“UNSTABLE SUBJECTS”: GENDER AND AGENCY IN CARYL CHURCHILL’S

CLOUD 9

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“UNSTABLE SUBJECTS”: GENDER AND AGENCY IN CARYL CHURCHILL’S *CLOUD 9*

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THESIS ABSTRACT

"UNSTABLE SUBJECTS": GENDER AND AGENCY IN CARYL CHURCHILL'S

CLOUD 9

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The work of Judith Butler raises important questions about subjectivity, and calls for a reconception of the subject as unstable. This instability is the result of the disruption of the sequence of desire following from gender, following from sex. It is also a result of the notion that all subjects are constituted through a heterosexual matrix, a matrix by which the point of entry is normative gender behavior. To vary one's behavior in the face of this matrix is to risk being thrust "outside," but also, paradoxically, to gain agency as a political subject. Butler argues that the only way for the subject to exercise agency is through the variance of performance within constituting discourses, and also the occupation of multiple roles. Though Butler insists on the agency of the destabilized subject, she has never explained precisely how this agency is possible to the satisfaction

of her critics. Thus, in order to investigate Butler's notion of agency for the destabilized subject, her ideas surrounding this theme are contextualized within *Cloud 9*, which is perhaps Caryl Churchill's best known work. Through cross-casting and the challenging of gender normative behavior, *Cloud 9* sheds some light on Butler's concept of agency. By reading Butler through *Cloud 9* and, *Cloud 9* through Butler, one is able to interrogate the process by which the destabilized subject gains and exercises agency.

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Unstable Subjects: Gender and Agency in Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine*

Introduction

The section of *Gender Trouble* entitled "Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire" is the location of one of Judith Butler's most important discussions of the relationship between sex, gender, and the political subject. Here, Butler troubles the conception of the subject in terms of both gender and sex, arguing that perhaps the lines drawn for gender and sex are themselves illusory. Furthermore, Butler posits the existence of a heterosexual matrix, undergirded by the most hegemonic of ideals, as responsible for producing and perpetuating social and cultural norms bound up with gender intelligibility:

> The cultural matrix through which gender has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of "identities" cannot exist—that is, those in which gender does not "follow" from either sex or gender. "Follow" in this context is a political relation of entailment instituted by the cultural laws that establish and regulate the shape and meaning of sexuality. (*Gender Trouble* 17)

It is the cultural laws that produce a matrix which regulates, among other things, gender intelligibility that Butler finds so limiting and constricting, and moves to challenge. As her essay progresses, Butler insists that neither sex nor gender can serve as the basis for identity, as both are constructed in Butler's opinion; sex and gender are artificial concepts used as tools to force subjects into categories for representation within a juridical system characterized by phallogocentric and necessarily exclusionary politics and language that serve as both judge and jury. Instead, Butler works to deconstruct the idea that gender

follows sex, arguing that one is always already the other. She asserts her position that there is no metaphysics of substantive sex, gender, or desire: if one cannot be a gender or a sex, then one can have no stable subject position. This argument has major implications for understanding—or reconceiving—standard notions of subjectivity through gender: if gender and sex are constructs, sex being the "political surface upon which gender acts"; if the source of agency cannot be found in the socially prescribed position of the subject, according to Butler; and if there does not exist a metaphysics of the substantive in relation to sex and/or gender, then how does one act with intentionality at all in a society undergirded by a hegemonic, patriarchal, and strictly heterosexual matrix? Butler would respond that the agency of the subject is found it its ability to occupy multiple subject positions since the subject can hold no actual position, and should only be perceived as a "free-floating" artifice" (*Gender Trouble 6*).

Thus, Butler's discussion of the political subject, a subject constituted by both social and politicized forces, raises many questions and calls for a deeper interrogation of the ideas associated with it, such as agency.[1] Again, Butler argues that the precarious position of the subject as unstable is a condition of representational and identity politics as convenient, contrived pigeonholes where those who are deemed alike either by their perceived gender, sex, or respective desires, and who are "inside" based on their inhabiting the "domain of the subject," are stashed for hegemony's sake (*Bodies that Matter* 3). The question becomes then, how can the subject act of its own accord if the subject is always already what the regulatory matrix has interpellated it to be? How can it have any agency at all if its very existence is the function of a firmly ensconced

[1] Every reference to agency in this paper is a reference both to political and personal agency.

political and ideological system that allows little or no room for deviation from a predetermined set of stylistic acts, without the threat of becoming powerless and obsolete, an "unintelligible" subject constituting the "outside"?[2]

Butler's contentions about the destabilized subject and the problems and questions this notion creates and raises have led scholars to criticize Butler's ideas on sex, gender, agency, and subjectivity: if subjectivity—which follows from neither sex nor gender—is permanently deferred, how does the always already destabilized subject gain and exercise agency? Where does it come from and how does the subject gain it? Also, is agency attainable only by those who exist in the "domain of the subject," those who constitute the "inside" by their normative existence? (*Bodies that Matter 3*).

Before proceeding with a discussion of the agency question in Butler, it is important first to clarify what Butler means by agency. In the introduction to *Bodies that Matter*, Butler discusses some of her more controversial ideas such as constructivism and the performance of gender. She acknowledges much of the criticism of these notions and also discusses in more detail how she defines them. For Butler, the agency of the subject is something complicated by her theories of constructivism and performativity, but especially constructivism:

> There are defenders and critics of construction, who construe that position along structuralist lines. They often claim that there are structures that construct the subject, impersonal forces, such as Culture or Discourse or Power, where these terms occupy the grammatical site of the subject after the "human" has been dislodged from its place. In such a view, the

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[2] Butler's concept of the abject is largely influenced by her work on the theories of Julia Kristeva.

> grammatical and metaphysical place of the subject is retained even as the candidate that occupies that place appears to rotate. As a result, construction is still understood as a unilateral process initiated by a prior subject, fortifying that presumption of the metaphysics of the subject there where there is activity, there lurks behind it an initiating and willful subject. (*Bodies that Matter* 9)

Here, Butler addresses those who question the construction of the subject in terms of free will; if a subject has the free will to act with intentionality, then some small part of it must be prediscursive, something outside the constituting powers of language and social norms. However, Butler argues against this largely humanistic and structuralist view of human agency, insisting that it implies an outside force which could be perceived as godlike, and that it thus reinforces a metaphysics of the substantive for the subject which she works to destabilize along such lines. Because the subject is reinstated and fixed by imbuing it with free will, it cannot be consistent with Butler's views of subjectivity. Thus Butler's notion of agency is not a humanistic one, but rather a poststructural one which supports her claim that the subject is unstable, and that no metaphysical force is responsible for it:

> …if power is misconstrued as a grammatical and metaphysical subject, and if that metaphysical site within humanist discourse has been the privileged site of the human, then power appears to have displaced the human as the origin of activity. But if Foucault's view of power is understood as the disruption and subversion of this grammar and metaphysics of the subject, if power orchestrates the formation and

> sustenance of subjects, then it cannot be accounted for in terms of the "subject" which is its effect. And here it would be no more right to claim that the term "construction" belongs at the grammatical site of subject, for construction is neither a subject nor its act, but a process of reiteration by which both "subjects" and "acts" come to appear at all. There is no power in acts, but only a reiterated acting that is power in its persistence and instability. (*Bodies that Matter* 9)

For Butler, constructivism is not an all-constituting force enacted by a metaphysical constant that creates a subject who has the ability to act with intentionality and exercise free will. Instead, it exists in the form of a series of stylized acts which come to signify or represent a subject position. Construction itself is a fluid, perpetual process for Butler rather than a fixed creative act that occurs once. Similarly, the subject, with its ability to occupy multiple subject positions, also becomes fluid, or destabilized, but still perpetually reconstructed by social norms and forces. For this subject to have agency then, in accordance with Butler's poststructural conception of the subject, is for that subject to work within the process that constructs it, but to vary its performances of gender and social norms to disrupt the anticipated sequence of behavior for its constructed social position.

Edwina Barvosa-Carter elaborates on Butler's sense of agency in her essay, "Strange Tempest: Agency, Poststructuralism, and the Shape of Feminist Politics to Come," stating:

> This conception of the performativity of gender unsettles traditional concepts of human agency. If agency is understood as a human being's

> capacity to conceive and execute their own actions and projects, then agency has historically been assumed to depend on one of two conditions of the self. (177)

Barvosa-Carter goes on to describe these two conditions, noting the Kantian nature of the first, the condition in which "the self is potentially independent of the social world and its influence, and is thus capable of being the sole author of its own actions" (177). The second condition, according to Barvosa-Carter, is that in which

> humans are deeply embedded or 'situated' in social life, and while discursive orders condition the subject and its action, there remains a prediscursive aspect of the self (however small) from which agency springs. (177).

As far as Butler is concerned, Barvosa-Carter contends:

> Butler rejects the view that any aspect of the subject is prediscursive, and instead relocates human agency within the processes of signification that construct the self. […] agency for Butler is not ground in the subject's distance from the gender discourses that forge her, but instead in the subject's capacity to vary—rather than repeat—those constituting discourses. (177)

Butler cannot embrace either of the two conditions of the self that have been credited with facilitating agency in the past. Following Foucault, she argues that *nothing* is prediscursive: no part of the self can escape "discursive orders," and, therefore, agency cannot be based on anything objective or outside. Instead, one must necessarily work within the discursive system that seems to rob one of one's agency: one must locate

behaviors and actions that challenge constituting discourses through variety, and then perform those rather than repeating traditional behaviors. Agency, for the destabilized subject, is found in multiplicity: that one can perform one's identity through a variation of responses to the categories—whether they be gender-related, class-related, race-related, or related to one's ethnicity or sexuality—into which one is socially inscribed, means that one gains agency through refusing to repeat consistently those behaviors upon which the fixed, false, and hegemonic sense of the subject is based.

As evident in Barvosa-Carter's critique, the extent to which some praise Butler's theoretical ideas mirrors the extent to which some question their practical application. To further explore the seeming abstract nature of some of her notions, it is helpful to contextualize Butler's theories on subjectivity through representations of gender and agency. Post-structural and postmodern in their insistence on the slippage and plurality associated with representational and identity politics, Butler's ideas may best be understood through problematizing and contextualizing them within texts which treat important questions dealing with gender, sex, and the agency of the subject. Similarly, the interrogation and exploration of other texts, specifically *Cloud Nine* by Caryl Churchill, also offers an interesting commentary on gender, subjectivity, and agency in light of Butler's ideas. Butler's *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter* may be read through Churchill's *Cloud Nine* and vice versa to reveal many overlaps in the work of these two important thinkers.

The work of playwright Caryl Churchill provides interesting and complex examples through which to examine some of Butler's more difficult and slippery theoretical ideas, such as how a destabilized, discursively-constituted subject is capable

of exhibiting agency. For example, it is without fail that the premise of a Churchill play derives from the embattled intersections of sex, gender, race, ethnicity, class, and desire that comprise individual experience and complicate the subject's understanding of his or her self. While questions are certainly raised as to how a character in a Churchill play conceptualizes the self and the Other, as well as how that character retains a sense of agency after his or her identity as a subject has been challenged, possible explanations of these questions are left open-ended and ready for multiple interpretations. Thus, Churchill's plays, specifically *Cloud Nine*, and the theatre itself become excellent and appropriate contexts within which to apply and problematize the question of agency in Butler—where does agency come from and in what ways can the subject exercise it,—especially in terms of gender: "Because gender is not natural but cultural, it is in some sense a role and thus intimately connected with theater, our culture's privileged site for problematizing the relation of the real and the role, the authentic and the textualized, the natural and the mediated" (Heuvel 805). With *Gender Trouble, Bodies that Matter,* and *Cloud Nine* informing one another, one can better understand the important social commentary of each writer, and can continue interrogating the questions in each that lay the groundwork for social change. As Butler says in the 1999 preface to *Gender Trouble*, "no political revolution is possible without a radical shift in one's notions of the possible and the real" (*Gender Trouble* xxiii). Without digressing to a discussion along the slippery slope that is the theoretical discourse surrounding the real, the discussion of the possible in terms of the agency of the destabilized subject in Butler is one that is sure to yield interesting new perspectives and, above all else, many more questions.

A major work of Churchill's that emerges as especially interesting for analysis through a Butlerian lens is *Cloud Nine.* In this perhaps Churchill's best-known play, the agency of the subject based on that subject's gender, race, or sexuality as male or female, black or white, gay or straight, is called into question. It is important to note that *Cloud Nine* is in fact a Joint Stock Theatre Group play, written by Churchill after a lengthy workshop in which the opinions and personal experiences of the cast were discussed, and eventually provided the basis for the story itself. The effects of race, gender, sexuality, class, and ethnicity on life experiences are the main source of these responses. Thus, a play developed through this method has interesting, real-life implications for ideas about subjectivity and the variation of performance to produce political and personal agency. In fact, the link between the subject and its discursively constituted gender is consistently called into question throughout this play.

Cloud Nine can easily be considered a feminist work, commenting on gender, race, and, perhaps most significantly for this interrogation, compulsive heterosexuality. In the first act, this commentary takes place within the bounds of nineteenth century Victorian society transplanted to colonial Africa. The cultural laws that control the discourse on sex, gender, race, heterosexuality, homosexuality, and colonialism in this setting render the variance of performance nearly impossible. Interestingly, the second act, which is set in Britain in the 1970s, a span of only 25 years for the characters,[3] reveals that the potential to vary one's performance of gender as distinct either from sex

[3] Many Churchill scholars agree that this unusual temporal structure represents the fact that "Victorianism has not been entirely laid to rest, despite all the evidence of sexual liberation…" (Kritzer 115). This is important because it demonstrates how cultural and social laws become firmly ensconced, protected and enforced by the family, so that any change is difficult to achieve. Butler would likely argue that collective agency is the best way to enact change on a large scale.

or desire continues to be suppressed by cultural laws, specifically what Butler would refer to as the heterosexual matrix. The interesting questions of subjectivity and agency raised by *Cloud Nine* make this work important for the discussion of Butler's ideas on the same themes. Essentially, the question becomes, if the subject is a "free-floating artifice," its identity permanently deferred, then is it possible for the subject to have agency at all?

Butler and the Agency of the Subject

Throughout her vast body of work, Butler discusses her conceptions of the political subject as informed by her background as a scholar of Hegel and other important existential thinkers. Taking the ideas of the philosophers to whom she devoted much of her early work one step further, Butler insists that the subject be reconceived not as a product of some substantive metaphysics, but, instead, as interpellated as a subject through social constructions of normativity. In terms of sex, this means of course that there is nothing distinctly masculine or feminine, just that which is named as such. Even biological sex is always already gender, and thus always already indistinguishable from that which it has come to mean in sociopolitical terms. Just as sex cannot exist outside of gender, nothing, in Butler, can exist outside of discourse, a discourse constituted and regulated by a heterosexual matrix. For one to be outside of this matrix is for one to inhabit the domain of the abject as opposed to the domain of the subject, and is also, of course, to be unintelligible, perceived as Other and outside, and thus powerless and obsolete.

Interestingly, however, the outside and the inside are really one in the same, if one considers that the outside is created by the inside to provide an exteriority which, of

course, does not really exist: "the distinction between internal and external is established through the ejection and transvaluation of something originally part of identity into a defiling otherness" (*Gender Trouble* 171). Thus, the dialectical nature of power is revealed: the outside, the abject, is not obsolete, but is a constituting, interpellating force. Though extended in Butler, this is a Foucauldian notion: "Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (Nayak 459). In Butler, the outside is a major threat to the regulatory cultural matrix which fortifies the inside.

Understanding the dialectic between the outside and the inside, the abject and the subject, is essential in the discussion of the questions that arise about the treatment of agency in Butler. Butler does acknowledge agency. Despite her insistence that the subject as the product of anything stable or substantive is impossible within an all-constituting discourse, she does believe that the subject in its displaced state is capable of exercising its agency, of making decisions and displaying intentionality in its actions through its immanent relationship to power:

> The paradox of subjectivation (*assujetissement*) is precisely that the subject who would resist such norms is itself enabled, if not produced, by such norms. Although this constitutive restraint does not foreclose the possibility of agency, it does locate agency as a reiterative or rearticulatroy practice, immanent to power and not a relation of external opposition to power. (*Bodies that Matter* 13)

The 1999 revised preface to *Gender Trouble*, written nearly a decade after the first edition was published, is also quite significant in terms of Butler's acknowledgment

of agency because in it she spends a great deal of time responding to critics and updating previous assertions to fit her new realizations about politics, sexuality, etc. Thus, when she writes in that preface of her own experiences as a homosexual person, it is significant that she states:

> I grew up understanding something of the violence of gender norms…All of this subjected me to strong and scarring condemnation but, luckily, did not prevent me from pursuing pleasure and insisting on a legitimating recognition for my sexual life. It was difficult to bring this violence into view precisely because gender was so taken for granted at the same time that it was violently policed. It was assumed either to be a natural manifestation of sex or a cultural constant that no human agency could hope to revise. (*Gender Trouble* xix-xx)

Though a largely negative acknowledgment of human agency—a negativity which has been a major theme of Butler criticism in recent years—this is an acknowledgment nonetheless. While Butler characterizes this agency as weak in the face of cultural constants, there is hope that agency can at least work within the discourse which seemingly defeats its potential for existence: "I am not outside the language that structures me, but neither am I determined by the language that makes this 'I' possible" (*Gender Trouble* xxiv). This example of Butler's acknowledgment of agency in the revised preface is also significant because it indicates her belief in the possibility of agency nine years after the publication of *Gender Trouble*, nine years during which this notion of hers was often debated and discussed. It is an indication that Butler's later works still maintain that human agency has the potential to disrupt constituting discourses

and is available to the subject who resists the reiteration of normative behavior within that discourse.

However, critic Kathy Dow Magnus does argue that, while agency is still acknowledged, it becomes more problematic in Butler's later writings as she further develops her theories:

> As Butler begins to develop a more general notion of subjectivity and shifts her focus from gender performativity to linguistic performativity, her notion of subjective agency becomes increasingly diminished. Whereas her earlier accounts of subjectivity transcend the linguistic domain by considering how particular gestures, individual habits, concrete bodies, and social rituals serve the performance of gender, her 1997 texts suggest a subject thoroughly vulnerable to the impositions of language—a subject reducible to the discursive effects of interpellation and naming. (Magnus 82)

Magnus is of the mind that the more Butler's work focuses on the theoretical implications of language, such as in *The Psychic Life of Power* and *Excitable Speech*, the more her continued belief in the possibility of agency contradicts her ideas about the subject; agency in Butler thus remains problematic throughout her work, despite the fact that she continues, even as her other theories evolve, to assume the subject's potential to act with intentionality.

Thus, before beginning an interrogation of Butler's ideas through the lens of Churchill's *Cloud Nine*, certain questions must be raised with the goal in mind of identifying some type of resonance and application of those ideas within the context of

Churchill's play. Is agency really possible for a Butlerian subject, Butler's own assumptions that it is notwithstanding? Is agency available only to subjects, or might it also be exercised by the abject? How can one vary performance—specifically, in the case of *Cloud Nine*, gender performance—and remain in the domain of the subject? Why can some subjects vary performance and not be thrust into the domain of the abject? How can a subject's gender still be considered intelligible even though it varies the performance of gender-constituting stylized acts? And lastly, if nothing is prediscursive, then where does agency come from in the first place? Can subjects really exercise agency at all?

Cloud Nine was first performed on February 14, 1979 by the Joint Stock Theatre Group.[4] A revised edition was first performed on August 30, 1980, by the Royal Court Theatre and was co-produced once again by Joint Stock (Churchill Introduction). The play originated in a workshop held by the now defunct Joint Stock along with Churchill, the culmination of which saw Churchill off for ten weeks to pen the complex drama which was originally written for the stage rather than direct publication; thus, the events of the workshop are crucial to the resulting published text of *Cloud Nine*. In the untitled preface of Routledge's revised American edition of the play, Churchill comments on that workshop and the events that took place:[5]

> As the starting point for the Cloud Nine workshop I suggested … simply "sexual politics" rather than any book,[6] an unnervingly general

[4] Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* was published as an individual text in 1990.
[5] Routledge's American edition, first published in 1992, is used throughout this paper.
[6] Churchill writes in the preface that usually the Company operated by producing a play that was already written, devising one without an author, or by spending several weeks researching a subject, normally taken from a book, then creating a drama around that subject.

> subject which soon became specific. We formed a company considering their sexual as well as acting experience. […] with Cloud Nine we started from ourselves, moving out from that to a more general context. (Churchill Preface)

Out of the workshop, Churchill gained all of the inspiration for the work she created: “Though no character is based on anyone in the company, the play draws deeply on our experiences, and would not have been written without the workshop” (Churchill Preface). One of the most significant aspects of the play is its attempt to subvert the audience’s expectations for each of the characters: the play seeks to dramatize the extent to which society needs to classify individuals, and how this affects the individual’s own self-identification. The play also takes up the connections between sexual and colonial oppression. In her own words, Churchill gives the background of the decisions made during the workshop that characterize the play:

> There were no black members of the company and this led me to the idea of Joshua being so alienated from himself and so much aspiring to be what white men want him to be that he is played by a white. Similarly, Betty, who has no more respect for women than Joshua has for blacks, and who wants to be what men want her to be, is played by a man. For Edward to be played by a woman is within the English traditions of women playing boys (e.g. Peter Pan): for Cathy to be played by a man is a simple reversal of this. Of course, for both that reversal highlights how much they have to be taught to be society’s idea of a little boy and girl. (Churchill viii)

Subjectivity here is shown to be constricting, a socially prescribed "sense of self" completely contingent on an objective and arbitrary system of social classification; society mandates a gender role that the subject becomes or assumes, neither questioning this role nor showing any sign of resistance against it. Churchill's play, with its gender and racial reversals, as well as its parody of the trappings of gender and gender norms, seems to speak to Butler's theory of subjectivity in myriad ways: gender roles and even gender itself is completely constructed by society in this play, then forced on the individual characters through a complex network of ideology and the consequences associated with refusing to accept normative systems of classification. Homosexuality is also a primary theme in the play: Churchill uses homosexuality as a tool to reveal the deeply entrenched heterosexual matrix which is both arbitrary and constantly transgressed against, whether or not these transgressions are sanctioned by *Cloud Nine*'s fictional society or even freely admitted. Subjectivity is addressed further in the play, both by the focus on sexual and colonial oppression, as well as the characters' inability to get outside the systems of social norms and language which bind them so tightly to the roles society has prescribed for them, even in the second act when it seems that the characters depart (or at least consider departing) from these prescriptions. Finally, agency is also taken up by Churchill in *Cloud Nine*, reflected in the choices the characters make and in their struggles for power or change. Bearing in mind theories of gender, subjectivity, and agency, *Cloud Nine* is a text which practically begs for analysis along these lines.

The question of agency becomes quite interesting in *Cloud Nine* from the first page of the first act. Here, we are introduced to Clive, Betty, their children, Edward and

Victoria, Betty's mother, Maud, Ellen the governess, Joshua the black manservant, and family friends Caroline Saunders and Harry Bagley. Beginning with Clive, the exploration of each major character as subject capable of agency in terms of Butler's ideas on these topics proves interesting and useful.

Clive and Betty

The agency of the subject in Act One becomes a prevalent theme through lack: none of the characters seems to have it at first. Clive, the father/Father "…to the natives here/and father to my family so dear," clearly operates within and even personifies the regulatory matrix through which gender, along with race and ethnicity, becomes intelligible (3). Clive's subjectivity is intelligible in as much as he occupies a solid position within the domain of the subject. He is a masculine, patriotic imperialist, the bearer of the phallus,[7] who perceives his role as that of master, protector, and defender:

> We're not in this country to enjoy ourselves. Must
> have ridden fifty miles. Spoke to three different
> headmen who would all gladly chop off each
> other's heads and wear them round their waists. (6)

Ironically, it never occurs to Clive that nothing he does is actually based on his own ideas: his notions of what society should be like—important here since he is in Africa forcing "his" beliefs on o/Others—come directly from the prescriptions of the matrix that constitutes him. As Marc Silverstein writes, "he does not possess power, but serves as a mouthpiece for codes of cultural power speaking (through) him" (11). As stated in the

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[7] See Jacques Lacan.

stage directions on the first page just before Clive leads his family in a song dedicated to England, the Union Jack flies over the characters. Clive is not an agent of himself, but an agent of the Crown, never varying his performance of the roles of patriot, father, son-in-law, husband, or friend. It is worth noting that even his two children are named after members of the British monarchy: Victoria and Edward. Repetition of performative acts is Clive's form of existence.

Another way in which Clive represents the absence of agency is in his reaction to perceived threats from the abject. When threatened, he turns to those strict codes of constituting social norms all the more. For example, Clive is quite horrified at Edward's poor athletic abilities as they play ball:

> CLIVE. Butterfingers.
>
> EDWARD. I'm not.
>
> HARRY. Throw straight now.
>
> EDWARD. I did, I did.
>
> CLIVE. Keep your eye on the ball.
>
> EDWARD. You can't throw.
>
> CLIVE. Don't be a baby. (26)

In another scene with Vicky's doll, a similar situation occurs. This time, Clive is interested only in restoring his son's masculinity as quickly as possible. Ellen and Betty, in order to protect Edward, try to take the doll and smooth things over:

> ELLEN. Come, give it to me.
>
> EDWARD. Don't pull her about. Vicky's very fond of her. She likes me to have her.

> BETTY. He's a very good brother.
>
> CLIVE. Yes. It's manly of you Edward, to take care of your little sister. We'll say no more about it. Tomorrow I'll take you riding with me and Harry Bagley. Would you like that? (12-3)

Interesting also in terms of Clive's behavior in the face of that which threatens his position within the discourse that constitutes him is the scene in which Clive engages in clandestine adulterous behavior with the neighbor, Caroline Saunders. First, Clive begs her:

> CLIVE. Caroline, if you were shot with poisoned arrows do you know what I'd do? I'd fuck your dead body and poison myself. Caroline you smell amazing. You terrify me. You are dark like this continent. Mysterious. Treacherous. …Oh don't shut me out, Caroline, let me in. (23)

Clive feels threatened by his desire for Caroline. Perhaps he feels guilty. Perhaps he is disturbed when Caroline does not reflect his desire back to him by rejecting his initial advances. This fear leads Clive to conflate Caroline and the African continent,[8] neither of which is as pliable as he would like them to be, and neither of which yields to him completely. Eventually, though, Caroline gives in:

> Please stop. I can't concentrate. I want to go home. I
> wish I didn't enjoy the sensation because I don't like you, Clive. I
> do like living in your house where there's plenty of guns. But I

[8] This remark by Clive is Freudian in nature. Freud also describes woman as the dark continent.

don't like you at all. But I do like the sensation. Well I'll have it then. I'll have it. I'll have it— (23)

As Kritzer states, "Clive controls the language of sexual desire," here, and "Mrs. Saunders' monosyllables…are consistently overruled by Clive" (117). Though she does not like Clive, Caroline does like sex, however. And at the very moment she is finally able to admit that she enjoys sex, regardless of whether or not she is in love or even likes the person she with, it is over:

CLIVE. The Christmas picnic. I came.

MRS. SAUNDERS. I didn't…What about me? Wait. (23)

By acknowledging that she is enjoying the activity she and Clive are engaged in, Caroline displays, if only for an instant, agency. She is a subject varying its performance of the acts that fortify and support the heterosexual matrix. Consider the exchange about sex between Ellen and Betty:

ELLEN. Betty, what happens with a man? I don't know what to do.

BETTY. You just keep still.

ELLEN. And what does he do?

BETTY. Harry will know what to do.

ELLEN. And is it enjoyable?

BETTY. Ellen, you're not getting married to enjoy yourself. (56-7)

Caroline does not fear sex or loathe it as Ellen and Betty do. Betty's and Ellen's conversation here represents not only women's attitudes toward sex in Victorian times, but also the passing down from one woman to another of this attitude. Because a fear of and a dislike for sex have been consistently passed down, they have become a norms, and

these reactions to sex by women are anticipated. Thus, when Caroline does not display the reaction Clive anticipates, he becomes threatened: "Sexual enjoyment, as Clive has noted, is the man's reward for fulfilling his obligations as head of the family" (Clum 100). Women are not supposed to enjoy sex, the act being too vile and indelicate for their feminine sensibilities. When she uses language to express her pleasure, she deviates from the normal behavior associated with her gender. Clive immediately puts an end to Caroline's pleasure, reinforcing the notion that his sexual needs are paramount and leaving her unsatisfied. For good measure, Clive invokes the Madonna/whore dichotomy, reducing Caroline to the abject position of the whore:

> CLIVE. Caroline, you are so voracious. Do let go. Tidy yourself up. There's a hair in my mouth. (24)

Caroline has been put back in the inferior position of woman, a position which is not a threat to Clive's masculinity or sexual prowess, a position in which Clive remains good, and Caroline becomes bad. As Joshua states, "God made man white like him and gave him the bad woman who liked the snake and gave us all this trouble" (47).

Clive is the ultimate example of the subject without the potential to exercise agency. So limited is he by the codes for normative behavior, he simply continues to repeat stylized acts imbued with a false yet ever-present sense of power, reaping his benefits of this system as a patriarch. Clive, ironically, is powerless without his precious social norms. As a Butlerian subject, Clive has no potential for agency at all.

Clive's wife, Betty, is the perfect example of the subject within a compulsory, heterosexual cultural matrix. Here, the audience for *Cloud Nine* actually sees those

limits: Betty, of course, is played by a man in a dress. As she says at the beginning of the play,

> I live for Clive. The whole aim of my life,
>
> Is to be what he looks for in a wife. I am a man's creation as you see,
>
> And what men want is what I want to be. (4)

Here, it is obvious that Betty is just as deeply entrenched in the normative matrix as is her husband. Throughout the first act, Betty overperforms her role as wife and mother to signify that she is indeed aligned with society's expectations for women. She seems to thrive off her unhealthy tendency toward guilt, constantly criticizing, shaming, and punishing herself in the name of femininity, morality, and purity:

> BETTY. Clive you are so good.
>
> CLIVE. But are you bored my love?
>
> BETTY. It's just that I miss you when you're away. We're not in this country to enjoy ourselves. If I lack society that is my form of service. (7)

Even though Betty obviously has feelings for family friend Harry Bagley, she keeps them in check, for the most part. She even remains the picture of propriety when Ellen, the governess, confesses her love for Betty, though it is surprising that Betty is not more upset by this exchange:

> BETTY. If you go back to England you might get married, Ellen. You're quite pretty, you shouldn't despair of getting a husband.
>
> ELLEN. I don't want a husband. I want you.
>
> BETTY. Children of your own Ellen, think.

> ELLEN. I don't want children, I don't like children. I just want to be alone with you, Betty, and sing for you and kiss you because I love you, Betty. (50)

It is as if Betty, so pure and chaste, can scarcely conceive of homosexuality. In a way, Betty's calm reaction to Ellen's confession indicates that Betty, so limited by her participation in the domain of the subject, views Ellen's sexuality as silly and unintelligible, a young girl's fleeting whim.

The disconnection between Betty's sexuality and her gender that is so visible on stage is not only important for Churchill's goals with this play, it speaks to Butler's work, too. Butler writes:

> 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. […] what we take to be an internal feature of ourselves is one that we anticipate and produce through certain bodily acts, at an extreme, and hallucinatory effect of naturalized gestures. (*Gender Trouble* xv)

Here, Butler clears up some of her ideas surrounding gender performance, her famous notion that rather than being a gender, subjects act out a gender, and that a gender, rather than being anything stable or meaningful, is really just an arbitrary set of acts that are not related to sex or maleness or femaleness. They are simply long-standing, ever-perpetuated habits and norms that come to define what is feminine behavior and what is masculine behavior in a cultural matrix that can make no sense of any "gender" outside of those two, and can make no sense of any gender that does not follow from biological

sex. As a good wife, Betty is really just performing a set of acts that have come to signify wife in opposition to husband. These are not her expectations for how she should behave, but her husband's, and really all men's, and, for the most part, all women's, too. Thus, because Betty is called into being as a wife and a lady by men, she is played by a man to remind the audience of *Cloud Nine* of this interpellation. Because Butler stipulates that in order to gain agency, one must manipulate her behavior within discourse to ensure that she occupies a multitude of positions, that she cannot be pigeon-holed, and that she does not repeat the behavior that constitutes her "position" in the cultural matrix the same way every time, lest she exists only as what she is hailed as, it is obvious that Betty has no agency along these lines: "…the law of sex is repeatedly fortified and idealized as the law only to the extent that it is reiterated as the law, produced as the law, the anterior and inapproximable ideal, by the very citations it is said to command" (*Bodies that Matter* 14). Butler would argue that while Betty certainly has the power to challenge the laws governing wifehood and motherhood, she chooses instead to reiterate them in her behavior, at least in the first act, precluding the possibility of agency for the first Betty. Anoop Nayak's article, "Gender Undone; Subversion, Regulation and Embodiment in the work of Judith Butler," elaborates on Butler's insistence that agency is found in challenging constituting discourses, in varying performance in the face of the anticipation of a specific set of stylized acts. In an interesting example, she writes:

> Consider, for example, the seemingly straightforward act of a girl putting on lipstick. Rather than attribute this action to a knowable female subject, in *Bodies that Matter* Butler describes such activities as a mode of "girling" through which the "subject" is only made intelligible through

> action. […] In contrast to the notion of a subject (the girl) producing action (putting on lipstick), Butler suggests that it is the action that produces the subject, or at lest the semblance or what the subject, the girl, "is." […] But if there is something profoundly "troubling" for feminism about the negation of a female subject, its antidote lies, perhaps, in the subversion and dramatic proliferation of identity possibilities. What happens, we may wonder, to our notions of gender if the lipstick the girl in our example puts on is black and used to exhibit an alternative goth-girl identity; if she is what the media term a "lipstick lesbian"; or if the "girl" is really a boy? (460-61)

The first Betty, however, will never be a goth-girl. She will never be a "lipstick lesbian," either: she has already refused Ellen's offer to become one. Betty, in the First act, will continue to apply lipstick—in a lovely, "feminine" shade—in order to "girl" herself all the more, always reiterating the anticipated behavior of her gender.

Edward

Edward's role in the first act is extremely important to some of the questions about agency that are being explored. Obviously homosexual from a young age, Edward is a tremendous threat to his family and their reliance on gender norms to keep order within their family unit. His parents sense this, though they exercise a great deal of denial, and Edward understands that he is in danger of becoming quite a disappointment:

> CLIVE. My son is young. I'm doing all I can
>
> To teach him to grow up and be a man.

EDWARD. What father wants I'd dearly like to be.

I find it rather hard as you can see. (Churchill 4)

Edward, who is played by a woman in Act One to underscore that his gender does not follow his sex, is consistently forced into masculine roles by his father, Clive. Despite the fact that Edward identifies more with female gender norm, he is constantly goaded into performing male behavior which, to him, seems unnatural. Again, the scene with Vicky's doll is significant here:

CLIVE. What's that you're holding?

BETTY. It's Victoria's doll. What are you doing with it Edward?

EDWARD. Minding her.

CLIVE. […] No, we had you with it once before.

BETTY. […] He's not playing with it Clive. He's minding it for Vicky.

EDWARD. […] Vicky's very fond of her.

She likes me to have her.

CLIVE. Yes, it's manly of you Edward, to take care of your little sister. We'll say no more about it. Tomorrow I'll take you riding with me and Harry Bagley. Would you like that? (Churchill 13)

Often remarked upon by critics, this scene is the perfect example of gender normative behavior being forced upon a subject—a subject constituted through the same system which produces gender norms—without that subject's consent. The notion of a phallogocentric system of politics and language that serves as both judge and jury is also brought into full relief with the close examination of this scene. Moreover, it is clear

through the exploration of this scene from the play that "gender is not the casual result of sex" (Butler 6).

As has been previously stated, Edward's character is homosexual. His preoccupation with the performance of typically female gender behavior is the first suggestion that Edward's desire does not follow his gender, and that his gender does not follow his sex. This sequence, which Butler terms gender intelligibility, is a notion inextricably bound to the existence of a heterosexual matrix which undergirds language, politics, and other ideological arenas. Still in Act One, Edward has an encounter with family friend Harry Bagley which confirms that he prefers male sexual partners to female ones:

> EDWARD. Harry, I love you.
>
> HARRY. Yes, I know. I love you too.
>
> EDWARD. You know what we did when you were here before. I want to do it again. I think about it all the time. I try to do it myself but it's not as good. Don't you want to anymore?
>
> HARRY. I do, but it's a sin and a crime and it's also wrong.
>
> EDWARD. But we'll do it anyway, won't we?
>
> HARRY. Yes of course. (Churchill 33)

Focusing on Edward here, one can see that his desire transgresses normative social behavior: Harry tells him not only that it is wrong to have homosexual relations, but that it is a sin and illegal. Harry could also be referring to his own pedophilic tendencies here; either way, the suggestion of a deviation from the heterosexual matrix as sinful and wrong is present. Within a heterosexual matrix, it does not matter whom one loves or

makes love to, that love has no validity unless it can move within the matrix which rests firmly upon notions of gender intelligibility and normative socio-sexual behavior:

> The cultural matrix through which gender has become intelligible recognizes that certain kinds of "identities" cannot "exist"—that is, those in which gender does not "follow" from either sex or gender. […] Indeed, precisely because certain kinds of "gender identities" fail to conform to those norms of cultural intelligibility, they appear only as developmental failures or logical impossibilities from within that domain. Their persistence and proliferation, however, provide critical opportunities to expose the limits and regulatory aims of that domain of intelligibility and, hence, to open up within the very terms of the matrix of intelligibility rival and subversive matrices of gender disorder. (*Gender Trouble* 17)

The fact that Edward is the victim of pedophile Harry Bagley in the first act notwithstanding, that Edward is participating in sex with another man and that he acknowledges that it is wrong and bad and something to be done secretly is an indication that he, in some way, understands what it means to be outside. If only metaphorically, the very act in which he participates emphasizes on the body certain boundaries he understands should not be transgressed. Butler is interested in the internal/external binary of the body as an analogy for the inside/outside binary of the cultural matrix which regulates and interpellates subjects:

> The construction of the stable bodily contours relies upon fixed sites of corporeal permeability and impermeability. Those sexual practices in both

> homosexual and heterosexual contexts that open surfaces and orifices to erotic signification or close down others effectively reinscribe the boundaries of the body along new cultural lines. Anal sex among men is an example, as is the radical re-membering of the body in Wittig's *The Lesbian Body*. […] the naturalized notion of "the" body is itself a consequence of taboos that render that body discrete by virtue of its boundaries. […] the rites of passage that govern various bodily orifices presuppose a heterosexual construction of gendered exchange, positions, and erotic possibilities. The deregulation of such exchanges accordingly disrupts the very boundaries that determine what a body is at all.
> (*Gender Trouble* 169)

Even as a young child, Edward seems to grasp that, through his acts with Harry, he is teetering on the edge of something, or he would not be so secretive about this behavior, as he plays with dolls, for example, quite openly. It is something about the body itself that lets Edward know he is in danger of becoming abject, though he does not recognize this in so many words. He also understands that this abjection is unacceptable to his family, and others in polite society, the type of society in which he has been steeped. Consider the following sequence of lines from the first act:

> ELLEN. Go inside, Edward. I shall tell your mother.
>
> BETTY. Go inside, Edward. I shall tell your father.
>
> CLIVE. Go inside, Edward. And Betty, you go inside too.
>
> (55)

Though this point in the play comes just after Joshua's parents are rumored to have been killed, and it is not related to anything Edward has done that has offended his family, such as minding Victoria's doll, the message that Edward receives is clear: Go inside. To be outside, something Edwards seems to have a sense of and to be afraid of, is dangerous. Inside is better. Secrets are better. Edward's ultimate fear is that his secrets will be told.

In the second act, when Edward is a grown man living in England in the 1970s, he is still preoccupied with existing on the inside. Edward has become a closeted homosexual:

> LIN. You're gay, aren't you?
>
> EDWARD. I beg your pardon?
>
> […] Don't go around saying that. I might lose my job.
>
> […] I wish you hadn't said that about me. It's not true.
>
> (Churchill 69)

Edward is still paranoid that his secret might get out(side). He perceives the heterosexual matrix quite clearly: though his internal desires and his perception of his gender already make him part of the abject, Edward knows he will not survive if his abject status is revealed to others. To maintain his lifestyle, in fact his very livelihood, Edward must remain in the domain of the subject. Thus he immediately hushes Victoria's friend Lin when she asks him probing questions. It is apparent that Edward cannot survive the pressure of the closeted homosexual, pressure Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick elaborates on in her foundational book, *The Epistemology of the Closet*:

> the deadly elasticity of heterosexist presumption means that, like Wendy in *Peter Pan*, people find new walls springing up around them even as

> they drowse: every encounter with a new classful of students, to say nothing of a new boss, social worker, loan officer, landlord, doctor, erects new closets whose fraught and characteristic laws of optics and physics exact from at least gay people new surveys, new calculations new draughts and requisitions of secrecy or disclosure. Even an out gay person deals daily with interlocutors about whom she doesn't know whether they know or not; it is equally difficult to guess for any given interlocutor whether, if they did know, the knowledge would seem very important. Nor—at the most basic level—is it unaccountable that someone who wanted a job, custody or visiting rights, insurance, protection from violence, from "therapy," from distorting stereotype, from insulting scrutiny, from simple insult, from forcible interpretation of their bodily product, could deliberately choose to remain in or to reenter the closet in some or all segments of their life. (68)

Edward's only escape from the closet itself is either to kill himself or work differently within the discourse that constitutes him. Edward chooses the latter. Just before an incestuous, bisexual orgy with his sister, Victoria, and her friend Lin, Edward makes a startling assertion: "I'm sick of men…I think I'm a lesbian" (92).

Edward's transition from gay man to lesbian is so packed with meaning that it is difficult to know where to begin interrogating this statement. In terms of agency, however, it is quite clear. By naming himself, in a sense, a lesbian, Edward has found a place to exist within discourse while manipulating terms to address his unique needs and sexuality. He protects himself from becoming abject: he wants to sleep with women

now, something observers would view as normative under the assumption that his desire follows from his biological sex, which appears to be male. Edward knows that this is not necessarily the case. Before identifying as female, Edward slept with men and lived in fear of discovery, of being cast out and considered unintelligible. Now, however, he will sleep with women, recognizing that not only is he identifying with the female gender, he also desires females. Edward exercises agency in asserting that he is a lesbian, if only for a split second, by calling into question the political subject of lesbianism and disrupting the anticipation of that subject.

The question becomes, however, is Edward engaging in radical reiteration of gendered acts, varying his performance and occupying multiple positions so that he cannot be said to be anything specific by referring to himself as a lesbian? Or has Edward finally found an opportunity to exist inside and outside simultaneously? Is this how a subject can vary performance without being cast into the domain of the abject? Edward's declaration that he is a lesbian reads more like a punch line than a moment of sudden self-discovery in which Edward has finally found his niche. The advent of the pink t-shirt donned by so many fraternity boys declaring, "I am a lesbian!" is an indication that Edward's assertion cannot be taken at face value. Again, Edward's self-identification as a lesbian speaks to Butler's notions that the subject must vary performance within the constituting discourse, that even as a subject is used by language it can somehow also use language to its advantage[9]. One cannot help but wonder, is the variance of performance by a subject within the discursive limits by which it is

[9] Butler takes up language as the primary constituting force of the subject in her later works, namely *The Psychic Life of Power* and *Excitable Speech*. However, this argument is one which bears extensive analysis along the lines of agency and is not intended to be discussed here.

constituted always already simply a reinscription of that which it would attempt to repudiate? What does this mean for the Butlerian subject in terms of Butler's narrow discussion of agency throughout her work? Edward's decision to become a lesbian places him in a position of performing his gender without interrupting the sequence that desire follows gender which follows sex, at least visibly, yet it also allows him to occupy many subject positions in relation to his sexuality. What, then, do these complexities indicate in light of Butler's ideas on the agency of the subject? Edward is subversive, but is he subversive enough?

Edward, in the second act, is still operating within a heterosexual matrix, is not defending his desires, and is certainly not challenging the hegemony that might cause him to lose his job. The argument that Edward perhaps stops short of challenging constricting and limiting discourse on gender may shed some light on the contentions of Churchill critic James M. Harding:

> Indeed, though critics have argued that Churchill's acclaimed use of cross-casting "underscores the social construction of gender" and "deconstructs" the patriarchal "character of representation," this theatrical technique repeatedly clothes gay male and lesbian desire in heterosexual attire. […] Read through the lens of stage directions, Churchill's play does not deconstruct heterosexual presumptions but, rather, enforces a repressive mode of expression, a passing under duress. *Cloud Nine* makes acceptance of gay male and lesbian desire easy because it represents these forms of desire in terms that reinforce heterosexuality. (Harding 260)

Harding argues that Churchill's play simply does not do enough to stretch the limits of constituting gender discourse. However, Butler's notions of agency would seem to support Edward's decision to become as lesbian by making the discourse work for him. This leaves discussion of agency at a crossroads: how much variance is enough? If read in light of Butler's theories, Edward does not have that much wiggle-room within the matrix that interpellates him as male lest he fall into the domain of the abject, where agency becomes impossible by those not recognized as intelligible. This paradox calls attention to some of the unanswered questions raised by Butler's theory of agency.

To elaborate further on the possibility that Edward's behavior throughout the second act may in fact reinscribe the very system that threatens to hail him as abject, the failure of Edward and other characters to destabilize deeply entrenched heterosexual categories and behavioral norms manifests itself several times within the text. When readers are introduced to Gerry, Edward's partner before he declares that he is a lesbian, the heterosexual matrix as a subject for social change is left completely untouched, and is even held up by comments Edward makes, like: "… Everyone's always tried to stop me from being so feminine and now you are too. … I like doing the cooking. I like being fucked. You do like me like this" (Churchill 91). This response to Gerry's comment to Edward, "You're getting like a wife," speaks to Harding's idea that *Cloud Nine* is neither the call to action nor inspiration for social change it is often hailed as: in fact, certain aspects of the play may even impede attempts to challenge the heterosexual matrix due to their reliance on heterosexual categories to characterize homosexual lifestyles. For example, despite Edward's gender as unintelligible, according to Butlerian notions, because his desire does not follow gender and his gender does not follow his sex, Gerry

still accuses Edward of displaying undesirable wife-like traits: it seems impossible to escape traditional categories associated with dominant heterosexual ideals, even if one's gender is not intelligible in relation to those ideals. To elaborate on this tendency of *Cloud Nine* to force the play's characters into rigid heterosexual categories despite their individual desires, reflect back on Edward's line at the opening of the play: "What father wants I'd dearly like to be/ I find it rather hard, as you can see"; it is possible, upon reading this line closely, that Edward does not, as is first implied, want to grow up and be a man, but wants to be a woman—specifically a wife—instead. This could certainly be the case, especially since a wife is one of the things Clive says he wants at the beginning of the play. Could it be that the role of a wife is the role Edward actually aspires to? Will he assume the femme in the butch/femme dichotomy if he becomes a lesbian? Whether he wants to become a man or a wife, Edward is prevented from fulfilling the role he would like to fulfill; not only is this due to a fictional society as deeply steeped in the heterosexual tradition as the actual society it attempts to parody, but it is also due to the play's failed efforts to displace sufficiently heterosexual norms for gender roles and behavior: "neither the dramatic nor the performative text of *Cloud Nine* necessarily offers stable resistance to… mistaken preconceptions…" (Harding 259). On the topic of the heterosexual matrix, it seems that Churchill's text is susceptible to many of the same issues that complicate Butler's notions of agency.

To say that perhaps *Cloud Nine* accidentally reinstates some of the gender norms it attempts to call into question is a claim which bears analysis along Butlerian lines as well. While some, including Harding, argue that there is not quite enough done to repudiate heterosexual and other hegemonic cultural prescriptions in the play, Butler may

argue differently. For example, Butler has strong opinions on the topic of the butch/femme dichotomy. She believes, in fact, that this binary is actually not a reinscription of heterosexual behavior, but an opportunity for subversion and also for the subject to exercise agency. Butler writes,

> Within lesbian contexts, the "identification" with masculinity that appears as butch identity is not a simple assimilation of lesbianism back into the terms of heterosexuality. As one lesbian femme explained, she likes her boys to be girls, meaning that "being a girl" contextualizes and resignifies "masculinity" in a butch identity. As a result, that masculinity, if that it can be called, is always brought into relief against a culturally intelligible "female body." It is precisely this dissonant juxtaposition and the sexual tension that its transgression generates that constitute the object of desire. In other words, the object…of lesbian-femme desire is neither some decontextualized female body nor a discrete yet superimposed identity, but the destabilization of both terms as they come into erotic interplay. (*Gender Trouble* 156-7)

Essentially, Butler challenges the idea that butch/femme is a reification of a heterosexual model of behavior in a sexual relationship, arguing that the very characteristics that make this model appear heterosexual ought to be called into question and destabilized if gender is to be thought of as constructed. Thus "masculinity" and "femininity" become problematic as rigid and all-encompassing terms used to express male and female roles in relationships. While the butch role in a lesbian relationship is associated with masculinity in a compulsively heterosexual culture, this role is problematic as such

because the very "definition" of masculinity is that it is associated with men: the butch in the butch/femme dichotomy is a woman. The notion that the butch role is based on a heterosexual model is thus problematized: masculinity loses its meaning as a term to describe the male gender role. The role of femme also offers opportunities for resignification:

> […] the perception of "feminine" identity would be juxtaposed on the "male body" as ground, but both terms would, through the juxtaposition, lose their internal stability and distinctness from each other. Clearly, this way of thinking about gendered exchanges of desire admits of much greater complexity, for the play of masculine and feminine, as well as the inversion of ground to figure can constitute a highly complex and structured production of desire. Significantly, both the sexed body as "ground" and the butch or femme identity as "figure" can shift, invert, and create erotic havoc of various sorts. Neither can lay claim to "the real," although either can qualify as an object of belief depending on the dynamic of the sexual exchange. The idea that butch and femme are in some sense "replicas" or "copies" of heterosexual exchange underestimates the erotic significance of these identities as internally dissonant and complex in their resignification of the hegemonic categories by which they are enabled. (*Gender Trouble* 157)

In terms of *Cloud Nine*, Butler's ideas here could indicate that Edward's decision to become a lesbian really is quite subversive beyond its obvious disconnection of sex, gender, and desire. Because Edward states that he enjoys cooking, cleaning, and "being

fucked," one assumes, as mentioned previously, that Edward most identifies with the femme in the butch/femme dichotomy that characterizes the lesbian relationship. However, that the femme role is traditionally conceived of as one which bears feminine traits means that Edward, as a man, would be resignifying the femme by actually being a man. Just as the "I like my boys to be girls" example in Butler, Edward would challenge the feminine aspect of the femme role if he were to assume it in a lesbian relationship. Thus Butler may claim that Edward's declaration that he is a lesbian actually gives more opportunity for him to exercise agency as a subject than previously considered. However, the complexity of this issue comes full circle: does Edward consider himself a man based on his biological sex? Or is his declaration that he is a lesbian a final disavowal of his biological sex as a constituting characteristic completely? If Edward associates his gender with the female, and, as Butler states, sex is always already gender, then Edward considers himself a woman. Thus, if he assumes the femme role in a lesbian relationship, then Edward does reinscribe the meaning of femme in heterosexual terms.[10] He would not be exercising agency consciously in this case: in fact, it would only appear that way because outward perceptions of his biological sex, which puts Edward once again at risk of using his newfound lesbianism as a cover for his "unintelligible" sexuality. In other words, despite the fact that Edward does indeed consider himself a woman, he is played by a man in Act Two.[11] Thus, it would seem to the audience, who can actually see the male actor playing Edward in the second act, that his newfound

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[10] It is worth noting Edward *would* be exercising agency if he were to perform the femme role sexually because he would be disrupting and subverting the sexual expectations for a man.

[11] We arrive at the conclusion that Edward considers himself a woman by understanding this through a Butlerian lens: if sex is always already gender, the two being impossible to separate as the meaning of one cannot be divorced from the meaning of the other in culture, and Edward performs behavior associated with the female gender role, than he likely also considers himself a woman.

desire for women is intelligible and follows from what they perceive, based on the materiality of his body, to be his gender.

The Performativity of Gender and Theatrical Performance[12]

It is evident that the complexities of Edward's perceived gender and sex are further complicated by the heterosexual matrix in which he is forced to perform if he wants to remain in the position of the intelligible subject. Considering the performativity of the subject in Butlerian terms, however, is a reminder that there is another significant type of performance worthy of interrogation here, as the discussion of the actor playing Edward indicates; this is, of course, theatrical performance.[13]

For Butler, performance is something the subject does over and again—not by choice but because it must—to exude the subject position it assumes at birth, again, because it must.[14] Theatrical performance is something akin to Butlerian notions of performance, though not absolutely the same. The overlap of theatrical performance and gender performance in Butlerian terms is, however, important for a discussion of Butler through Churchill and vice versa.

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[12] This section serves a brief description of some of the interesting relationship between theatrical performance, gender performativity, and the destabilization and agency of the subject. For further reading, please see the bibliography.

[13] Consider Butler's poststructural definition of performativity over and againstperformance in *Bodies that Matter*: "Performance as a bounded 'act' is distinguished from performativity insofar as the latter consists in a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the performer's will or "choice"; further what is performed works to conceal, if not to disavow, what remains opaque, unconscious, unperformable. The reduction of performativity to performance would be a mistake. (234)

[14] Amy Hollywood's "Performativity, Citationality, and Ritualization" offers an excellent discussion of performativity in Butler. See works cited.

To return briefly to Butler's notion of gender performativity, it is important to remember that she believes gender itself to be a "style" initiated and maintained by normative behavior:

> …in my earlier reading of Beauvior, I suggest that gendered bodies are so many "styles of the flesh." These styles all never fully self-styled, for styles have a history, and those histories condition and limit the possibilities. Consider gender, for instance, as *a corporeal style*, an "act," as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where *performative* suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning. (*Gender Trouble* 171*)*

Performance in Butler is the way a subject survives within compulsory systems.[15] One such compulsory system is, of course, heterosexuality. Bridging the gap between Butlerian gender performativity and theatrical performance, Joseph Harris uses Butler's discussion of heterosexuality as a compulsory system as a point of departure:

> When Butler figures heterosexuality 'as both a compulsory system and an intrinsic comedy, a constant parody of itself,' her use of the term 'comedy' casts society's repeated attempts to approximate its own gender norms as a form of theatre. (Harris 68)

In *Cloud Nine*, approximating gender norms as a form of theatre is largely the basis for the actual performance of the play.

Up to this point, *Cloud Nine* has been discussed as a dramatic text in the sense that the characters and situations found on the page have served as the basis for analysis.

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[15] "Hence, as a strategy of survival within compulsory systems, gender is a performance with clearly punitive consequences," (*Gender Trouble* 178).

However, as stated, the performances that occur onstage have particular relevance to a discussion of Butlerian notions of gender performativity. Dimple Godiwala's insistence on the performance text as the site of multiple possibilities for the dramatic text has special resonance with the aims of this study:

> [Patrice] Pavis separates, in theory, the dramatic text and the performance text. The dramatic text, for him, is the verbal script which is heard or read in the performance; the performance text is all that is made visible or audible on stage; and the *mise-en-scène* is the confrontation of all these various signifying systems. Thus, the Pavisian notion of the birthing of the play is not the traditional conception of 'translating' a text into performance; the relationship between text and performance is not one of conversion, translation or reduction, but one of the *confrontation* of two *oppositional* semiotic systems. The systems of page (dramatic text) and stage (performance text) are opposed because of the difference: verbal and non-verbal, symbolic and iconic. The text entire is the *mise-en-scène*. (" 'The Performativity of the Dramatic Text' " 5-6)

Thus, through the dialectic of the page and the stage, and the destabilization that this poststructural view of theatrical performance allows, *Cloud Nine* becomes almost the ultimate example of Butler's theories of gender performativity and construction in action, and even sheds light on the way agency is exercised within a constituting system.

Consider, for example, Butler's insistence that the subject vary its performance within constituting discourse, disrupting the perpetuation of normative behavior in order to avoid being fixed in a single subject position. The stage performance of *Cloud Nine*

illustrates this point well. Though Churchill specifies that the first Betty be played by a man, and that Joshua be played by a white, for exmaple, she does leave certain casting choices up to the director's discretion. For example, though Betty is played by a man in the first act but not in the second, Churchill leaves the choice of that male actor's role up to the director in Act Two. Thus, that actor could play Cathy in Act Two, who Churchill states should be played by an adult male, or he could play Gerry, Edward's sexually promiscuous gay lover. Either casting choice would be suitable, but each would produce a different effect. For example, if the male actor who plays Betty in Act One plays Cathy in Act Two, then the behavior of the Victorian wife and mother from Act One is brought into sharp relief against the tomboyish, unladylike, and often obnoxious behavior of Cathy. The audience is struck by the way Lin talks to her daughter Cathy versus the way the first Betty spoke to her children, and is also struck by Cathy's fascination with blood, guns, and violence as opposed to Betty's constant fear of such indelicate and frightening subjects in the first act.

If the actor who plays Betty from the first act plays Gerry in the second, however, then the audience literally *sees* the juxtaposition of the family as the careful custodian of normative heterosexual values against that of the stereotypically flamboyant, promiscuous homosexual of the 1970s represented by Gerry. Again, these kinds of casting choices are not predetermined by Churchill, and could be done with virtually any of the characters in the play across the two acts. What is significant here, however, is that the effect is always different: depending on the casting choices, *Cloud Nine*, each time it is performed, has the potential to be a different play open for a "multiple reading of dramatic text enabling comment on the performative possibilities of each text" (" 'The

Performativity of the Dramatic Text"' 6). Thus, as Godiwala contends, "the dramatic text…contains a limitless performativity," an opportunity for variance which recalls Butler's prescription for the agency of the subject (6).

Of course, the sex and gender of the actors playing the characters from *Cloud Nine* onstage also have implications for a study of the play through a Butlerian lens. Just as a distinction has been made between the Butlerian sense of performance and theatrical performance, so must the differences between theatre and performance be made. Elin Diamond takes this up in her essay, "(In)Visible Bodies in Churchill's Theater." Here, Diamond contends:

> Theatre is governed by the logos of the playwright's text: actors re-present fictional entities of that text to produce a unique temporal and spatial framework or dramatic "world." Theatre spectators are encouraged in pleasurable narrativity: prompted to identify with the psychological conflicts of individual subjects, to respond to the lure of suspense, reversal, and deferral, to decode gestural and spectacular effects. Performance, on the other hand, dismantles textual authority, illusionism, and the canonical actor in favor of the "polymorphous thinking body" of the performer, a sexual, permeable, tactile body, a "semiotic bundle of drives" that scourges audience narrativity.[16]
>
> ("(In)Visible Bodies" 260)

[16] For further discussion, see also Herbert Blau's *Blooded Thought: Occasions of Theatre*, 1982, and Josette Féral's "Performance and Theatricality: The Subject Demystified," *Modern Drama* 25.1 (Mar 1982) 170-81.

For Diamond, the traditional definition of theatre invokes a humanistic view, fixing the actors and the text itself, locking it into a singular interpretation along predetermined lines. However, performance here suggests a poststructural take on the text, not unlike Butler's own postructuralist approach to constructivism, subjectivity, and agency, in which the material body of the actor is just as significant as the dramatic text itself. Consider, again, that Betty is played by a man in the first act. In the text, Betty is the very embodiment of Victorian values, and, as previously stated, a participant in policing the gender behaviors of her friends and family members. However, onstage there is another layer to the text, or even a new text in and of itself. The audience can see the disconnect between Betty's gender and the actor's biological sex: "What we *see* is what, given sexual and racial politics, cannot be seen" ("(In)Visible Bodies" 266). Thus, Clive and Betty, as they are represented on stage, *appear* to be engaged in a homosexual relationship. Furthermore, the audience sees the absence of woman: "The point is not that the male is feminized but that the female is absent. What remains is a dress, a palpitation, a scream. All encoded female behaviors adding up to a trace denoting absence" ("Refusing the Romanticism of Identity 97). In this way, the performance text of *Cloud* Nine is almost a parody of a parody, constantly revealing gender and sex to be insufficient grounds for stable subject positions. Butler and Churchill, though it is unclear whether or not they are familiar with one another's work, certainly seem to have similar ideas here.[17] It is also interesting to recall Butler's discussion of parody in *Gender Trouble*:

[17] Mark Vanden Heuvel, in his article "Performing Gender(s)," would agree that Churchill and Butler's ideas about subjectivity, for example are quite similar: "But I would suggest that Churchill's aim is more radical still, directed at undermining the very ontology of a stable subject. Especially in *Cloud Nine*, there

> Parody by itself is not subversive, and there must be a way to understand what makes certain kinds of parodic repetitions effectively disruptive, truly troubling, and which repetitions become domesticated and recirculated as instruments of cultural hegemony. (*Gender Trouble* 176-7)

In the case of Betty in the first act of *Cloud Nine*, one could argue that what makes the "parodic repetitions effectively disruptive" is the performance of the text itself, moreover the actual physical, material, anatomical body of the male actor playing "wife" to Clive.[18] Thus *Cloud Nine*, as a both a dramatic and performative text, helps demonstrate the way Butler perceives the subjects potential for agency by being open to a variety of different performance possibilities and interpretations, and by consistently adding layers that further complicate a fixed understanding of any character in the play.

Victoria

It is established that Butler and Churchill represent gender similarly: "If gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes, then a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way" (*Gender Trouble* 10). *Cloud Nine* upholds this idea through cross-casting and parody. How, then, do Butler's and Churchill's conceptions and representations of agency speak to each other even further? Returning briefly to the work

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really exists no secure signifier of race, class, sexuality, or gender, and thus the characters do not actually exist in any tangible sense. These self-defining categories come into being only when the characters act, when they develop what Judith Butler calls a "corporeal style" which allows them to assume a contingent reality. By destabilizing the notion of identity, Churchill renders it performative, and her plays are able to embody a vision of the subject as radically free to be transformed" (812).

[18] James M. Harding argues, as mentioned in this paper, that *Cloud Nine* is not subversive enough. He would disagree with the assertion that Churchill measures up to Butler's notion of parody here. See "Cloud Cover: (Re)Dressing Desire and Comfortable Subversions in Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine*."

of Edwina Barvosa-Carter, one way Butler's ideas on this subject can be interpreted is the following:

> The reflexive space created by multiple identity is available to foster agency even while all subject positions (i.e., identities) are fully socially constructed and implicated in how the subject becomes and proceeds as a subject. […] On this view, to accept the idea of a completely socially constructed subject (such as that Butler offers) does not require recourse to a pre-linguistic self in order to secure agency. Rather, it requires us to attend to the socially constituted self as *multiply constructed*—a self whose perfomativity applies not to one axis of gender norms, but to a variety of different culturally derived axes each with its own sets of linguistic tools […]. (Barvosa-Carter 179).

Because Butler believes that nothing is prediscursive, especially one's subjectivity, agency for the subject does not always already exist. Instead, agency can only be reached through performance; however, the key to a subject's agency is the performance of varied actions. One cannot obtain agency simply through the repetition of already ensconced normative behavior; one must vary one's performance of subjectivity by understanding that one is constituted as a subject along multiple axes:

> If the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time, and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style.

("Perfomative Acts and Gender Constitution" 270)

In *Cloud Nine*, there exists an interesting opportunity for the contextualization of Butler's conception of agency. Again, it is important to note, as Barvosa-Carter does at length, that Butler's ideas surrounding the agency of a non-prediscursive subject are often critiqued for their seeming abstractness: "Butler has yet to answer the question of the source of agency to the satisfaction of her critics" (178).[19] In Churchill, however, support can be found for Butler's interpretation of the agency of the subject: it is through the actions Victoria does and does not take in acts one and two that Butler's notions are upheld, and, again the two texts in question seem to speak to each other.

At the beginning of Act One, the audience or readers of *Cloud Nine* are introduced to Victoria, alternately referred to as Vicky, who is, enigmatically, "played" by a dummy in this act. Interestingly, however, despite the fact that a dummy is inhuman and, therefore, bears no anatomical distinctions that constitute it as male or female, Vicky is always already assumed to be female. Again, consider the point in the play in which Edward is discouraged from "minding" Vicky's doll: as stated before, this struggle demonstrates Edward's family imposing gender normative behaviors on him at an early age; similarly, they are also forcing gender norms on Victoria. Not only have they bought her a doll—she is barely a toddler according to stage directions—they also assume or impose on her other stereotypical female behavior she is too young to perform. For example, just before the doll debate, Clive asks Victoria what she's done today:

CLIVE. There's my sweet little Vicky. What have we done today?

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[19] Some of the most famous criticism of Butler's theories, specifically constructivism and the agency of the subject, are made by Seyla Benhabib, Nancy Fraser, and Drucilla Cornell. For further reading, see Benhabib, Seyla et al. *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange*. New York: Routledge, 1995).

BETTY. She wore Ellen's hat…

CLIVE. Did she wear Ellen's big hat like a lady? What a pretty.

(Churchill 11-2)

Once again, the hat represents Clive and his family's attempts to force standards for gendered behavior upon Vicky, despite that she is so young, and also despite that, as the audience can see, Vicky is a dummy, which the other characters do not seem to notice. It is worth noting that the family has no trouble referring to Vicky's doll as "it," acknowledging that the doll can have no gender because it has no anatomy, yet still refers to Vicky as "she."

These blatant attempts to surround Vicky with toys and to place her in situations in which feminine behavior is the appropriate mode of operation are highly significant to a discussion of agency in *Cloud Nine*. In the first act of the play, Vicky is consistently referred to as female; though a dummy, she is dressed in girls' clothes, bears a feminine name, and is seemingly being trained to begin life as a lady. The casting of Victoria in the first act can be seen as an attempt to parody the metaphysics of the substantive, a term used frequently by Butler. Because there are no anatomical characteristics upon which to base Victoria's gender—or sex, for that matter,—it seems the other characters rely on something else, something prediscursive and essential to Victoria's being. But what are they basing her gender and sex on? It is almost as if Clive and Betty, Edward and Ellen, Harry and Maud, and the rest of the cast in Act One pulled the notion of Victoria's femininity out of thin air; perhaps this is Churchill's point. Gender is socially constructed and, furthermore, this anomaly reaffirms Butler's claim that sex is, too:

> If 'the body is a situation,'…there is no recourse to a body that has not always already been interpreted by cultural meanings; hence, sex could not qualify as a prediscursive anatomical facticity. Indeed, sex, by definition, will be shown to have been gender all along. (Butler 9).

Without the pressure of a heterosexual matrix, and without the constituting power of language, Vicky's gender/sex would be left for her to decide, when she was old enough to decide it; however, the other characters need to know Vicky's gender/sex because otherwise, s/he/it is unintelligible and has no place within a patriarchal system of gender classification: Clive, the Father, could never abide a child whose gender/sex was, as Butler suggests it should be, a "free-floating artifice" (*Gender Trouble* 6). Clive, Betty, and all of the rest base Vicky's gender/sex not on a metaphysics of the substantive—there is no substantive, a fact illuminated by Vicky's character as played by a dummy. How, then, is Vicky constituted as a subject? What is the origin of her agency in the play?

Butler would argue, as evident from Barvosa-Carter's elaboration on the topic, that one's subjectivity is not derived from gender or sex, but from existing in relation to many intersecting characteristics, such as ethnicity, class, and race. Similarly, agency must also take these multiple roles into consideration. By varying one's performance of different roles, one gains agency, and thus has the power to make decisions and affect change. Kathi Weeks elaborates this idea in her book dedicated to the constituting of feminist subjects:

> As Butler repeatedly insists, "[t]here is no subject prior to its constructions, *and neither is the subject determined by those constructions*." Butler's alternative to the apparent determinism of

> thoroughgoing conceptions of social construction is to insist that this construction is an activity rather than an act; the subject is not a final product but an ongoing, always incomplete series of effects of a process of reiteration. The fluidity and instability of this artifact ward off fatalism; contingency is the antidote to determinism. The tenuousness of gender performativity opens up the field of political possibilities and affirms the potential for resistance. If gender identity is "*a stylized repetition of acts*" as "a constituted *social temporality*" rather than a pre-existing essence or a deep an intractable construction, then it follows that we can intervene in and hopefully disrupt this process through strategies of subversive resignification.[20] (Weeks 127)

To further understand how Butler's and Churchill's texts communicate on this issue, one can trace Vicky's character from the first—where it is evident that her subjectivity is not based on her gender/sex because these characteristics are socially constructed and imposed—to the second act, where a body is attached to Vicky's character giving her the opportunity to demonstrate agency.

In the second act of the play, Vicky alternately accepts and repudiates that which is expected of her as a woman. For example, her friend, Lin, who has recently become a lesbian, propositions her:

> LIN. Will you have sex with me?
>
> VICTORIA. I don't know what Martin would say. Does it count as adultery with a woman? (Churchill 75)

[20] All emphasis in this quotation was added by its author, Kathi Weeks.

Here, Victoria's first thoughts are of her husband: it is apparent that her sex life is not her own. Moreover, she can only think of this experimentation within the confines of the heterosexual matrix, wondering aloud if having sex with a nontraditional partner is adultery. According to Butler's definition—however slippery—Victoria does not have agency here; instead, she is repeating the behavior required of a wife within a traditional marriage. Victoria does not acknowledge her subjectivity along other lines during this exchange: she does not take into account the axes of class, race, or sexuality. She thinks of herself only as a wife to Martin in this instance, failing to vary behavior or to acknowledge the possibility of multiple subject positions.

However, later in the second act, Victoria becomes quite agitated as she speaks out about her marriage: "Why the hell can't he just be a wife and come with me? Why does Martin make me tie myself in knots? No wonder we can't just have a simple fuck" (84). Here, Victoria challenges the roles of a man and a woman in marriage over and against the conventions of the heterosexual matrix, asking why, just for one time, Martin can't be *her* wife; why can't Martin move for her? Why does Martin control the pace and timing of their sex lives? Why does Martin refuse to acknowledge her value as an intellectual? Such questioning of her traditional marriage represents in Victoria a variation in the repetition of gender acts, and through this repetition Victoria has agency: "And I feel apologetic for not being quite so subordinate as I was. I am more intelligent than him. I am brilliant" (84). She makes these claims without ceremony and without fear of what anyone else thinks; saying that she is smarter than her husband is an obvious transgression against traditional heterosexual gender norms, yet she does it anyway. Geraldine Cousin remarks, "All the characters manage to change at least a little during

the [second] act. The park is a kind of playground where they try out different roles and possibilities" (44). One Victoria begins to try out these different possibilities, she disrupts systems of normative behavior. Unlike Edward's, Victoria's variance of performance is not protected under the guise of appearing to be something else entirely, as Edward's lesbianism clearly is. Victoria states her beliefs outright in direct opposition to that which a "good wife" should believe.

Victoria obtains and exercises agency at various points throughout the second act, though agency is not represented in *Cloud Nine* in a continuous flow, just as Butler would argue it does not exist this way in "real" society either. It is important to recognize from the commentary on agency that can be seen as a subtext in the second act that agency, like subjectivity, identity, and gender/sex, is free-floating rather than a constant, constituting feature that insures the position of the subject within a hegemonic system of representational and identity politics. It can only occur in moments and small spurts, lest the subject who utilizes it is cast out. That agency is necessarily destabilized through the social construction of both gender and sex and, ultimately, subjectivity, does not detract from its significance in *Cloud Nine*. As Lin quips when Victoria accuses her of being "inconsistent," "I've changed who I sleep with, I can't change everything" (Churchill 85). Agency is in Butler—and is shown to be in *Cloud Nine*—inconsistent.

Kathi Weeks writes,

> Butler takes her cue not from a Marxist but from a Nietzschean problematic. As we have seen, Nietzsche was also occupied with the project that seeks an exit from the opposition between a metaphysical voluntarism and a fatalistic determinism. For his part, Nietzsche rejected

> both transcendental and mechanistic models, neither of which is able to conceive an immanent form of human agency. Butler's theory of gender performativity takes up this Nietzschean agenda—often drawing on its Foucaultian reformulation—and attempts to develop a theory of the social construction of gender that is not trapped within the familiar terms of either free will or determinism. (125)

This notion in Butler, however, raises many questions but fails to "answer" any to the satisfaction of her critics: "Discursive categories and cultural norms are, in and of themselves, insufficient mechanisms of force; that is, they cannot adequately account for the manner in which gender practices are compelled […]" (Weeks 129). Instead, Butler's theory of agency complicates—and, at times, seemingly contradicts—her insistence that nothing is prediscursive. Using *Cloud Nine* as a lens through which to examine Butler's theory of agency as a whole is interesting and clarifies some of its complexities. The discussion of Clive as an agent of the Crown and not of himself speaks to Butler's assertions of the performative nature of gender: as a subject, Clive's entire existence consists of a series of highly stylized acts that are consistently repeated and reiterated to conform to social prescriptions for male behavior. By always performing the anticipated behavior, Clive remains in the domain of the subject, but never exercises agency.

Betty's situation as a subject without agency is much the same as Clive's. Betty constantly performs her gender, even in the second act when her codified behavior is brought into sharp relief compared to Vicky's and Lin's interrogation of the traditional

female gender role. Unlike Clive, however, Betty demonstrates the potential for agency when she begins to explore new parts of herself, literally and figuratively:

> I thought if Clive wasn't looking at me there wasn't a person there. And one night in bed in my flat I was so frightened I started touching myself. I touched my face, it was there, my arm, my breast, and my hand went down where I thought it shouldn't, and I thought well there is somebody there. It felt very sweet, it was a feeling from very long ago, it was very soft, just barely touching, and I felt myself gathering together more and more and I felt angry with Clive… (105)

Edward, though closeted, is aware of the constituting forces that surround him. He *wants* to act with intentionality, but he does not know how to began. Declaring himself a lesbian does, for a moment, imply the potential for Edward to be an agent of his own desires. However, as pointed out in the discussion of Butler's ideas pertaining to the butch/femme dichotomy, Edward would need to perform the role of femme to subvert fully the expectations associated with this role, as his resistance to constituting gender norms and heterosexual expectations for behavior must be completely oppositional to indicate agency. Perceiving Edward through a Butlerian lens also speaks to the question of why some subjects who vary their performance are cast out, and why some are not. It is understood that if Edward lived as the person he wanted to, his gender would be completely unintelligible to a compulsively heterosexual society.   However, by declaring himself a lesbian, Edward has the opportunity to both vary his performance of traditional gendered acts and still remain intelligible. The new question becomes, is this really variance if it is still perceived as intelligible by the inside?

Though clarified at some points, Butler's work on the agency of the subject as explored through *Cloud Nine* is still problematic at others. For example, Victoria's situation in the play may problematize Butler's theory of agency most of all, recalling the original criticisms of her concept of agency made by theorists like Seyla Benhabib and Nancy Fraser. As the discussion of Victoria as a dummy in Act One reminds us, the most problematic aspect of agency in Butler's earlier works remains: where does agency come from in the first place?[21] If intentionality is not born of free will, and the subject is not, according to Butler, fatally predetermined, then how can a subject exercise agency? Weeks herself suggests resistance as the subject's only recourse in the face of a constituting cultural and gender matrix: "We cannot simply refuse to comply with the norms, but we can perhaps alter our performance of them in ways that call into question their status as natural and necessary foundations" (127). Barvosa-Carter, as previously discussed, views the source of agency as the ability of the subject to exist in multiple roles as opposed to being defined by just one: "It is through the overlap, intersection, mutual conditioning, and mutual critique of these different sets of socially constituted perspectives and identities that the resources for the variation on repetition—and agency itself—springs" (179). Weeks, Barvosa-Carter, and Butler view the destabilized subject as an extremely limited entity, whose narrow opportunity to gain and exercise agency is contingent on the moments in which it can disrupt the anticipated reaction to various situations and circumstances which would otherwise define it along rigid normative

[21] Most critics recognize Churchill's decision to "cast" Victoria as a dummy in the first act as a reminder of the female silence encouraged in the Victorian era, a time in which children were also encouraged to be seen and not heard. However, I think that Victoria as a dummy, with no anatomy, provides an interesting commentary on the family's insistence that she is female and their attempts to force on her trappings of femininity.

cultural lines. Thus, the source of agency itself seems to be always already displaced, inaccessible, and contingent. A close reading of Butler's earliest and, arguably, most influential, works, *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter*, both clarifies and raises more questions about her concept of agency. However, such an experiment is important: applying Butler's theory of agency leads to a deeper understanding of the crisis of the political subject as constituted by a regulatory cultural—specifically, heterosexual—matrix. This interrogation also reveals the significance of seizing the opportunity to exercise agency—especially in terms of normative gender behavior—in the hope that these norms can themselves be destabilized. A subject cannot really have agency—instead, it can demonstrate it at specific times. While agency cannot be a defining characteristic of the subject, it can suggest that perhaps that which defines the subject is contingent and can, at the very least, be challenged. Despite the largely negative acknowledgment of agency in Butler's work as a whole, there seems to be hope for the unstable subject after all.

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