ALPHABET-FRAME OF READING

On the other hand, it is Butler herself that introduces the very notion of ‘heterosexual matrix’ as *grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalized* (Butler 1999^a [1990], footnote 6, p. 194). **That is, even if Butler does not approve ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ as the deterministic constructive Law of ‘gender social temporality’, she indicates however as frame-reading alphabet of this construction, the matrix of that very law - of *heterosexuality*.**

And yet, all unpredictably and in an impressive way, the constitution of this matrix as reading frame does not leave the system of gender construction intact¹¹, for, as Butler herself denotes, *you never receive me apart from the grammar that establishes my availability to you* (Butler 1999^b [1990], p. xxiv). Expressing that in another way, *I’m not outside the language that structures me* [outside the ‘heterosexual matrix’], *but neither am I determined* [constructed through deterministic means] *by the language that makes this ‘I’ possible* (Butler 1999^b [1990], p. xxiv).

In this sense, the cultural matrix that renders the genders¹² “legible and intelligible” requires that certain kinds of them cannot ‘exist’ - that is, they do not fulfill the prerequisites of “intelligibility” (footnote 2). It is all about cases where ‘gender’ does not “follow” -through a sort of causal entailment- from ‘sex’; but also about other ones where (sexual) practices of desire do not “follow” either from ‘sex’ or from ‘gender’ (Butler 1999^a [1990], p. 24).

¹¹ *And how do the regulatory practices that govern gender also govern culturally intelligible notions of identity?* (Butler 1999^a[1990], p. 23.)

¹² We perceive as ‘gender’, according to Butler, *the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being* (Butler 1999^a [1990], pp. 43-4).

Consequently, we would like here to introduce, and yet explain, a **distinction between ‘legible’ and ‘intelligible’**. Those from the gendered identities that fail to conform to the norms of the heterosexual matrix, definitely fail as ‘intelligible’ forms as well; but they remain however ‘readable’ *within* the discourse, even if they can only appear as *developmental failures or logical impossibilities in its margins*¹³. In other words, the dislodgement of whatever (but here heterosexual) matrix from ‘deterministic law of construction’ to ‘alphabet-reading frame’, provides critical chances of tenuously extruding the limits of the system. For, when opened up, these limits will not anticipate the impossibility of re-inscribing some forms that now appear as ‘unintelligible’ or ‘impossible’.

Proceeding here to an **overall inspection**, we argue that the success of **performative theory**, apart from the disruption of compulsory orders, is particularly focused on the importation of a matrix as the necessary reading frame of gender behaviors; what indicates the contingency of its heterosexual character. That is, the compulsory existence of the alphabet does not necessarily imply the compulsory of its heterosexuality as well, which, even if uncontested and given in the current discourse, may be so by chance and accidentally. Therefore, we may not be in position to subvert it, but we can still exercise the *variation on repetition* (agency) in order to tenuously dislodge these (primarily dual, then multiple but until now, in any case finite) limits of gender to the infinity.

‘SEX’ - ‘GENDER’ - ‘SEXUAL DESIRE’

The historical ‘**compulsory order**’ as for gender issues was until today described in the following linear scheme of causal transition: ‘sex’ => ‘gender’ => ‘desire’; where ‘sex’ serves as the ground on which several sociocultural influences overlay forming ‘gender’ and [where] *desire not only reflects and expresses gender but also gender reflects and expresses desire* (Butler 1999^a [1990], p. 30). This order predisposes an inert coherence of the one or the other gender, man or woman. Moreover the heterosexualization of desire presupposes or produces a univocal continuity, under which the idea ‘*you were born female, become woman and desire men*’ is better expressed as ‘*you desire men because you are woman and you are woman because you were born female*’ (Marnelakis 2003, p. 11).

¹³ While speaking about the case of hermaphrodite Herculine Barbin, whose diaries are prefaced by Foucault, Butler insists that *Herculine is not an “identity”, but the sexual impossibility of and identity*” (Butler 1999^a [1990], p. 31). Applying to this example what we have here denoted about the theory of performativity, and although the ‘heterosexual matrix’ as alphabet-reading frame renders Herculine unintelligible, we persist ‘reading’ him - even as impossible. That is, without foreclosing him from the discourse, we allow his ‘existence’ within (the margins) of the system and, consequently, we create the preconditions of his re-inscription as “possibility” given an oncoming expansion of the system’s limits and borders.

Thus, having inherited from previous generations this settled -almost intact- causal scheme of gender construction, we are challenged here to re-inscribe it on the new data of our epoch; the ones that have made us aware of the tenuous change that both private and public spheres of life are undergoing. If we pretend to have already realized that there is no fixed center of reference, no certainty acquired through traditional knowledge that cannot be revised or reversed; and if, therefore, we are persuaded that all social structures and relations are formed, transformed and re-formed each and every moment *together* with their frame of reference through a lifelong learning process, then it is a *must* to seek for the **theoretical tools** which could sustain our faith in this value of transitional processes, legitimate the autobiographical and empirical research, and finally guarantee the loosening of every causal irreversibility in our discourse.

Therefore, it is within this very frame that we suggest Butler's mechanism of performativity as the appropriate, yet not the only, theoretical tool, surprisingly open to further expansions and renovations, and capable for the fulfillment of our mentioned intentions as for not only gender construction, but also a big variety of social structures. We will thus present here two exemplary cases of transition, in which performativity manages to deconstruct any lineal causality and to legitimate a sort of symmetrical diffusion of interaction among the discrete elements.

The first example concerns the already mentioned linear 'order' of gender construction. While importing the performative mechanism of enactment in this tripartite causal sequence of 'sex'-'gender'-'desire', we would not say that performativity *subverts* the 'compulsory order' but that it rather *deconstructs* its causality. For the *subversion* may easily lead to a misunderstanding or confusion with the idea of *reversion*, while the result that we support is in no case a new reversed compulsory order: 'desire' => 'gender' => 'sex' (Marnelakis 2003, p. 11). We rather believe in **total deconstruction of causalities together with a performative interaction among the three elements, 'sex', 'gender' & 'desire'**¹⁴.

Applying here the compulsory 'heterosexual matrix' as well, we remark that the so-called matrix is neither the cause nor the constructive Law but the mean, which legitimates and reproduces 'heterosexuality' as proper form of sexuality (Marnelakis 2003, pp.11-2). It is all about a regulatory reading frame, within which performativity is taking place and getting accomplished. According to this frame, not only the constructed legible forms are recognized as intelligible or not, but also several behavioral codes of repetition are getting constituted. It seems namely that the idea of sexual practices has by itself the power to destabilize gender, while normative sexuality consolidates it as category of analysis (Butler 1999^b, p.xi).

¹⁴ While replacing the linear causal relation with the symmetrical performative diffusion of relations, we are motivated to use as spatial metaphor of this new mechanism an **equilateral triangle**; placing each feature on each vertex of the symmetrical geometric scheme.

Speaking about **normativity**, it seems that most of the theories accepting the existence of a Law, are founded on a template about ‘how *shall* things be’, ‘how is it *proper* (for them) to be’. We nevertheless believe that this *mimetic scheme* has already started to loosen nowadays, by including as well the problematic of ‘how is it *popular* to be’. We would dare to indicate that the feature of morality is almost displaced from the pop(ular) one; that is, we adopt concrete behavioral codes and styles of acting not by fear of not doing the proper - and therefore, of getting marginalized as *immoral*- but by fear of not following the trends of nowadays - and, consequently, of getting marginalized as *old-fashioned* and *anachronists*. These thoughts have in no case the intention of contesting the notion of ‘heterosexual matrix’; they merely ask for a possible **expansion of normativity’s limits** in a more contemporary and yet popular way (Giousiou 2005).

‘SUBJECT’ - ‘GENDER’ - ‘SPACE’

It is now time to present our second exemplary case of transition analysis, in which we deconstruct through performativity one more lineal scheme of entailment: ‘subject’-‘gender’-‘space’. We remind therefore that (performative) ‘gender’ neither is constructed as an inner feature nor can ever be afterwards fully internalized. It is, on the contrary, constituted through a regulatory process of stylized repetition of acts taking place *in an ‘external-open’ locus*, that is in the *public* one; for only the public space can represent the field of (inter)action, where the stylized acts are thus eternally recomposing gender¹⁵.

Nevertheless, it is exactly because of the space’s stylization *through t i m e* that the spatial idea of locus self-contradicts due to lack of fixed coordinates. In the context of social temporality, where the already and ever-gendered self is rendered ‘cultural intelligible’, *the occasional discontinuity* within the process of stylization *reveals the temporal and contingent groundlessness of this “ground”*(Butler 1999^a [1990], p. 179). At last, the intrusion of the factor “time” in the process is proved catalytic and thereby, tenuously dislodged, the locus is no more conceived as space but better as *gendered corprorealization of time*. Thus, while the performative process replaces ‘gendered identity’ with the notion of ‘gender social temporality’, the ‘settled given ground’ is getting transformed to ‘gendered corprorealization of time’. Therefore, and proportionally, ‘space’¹⁶ is **not less performative than ‘gender’**¹⁷ (Gregson & Rose 2000 [1998], p. 433).

¹⁵ *Although there are individual bodies that enact these significations by becoming stylized into gendered modes, this “action” is a public action* (Butler 1999^a [1990], p. 178).

¹⁶ We have already begun to think (vice-versa), based on the article “Taking Butler elsewhere: performativities, spatialities and subjectivities” (Gregson & Rose, 2000), **about the spatiality of this very notion of performativity** -and of performance- itself (Gregson & Rose 2000, p. 435). Besides, if trying the diagrammatical representation of the performative mechanism, we may

Notwithstanding, 'performativity' is not the only attribute characterizing equally 'gender' and '(public) space'. For 'constructedness' could also be named as basic feature of both. The profession of architect is a discrete exemplary case that legitimates and exercises on empirical and practical level this constructedness of space, almost taken for granted. Undertaking however the interpenetration of both *gender* and of *space* according to their attributes, we notice that, while the perception of spaces as culturally constructible is nowadays common sense, we still do not confront as self-evident the perception of the language of social relations as inherently spatial (Bell, Binnie, Cream & Valentine 1994, p. 31)¹⁸. That is, relations and identities need the (public) sphere as the mean to represent and performatively re-constitute their existence; but they necessitate also a reading frame, which is in not but the 'heterosexual matrix' - notion already and ever-spatial!

In other words, **(public) space is not only performatively constructible but is also actively constructed as heterosexual, when referring to it as if to the reading frame of our discourse.** This ascertainment comes together with thoughts concerning the establishment of a possible performative bond that would relate the, seemingly parallel and thus asymptotic, notion of 'gender' and 'space'. Although we accepted rather uncritically that *gender identity impacts on the use and reading of space*, we yet begin to observe that *the socially and culturally encoded character of space* seems to influence the acting of gender identities as well. «It is namely possible one to be gay [only] in *specific* places and spaces», as J. Bristow accurately puts it (Bell, Binnie, Cream & Valentine 1994, p. 32). Consequently, apart from the performativity of each one of the separately, we certify -and persistently (re)establish- the performative interaction *between 'gender' and 'space'* as well, namely within the discussed and constituted pair¹⁹.

Proceeding thus to an **overall inspection**, Bristow's quote suggests in no case that the subject chooses each time -or according to each space- the 'gender identity' that is going to get dressed with, as if we talk about an unbidden selection of costume. On the one hand, the performative simultaneous mutation of 'subject' and 'gender identity' does keep on, for none of them exists prior to the other; on the other, as we have repeatedly noticed, each and every trace of

project its spatial metaphor by using the perfect closed scheme of cycle. There is namely no linear causal sequence, but a circular repetitive trajectory.

¹⁷ *The view that gender is performative sought to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body* (Butler 1999^b 1990], p. xv).

¹⁸ That is, *not only space is gendered and space is sexed but also the notions of 'sex', 'gender' and 'sexuality' are all 'spaced'* (Bell, Binnie, Cream & Valentine 1994, pp. 31-32).

¹⁹ *The notion that gender is not simply an aspect of what one is, but it is something that one does, and does recurrently, in interaction with others* (West & Zimmerman, 1991) and in space, highlights the performative character of both gender and of place (Ibid., pp. 32-33).

‘free will’ wipes away, may there be no ‘doer’ behind the ‘deed’ and no agency before its production (Gregson & Rose 2000, p. 436); while the ‘subject’ is already and ever-gendered (Marnelakis 2003, p. 13). But keeping in mind also the second mentioned performative co-mutation of ‘gender identity’ and ‘space’, we conclude that the separate elements of the trilogy ‘subject’-‘gender’-‘space’ or better ‘identity’ - ‘social temporality’ - ‘gendered corporealization of time’, constitute a tripartite model as vertices of a [new] equilateral triangle. Last but not least, **these discrete features do interact performatively and this interaction is diffused symmetrically within the discourse.**

‘SPATIAL DUALITY’ - ‘SPATIAL ASYMMETRY’ - ‘HETEROSEXUAL MATRIX’

If developing further our thoughts about the ‘constructedness’ of (public) space and the ‘compulsory heterosexuality of its matrix’, we find out that not all space is ‘straight (heterosexual)’ yet all space is legible according to the reading frame of the heterosexually constructed, namely of the one that designates the sites as intelligible or not. Moreover, when intensifying that space expresses both ‘gender’ and ‘subject’, and is simultaneously expressed by them, we begin to think that the rest of the gender attributes may well be the same transferred to the spatial model. It is namely possible that both ‘gender’ and ‘space’ constitute sub-systems within the same general discourse that (re)establishes them through common performative transition²⁰.

Consequently, and proportionally to gender system, we would dare to speak about ‘**spatial duality**, ‘**spatial asymmetry**’ and ‘**heterosexual matrix**’ in a **new tripartite model**. The dualism here is not exclusively referred to the simple conveyance of gender duality in its spatial dimension as attribute²¹. It concerns also the binarism of ‘private’ and ‘public’ space, with the public one having supremacy compared to the private; for it is the public space that postulates interaction between two or more private, already asymmetrical, places. Moreover the public locus may attain unlimited number of forms, according to the analysed template model of the ‘infinite gender multiplicity’.

²⁰ *It is not only social actors that are produced by power, but the spaces in which they perform* (Gregson & Rose 2000, p. 441).

²¹ Within the frame of conveyance of ‘sexual duality’ and ‘gender asymmetry’ in space, we report here the characteristic example of women who deprive of their rights to spatiality. There is *a sense that the body is positioned within invisible spatial barriers*, meaning by this that high heels and short skirts are not but expression of restriction of women’s movement (Bell &.. 1994, p. 41). Therefore, it is all about the imposition of power and mastership of male on female, within the frame of the asymmetrical bipolarity ‘masculine/feminine’.

Within this context, ‘spatial (sexual) duality’ identifies *public space with the asymmetrical supremacy of male, while the *private* one with the female form*. This is to be seen more intensely in times (and societies) that encouraged much the discretion of social roles between the two sexes. In this sense, the simple presence, even if occasional or transitory, of the female in the public sphere was totally out of question, while the dominant male had access also to the (female’s) private sphere, affirming so the bipolar asymmetry of the (spatial) discourse.

We indicate here as representative example of such a society the ancient greek city-state in general (with the exception of ancient Sparta) and even better, Athens of the classical era, 5th century B.C. This very society was yet well known for the provision of political rights only to men and for considering the access to education as an exclusively masculine issue. At the same time, women were spending the biggest part of the day at home, taking care of household and children, all deprived of education or of any other kind of social (public) life (Asimomytis &... 1997, p. 53) (Tiverios & Tsaktsiras 1994, pp. 169-170,172-173).

When moving though from the ancient times to the contemporary ones, we nonetheless observe in some of the western societies of nowadays a new border line between public and private sphere; less unbreakable and more permeable but yet still present. Although the modern discretion of social roles permits a sort of interpenetration, we present the typical family model as the one that keeps for men the role of buying items, such as do-it-yourself tools and consumables; while women are left with the commodities, the clothing, the household items and, above all, are associated with the care and nurturing both of children and of men. In any case, we are about to reassure under these circumstances the described model of bipolar asymmetrical conventions (Gregson & Rose 2000, pp. 444-445).

Focusing once more on this case of ‘*spatial* (gender) asymmetry’, always proportionally to the one of ‘gender asymmetry’, we are led to the conclusion of its **contingency**. In other words, the compulsory heterosexuality of (public) space is contingent and in its place one could have found a no matter what other new spatial model; for space (either heterosexual or homosexual) is not given but produced and constructible (Bell, Binnie, Cream & Valentine 1994, p. 32).

It is not here the right place and time to get into further details analyzing this discourse of ‘spatial (gender) asymmetry’. Yet we have already achieved our goals by testifying this very system as exemplary case of **symmetrical performative diffusion among the elements ‘spatial duality’, ‘spatial asymmetry’ and ‘heterosexual matrix’**. Finally, representing these elements as vertices of an equilateral triangle and not as linear causality, we provide some ideas for attempting if not the subversion, at least some deviation of the current model from the present circumstances of binary, given and asymmetrical frame.

As this paper is coming here to an end, we would like to underline that our insistence on subversion and deconstruction does not concern any sort of obsession as for demolishing the existing social structures and relations. On the contrary, having fully embraced and adopted the idea of continuous change that both private and public spheres of life are undergoing, we merely indicate the need of bending above the existing forms with criticism; without taking them for granted or considering them as a sort of ideal certainty acquired through tradition knowledge.

We thus dared to discover and fumble the appropriate theoretical tools that may enable us to approach this ongoing and transitory mutation. The examples of identity, gender and space, in which we here applied the theory of performativity are not the unique ones; for actually, given the lack of a center of reference, *every* structure and domain of life is mutating, non-preexistent and thus performative. The whole process of learning these performativities is performative by itself and yet, even if unconsciously, the lifelong learning procedure serves this very idea.

Furthermore and as each performativity is not but a set of repeated acts through time, the observation and analysis of the mutable social structures is practically reduced in a case study of behavioral codes and acts. Within this frame, the gradual emergence and sudden expansion of the biographical, autobiographical and life-history research is not merely legitimated, but actually pointed out as the very, if not the most, appropriate; for these suggested empirical methods, being always in tenuous mutation together with the persons to which they refer, are exactly enough performative by themselves in order to represent this epoch of ours and the current discourse of transitory relations.

Our destination in this mazy journey of notions constitutes neither just of our thirst for knowledge of 'how the things are' or of 'how they should be / have been' nor of their simpleminded, uncritical subversion. For our ending is finally the investigation of the first place; and the exploring of this place from another point of view, within another context and alphabet - above all, as if it was the first time.

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