Hegel on a Carrousel: Universality and the Politics of Translation in the Work of Judith Butler

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Abstract:

The purpose of this article is twofold. First, it aims to confront Hegel's ideas on the interaction between universality, particularity and singularity with those of Butler and to show that Butler's universal is dynamic and infinitely self-renewing. Second, it aims to engage with Butler's politics of translation and to demonstrate how a Levinasian perspective on Hegelian dialectics changes the functioning of the universal. In relation to this claim, the article will also demonstrate how the structural failure in translation and performativity allows for the constant circulation of the universal and, as a consequence, brings about social and political transformation.

Keywords: Hegel, Judith Butler, universality, particularity, singularity, translation, social transformation, Levinas

'I think it would not make sense for me to say that I resist dialectics. I do resist the claim that dialectics leads to teleological closure' — this is how Judith Butler responded to a question about whether she is resistant to placing her concept of the universal within a dialectical logic.[1] In thinking about universality, Butler can be placed in the line of non-totalizing interpretations of Hegel of the 1990s. As an example of this tendency, Jean–Luc Nancy's *Hegel: the Restlessness of the Negative* (1997) 'releases Hegel from the trope of totality',[2] as does Catherine Malabou's *The Future of Hegel* (1996).[3] The movement away from the critiques of Hegelian totality of Derrida, Deleuze and Foucault opens up a space for possibilities beyond the rehabilitation of binary

oppositions.[4] Butler's reading of 'Hegel without closure' allows for conceptualization of an *affection* of the universal by the singular.[5] Her concept of translation is dialectical in the sense that the Same is affected by Otherness and thus changed, in this way aligning Butler with a non–totalizing reinvention of Hegel. In order to understand how Butler's system functions, and why she is an important contemporary socio-political philosopher, we need to go back to the place of Hegel within Butler's work.

   In 1998, in her preface to *Subjects of Desire*, Butler admits that 'In a sense, all of my work remains within the orbit of a certain set of Hegelian questions: what is the relation between desire and recognition, and how is it that the constitution of the subject entails a radical and constitutive relation to alterity' (*SD*, xiv). Hegel is a recurring figure throughout Butler's writing and he inevitably structures her ideas on universality. The purpose of this article is therefore twofold. First, it aims to confront Hegel's ideas on the interaction between universality, particularity and singularity with those of Butler and to show that Butler's universal is dynamic and infinitely self-renewing. Second, it aims to engage with Butler's politics of translation and demonstrate how a Levinasian perspective on Hegelian dialectics changes the functioning of the universal. In relation to this claim, I will also show how the structural failure in translation and performativity allows for the constant circulation of the universal and, as a consequence, brings about social transformation. The former question concerns dynamics and, more specifically, the circulation between singularity, particularity and universality. The latter concerns the specific consequences of the dynamic proposed by Butler's system for politics and social change. In order fully to envisage the specific dynamic of the universal in Butler's work, Hegel's concepts will be placed within a triangular structure where each vertex is occupied by the category of the universal, the particular and the singular respectively. This arrangement will provide a useful framework that will allow us to explore the respective fates of the universal, the particular and the singular when confronted with Butler's theoretical work, and will allow for a better appreciation of how these specific terms interact with each other. In fact, we will see that in the process of universality formation all three members of the singular-particular-universal triad leave unrecognized 'remainders'. This unrecognized residue of failed particularization and failed universalization, which should be also understood as singularity, circulates between the three instances and keeps the system going *ad infinitum*. When appropriated

by Butler, Hegel's triad singularity-particularity-universality is in continual circulation.

Hegel's Static Triad: Universality-Particularity-Singularity

Hegel develops three 'moments' of a *notion* in his *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences (I): The Science of Logic*: universality (*das Allgemeine*), particularity (*das Besondere*) and singularity (*das Einzelne*).[6] The distinction between the 'universal' and the 'particular' is between the generic term (applicable to all entities, for example animal) and the specific term (applicable to some entities, for instance elephant). The universal and the particular are relational terms, that is, they are fully dependent upon each other. The universal is contaminated by the particular, that is we are not able to grasp the idea of the animal without thinking about particular instances of 'animal-ness': elephant, tiger, hippopotamus, fish. The particular, further, is inseparable from the universal (*Enc* I §24A.1).[7] In each particularity there is an implied universality. The way to arrive at universality is therefore through plurality. We can only extract the universal category by having at least two particularities from which we will abstract universality (to put it crudely: white person + black person ⇒ race, lesbian + heterosexual ⇒ sexuality, German + French ⇒ nationality). Implicit in this procedure is the negation of the singular instance of each entity: in order to identify an entity as a particular instance of the universal 'animal', its singularity needs to be negated in order for it to be named 'elephant' or even, to a higher degree, for the elephant to be named 'Benjamin Blümchen'. In such an operation, violence towards the singular is potentially involved through the negation and exclusion inevitably required to arrive at a universal. The categories forming particularities and universalities are chosen arbitrarily. In a specific cultural and historical context, certain categories are recognized and considered worth being abstracted from (like race, sexuality or nationality), while other categories are not recognized. Therefore, one is left with singularities. These are entities that do not share particular categories with any other entities and are therefore banned from the sphere of the particular: they constitute a certain trace or a remainder from the particular-universal dyad. Singularity is, however, essential and constitutive because without its exclusion and its inherent excess it would not be possible to particularize and universalize entities.

For Hegel there is no sharp logical, epistemological or ontological difference between universality, particularity and singularity. According to Hegel, the pattern of the universal-particular-singular is a triadic structure that is exemplified in all thoughts and things. Therefore, we can also map it onto the single structure of a triangle in order to observe the interaction of these three concepts with each other and across Butler's ideas. We can observe that, in Hegel, there is a constant exchange and interdependence between the universal and the particular, whereas the singular is left out of this interaction. The singular is constitutive but not relative, unlike the relationship between the particular and the universal. The universal is fundamentally dependent on the particular and vice versa. The triangle in Hegel would then be a static structure with local movement between the two instances: the exchange relation between the particular and universal. The singular, however, remains beyond this mobile pattern. This poses an important question about the fate of the singular within this potentially violent Hegelian particular-universal dyad. Violent because both particularity and universality need to exclude entities in order to operate. Any one entity can have a number of particulars but only some of them form universals (universality formation), and any one entity appears in already recognized particularities (particularity formation).[8] This means two things, which are intertwined in Butler's work — first, that some characteristics are recognized and privileged in particular political contexts and second, that only some characteristics are recognized at all, even in language, due to the cultural and socio-historical context. These are problems that Butler addresses throughout her work.

Butler's Dynamic Universal: The Politics of Translation

In *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality* (2000), Butler arrives at her concepts of universality and hegemony within a Hegelian framework. In Butler's view, universality is *performatively enunciated discursive universality*. It is, on the one hand, tied to language and our places of enunciation. It is established through reiterative speech acts, which renew the claims to hegemony through repetition. On the other hand, it is inseparable from constant bodily performativity, unwitting imitation and repetition of cultural norms. In these two areas of language and material performativity it is possible to make effective claims to universality and hegemony and to accomplish social

transformation. Language and performativity are inseparable from each other and Butler often intermixes the vocabulary of both spheres to emphasize their interdependence.

   For Butler there is a fundamental *unsurpassability* of language in politics. On a basic level, language structurally affirms itself as necessary and universal in its operation *as* language; the only means of subversion, therefore, is subversion from within the system, from within language. On an intrinsic level, as universality is rooted in language, it is therefore necessary to establish rhetoric as the assertion of universality. Butler claims that 'universality is not speakable outside of a cultural language, but its articulation does not imply that an adequate language is available'. It only means that we do not escape our language, although we can — and must — push its limits.[9] A language must therefore be found which enables subjects who are not considered as subjects to enter the sphere of political legibility. However, not only does this process require finding a language to re-introduce the excluded into the sphere of the universal, but it is also necessary to expand the notion of universality through translation. Translation for Butler is therefore the process 'by which the repudiated within universality is readmitted into the term in the process of remaking it' (*CHU*, 3). This is achieved by exposure to alterity by way of common vulnerability and by the *contagion of heterogeneity* that will spread and inevitably increase social transformation.

   Butler deals with the concept of translation most extensively in her recent book *Parting Ways* (2012). The politics of translation that Butler proposes is saliently influenced by Levinas's ethics and Walter Benjamin's concept of translation (*PW*, 13).[10] Its relation to Levinasian alterity is constitutive and it makes Butler's politics of translation an inevitably ethical project. Butler discusses the question of translation in the context of the Israel/Palestine conflict. In her view, a 'resource' — that is tradition, principle or injunction — can be made available to us only if it is first translated. Through translation a resource is introduced into our temporality (*PW*, 8):

If the ethical demand arrives from the past, precisely as a 'resource' for me in the present — a message from an ancient text, a traditional practice that illuminates the present in some way, or might dispose me toward certain modes of conduct in the present — it can only be 'taken up' or 'received' by being 'translated' into present terms. Receptivity is always a matter of translation. (...) In other words, I cannot receive a demand, much less a commandment, from a historical elsewhere without translating, and, because translation alters what it conveys, the 'message'

changes in the course of the transfer from one spatiotemporal horizon to another. (*PW*, 10–11)

The loss of the original is therefore the condition of the survival of a certain 'demand' captured in this resource (*PW*, 13). In case of injunctions such as 'thou shalt not kill', it can be understood and applied in one's life on the condition that it is translated into the concrete circumstances in which one lives. For Butler, therefore, 'there is no ethical response to the claim that any other has upon us if there is no translation; otherwise, we are ethically bound only to those who already speak as we do, in the language we already know' (*PW*, 17). The 'demand' that Butler speaks about is the Levinasian demand of the Other. As Levinas's Other is radically different from us, unintelligible and incommensurable with us, her alterity must be necessarily transmitted in translation. Even more, it must be established at the very core of transmission. In that way, the trajectory of translation is counter-hegemonic because one discourse is interrupted by another 'in order to make room for what challenges its scheme of intelligibility'. Hence, 'translation becomes the condition of a transformative encounter' (*PW*, 17) with the Other:

If a demand comes from elsewhere, and not immediately from within my own idiom, then my idiom is interrupted by the demand, which means ethics itself requires a certain disorientation from the discourse that is most familiar to me. Further, if that interruption constitutes a demand for translation, then translation cannot be simply assimilation of what is foreign into what is familiar; it must be an opening to the unfamiliar, a dispossession from prior ground, and even a willingness to cede ground to what is not immediately knowable within established epistemological fields. (*PW*, 12)

In this way translation forces an encounter with the epistemic limits of a given discourse and leads it into a crisis. In order to emerge from this crisis, the discourse cannot adopt any strategy that would try to assimilate and contain difference (*PW*, 12–13). It needs to rearrange its own terms and in this way must be a form of 'dispossession'. It thereby becomes a condition of an ethical response to the claim of the Other and a precondition of a new way of thinking about territory, property, sovereignty and cohabitation (*PW*, 11). The encounter with alterity, the possibility of an 'ec-static relationality' with that which is outside of me, is the scene where 'something new happens' (*PW*, 12).

   This proneness to change through the incorporation of the 'unexpected' is important for Butler and differentiates her own stance

from that of Hegel. Whereas Hegel accounts for change in so far as it is part of the natural dialectic of things to which change (including the destruction of an entity) is essential,[11] Butler is interested in accounting for change that is radically new and unexpected. What is happening in Butler is the reverse of Hegelian dialectics: instead of turning the singular into the same (universal), the singular transforms the universal each time it is included in the universal. This happens not only through the means of particularity (which is the instance when the singular appears or, in a political context, when it is recognized); it is also 'powered' by failure in the process of particularization and universalization, by the 'remainders' that force universality into constant translation. By this we mean the way the singular can also be seen as a 'failed' instantiation of the particular in the singular–particular dyad, and the particular as a 'failed' instantiation of the universal in the particular-universal dyad, and thus also already as kinds of 'remainder' that do not manage to form part of a stable, closed dyad. As we will see below, performative failure is an instance of this dialectic. Through this process, the limits of the current notion of universality are exposed and existing standards are challenged (although indirectly) by singularity; in this way universality revises itself 'in more expansive and inclusive ways' (*UC*, 48). Butler's reversal of Hegelian dialectics should be understood here as reversing the direction of *affection*: the Spirit is affected by the singular and therefore, in Butler, there is no universality without translation (*CHU*, 216). This different view of Hegelian dialectics is achieved by Levinas's conceptualization of the Other. The lack of intelligibility of the Other is essential for preserving the radical otherness of the Other.[12] Butler's Hegelian understanding of dialectics is thus interrupted by the influence of Levinas and changes accordingly her conceptualization of the interaction of the universal, the particular and the singular.

Hence, translation is key in Butler's universality. For universality performatively to enact itself, it must undergo a set of translations into various rhetorical and cultural contexts. It is part of the 'mechanism of renewal' in which 'the established discourse remains established only by being perpetually re-established, so it risks itself in the very repetition it requires' (*CHU*, 41). This risk, introduced by the intrinsic failure of repetition, is constitutive of the very mechanism of renewal. In other words, there is no translation without contamination. Without translation, in Butler's view, the only way to assert universality would be through colonial or expansionist logic, which would be

tantamount to a totalizing operation of the Same, to the dialectic operation of the Hegelian abstract universal towards the particular. One of the social and political aims is therefore 'establishing *practices of translation* among competing notions of universality' (*CHU*, 167). Through what she calls 'perverse reiterations', a new set of demands on universality can be mobilized (*CHU*, 40). What is essential, though, is the temporal aspect of a political or social aim, *the 'not yet' realized* of a political aspiration, of democracy for instance: 'that which remains "unrealized" by the universal constitutes it essentially. The universal announces, as it were, its "non-place", its fundamentally temporal modality' (*CHU*, 39). In Butler's view, for translation to act in the service of the struggle for hegemony, 'the dominant discourse will have to alter by virtue of admitting the "foreign" vocabulary into its lexicon' (*CHU*, 168). In order for her project of translation to enact a politics of translation, it should constitute a 'movement of competing and overlapping universalisms' (*CHU*, 168–9).

The idea of material performativity needs to be added to the notion of translation as a way to renew and redefine universality. Both *translation* and *performativity* are similar in their potential for transformation owing to the failure inherent in their renewals. Performativity for Butler means imitation or citation of norms that is their appropriation and reenactment by a subject.[13] She proposed it for the first time in *Gender Trouble* (1990) where she applied this idea to gender and tagged it as performative, that is, the subject as constituted by a series of repeated acts, rather than a gender essence that a subject possesses. This process of norm citation can never be performed perfectly in Butler's view. As she claims in *Bodies That Matter*, 'That reiteration is necessary is a sign that materialization is *never quite complete*, that bodies *never quite comply* with the norms by which their materialization is impelled'(my italics).[14] The slippage in performance is structurally unavoidable; thus 'sex [and gender] [are] both produced and destabilized in the course of this reiteration' as 'gaps and fissures are opened up as the constitutive instabilities in such constructions' (*BTM*, 10). In the example of imitating gender norms, the 'gaps and fissures' are created by the inevitable difference between prescribed sexual norms of gender identity (in the 'regime of heterosexuality'), and the successful approximation to this socially constructed model. In this space between the 'ideal' norm and the performed act, that is the 'gaps and fissures' created by the failure in the performance, variation and transformation are possible.

This reveals the structurally intrinsic but necessary and useful role of failure in citations of all cultural norms.

Failure in Butler's system is inevitable and constitutive, and it opens up a space for change in the universal, for its renewal and redefinition. Butler is looking 'for possibilities that emerge from failed dialectics and that exceed the dialectic itself' (*UG*, 198). Failure ensures social transformation and change. It is not only constitutive on the personal level of all gender enactments,[15] subject formation (*CHU*, 108) and imitation of cultural norms, but also on the level of political performativity and the struggle for hegemony. Butler, in the wake of Foucault, believes that social transformation can only be achieved from within the system. It is 'only *within* the practices of repetitive signifying that a subversive identity becomes possible' (*GT*, 199), and this is why failure is so essential for her idea of social transformation. It guarantees change as an exposure to the singular in the *contagion of alterity* rather than its exclusion. Interestingly, due to this risk within repetition, offered by its structural failure, we are given over to the unknown. Butler is affirmative and hopeful about the unknown future resulting from failure. She claims it is necessary for democracy to be unknowing about its future because it opens up questions and ensures constant renegotiation of the universal and of democracy (*CHU*, 41).

The universal is therefore a form of political performativity for Butler; it establishes itself performatively, through reiteration, like gender and other cultural norms. Its discourse works in the present and is tied to the present. The inherent failure gives the universal the power, retroactively, to deprive the past of its full control over universalist discourse and its absolutist claims. It allows for reciting a set of cultural norms that displace legitimacy from presumed authority to the mechanism of renewal. This renewal of the universal and its circulation is conditioned by the constant necessity of repetition, of re-establishing the dominant discourse. The failed performativity can produce unconventional formulations of universality that expose the limited and exclusionary features of the former universality at the same time that they mobilize a new set of demands. The final destination of the renewal, of the process of translation and performativity, is movement itself (*CHU*, 40–1). As Butler claims: 'The point of hegemony (. . .) is precisely the ideal of a possibility that exceeds every attempt at a final realization, one which gains its vitality precisely from its non-coincidence with any present reality' (*CHU*, 162). This non-coincidence is essential because it opens up a new field of political possibility.

Butler's Universal in Triangulation: the Circulation of the Singular

In her later work Butler is mainly concerned with the unrecognized singular. In her *Precarious Life* (2004), she borrows Agamben's concept of *homo sacer*, which can be defined as an entity that can be killed but not sacrificed because it does not have the status of a person, of a subject, of a victim. Butler raises a question about recognition, about who counts as human.[16] She claims that some lives are considered grievable whereas others are not, and this differential allocation of grievability 'operates to produce and maintain certain exclusionary conceptions of who is normatively human' (*PL*, xv). In Butler's view, Guantanamo prisoners, for example, do not count as human and the framework that was constructed authorized limitless aggression against 'targets', the invisible, unrecognized *homo sacer*.

Homo sacer belongs to the sphere of the *singular* in the suggested Hegelian triadic structure of the universal-particular-singular. This is because, in contrast to what is offered by the particular, *homo sacer* does not possess a shared place of enunciation such as the category of the afflicted particular, for instance victimhood. It is the singular that poses the severest political problem because there is no political space for the singular in contrast to a well-established space for the victim in Western culture. As Butler claims in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*:

Those who should ideally be included within any operation of the universal find themselves not only outside its terms but as the very outside without which the universal could not be formulated, living as the trace, the spectral remainder, which does not have a home in the forward march of the universal. This is not even to live as the particular, for the particular is, at least, constituted within the field of the political. It is to live the unspeakable and the unspoken for, those who form the blurred human background of something called 'population'. (*CHU*, 178)

The difference between *homo sacer* and victim is the question of recognition. *Homo sacer* as the singular constitutes an empty category, devoid of recognizable common features, which would necessarily transfer it to the sphere of the particular, of the victim of ethnic, sexual or religious discrimination, if she were to be recognized. In Butler's system, to ask for recognition is then to wish to join the ranks of the particular, of the ones who have their political place of enunciation and who are worthy to be mourned. For the unrecognized singular that Butler considers in her work — Palestinians

in the Israel/Palestine conflict, the afflicted in Afghanistan, Iraq and Guantanamo — victimhood would seem to be a preferable status.

There is a peculiar doubling of the singular when considered through Butler's system: on the one hand, the singular is made up of the invisible characteristics that are not shared by the particular; being without a counterpart, it is therefore left alone. On the other hand, the singular is the result of failure within the universal-particular dyad in its striving towards becoming an all-encompassing universal. In this case, the singularities are entities that do not fit into the universal. In both cases singularity is a trace, a supplement that remains unrecognized but also excessive. This peculiar doubling raises a question about the possible distinction between singularity routinely produced, as a remainder of 'failed' particularization and 'failed' universalization, and a potentially progressive singular that could be a lever of social change.[17] In Butler, the singular that demands recognition, that demands entry to the sphere of the particular and then to the sphere of the universal, amounts to a potentially progressive singular. In respect to this Butler claims 'the universal begins to become articulated precisely through challenges to its existing formulation, and this challenge emerges from those who are not covered by it, who have no entitlement to occupy the place of the "who", but who nevertheless demand that the universal as such ought to be inclusive of them' (UC, 48), and also 'the universal can be articulated only in response to a challenge from (its own) outside' (UC, 49).[18] Butler is committed to a hegemonic transformation of the epistemological horizon, a historically variable episteme, which is transformed precisely by the emergence of those singularities, those entities that are non-representable within their own terms. She pleads for the recognition that should be granted to these singularities: to be considered human and in effect to be acknowledged as victims. This is crucial because from this position of the particular these 'impossible figures' can compel the universal to re-orientate itself and change its parameters (*CHU*, 149). In this way, the universal can renew itself in a non-totalizing, less violent form which will include the singular in its ever-expanding project of translation.

In her considerations of the Hegelian universal-particular dyad, Butler claims that the tragic consequences of the formal notion of universality (abstract universality) — that is of universality that fails to embrace all particularity — is the creation of hostility towards particularity. Butler asserts that Hegel's abstract universal is not working towards 'a true and all-inclusive universality' because, by the exclusion

of the particular, it is destroying the particularity that it purported to include (*CHU*, 23–4). Butler concludes with Hegel's idea that there is a basic negativity haunting the concept of the universal; particularities appear through differential emergence: 'no particular identity can emerge without presuming and enacting the exclusion of others, and this constitutive exclusion or antagonism is the shared and equal condition of all identity-constitution' (*CHU*, 31–2). This exclusion is both constitutive and problematic as there is always a remainder that is left out of the hegemony to come back and haunt the universal.

Butler tries to solve the problem of the violent Hegelian abstract universality though her idea of *competing universalities*.[19] It is a concept of universality that emerges from the interaction between particularities. Each particular position, in order to articulate itself, involves the (implicit or explicit) assertion of *its own mode of universality*. The intrinsic competing versions of universality that a particularity contains emerge in confrontation with another instance of particularity. A good example is that of religions; indeed this is the one that Žižek gives to explain Butler's notion of competing universalities. It is not enough to claim that the generic term 'religion' is divided into multiple particularities: Judaism, Islam, Christianity, animism, polytheism, Buddhism. The point is rather that each of these particular religions contains its own universal notion of what religion is 'as such', as well as its own view on how it differs from other religions (*CHU*, 315). These competing universalities, instead of relating a particular claim to the claim that is universal, where the universal is positioned as anterior to the particular and incommensurable with it, should employ practices of translation in their struggle for hegemony. In Butler's view, it is crucial to establish these practices of translation between competing notions of universality because their claims may belong to an overlapping set of social and political aims, and therefore may be more effective in achieving ongoing social transformation (*CHU*, 166–7). For Butler, the universal is not violent by definition but there exist conditions under which it can exercise violence. This is when the operation of universality fails to be responsive to cultural particularity and fails to reformulate itself in response to cultural conditions, that is, when it fails to undergo the process of translation.[20]

If we consider Butler's ideas through the suggested Hegelian framework of the universal-particular-singular triangulation, then we can observe that there is a repeated circulation between the three concepts in the system. What Butler is trying to do conceptually,

when mapped onto this triangle, is to push *homo sacer* (the singular) towards the sphere of the recognized victim (the particular) and then, through the operation of competing universalities, from the site of the particular towards the universal (the sphere of hegemony). This circulation (singular ⇒ particular ⇒ universal) is part of the process of translation that is key to her theory of universality. It is also the process whereby the universal is constantly renewed and constantly expands. In each of the stages there is an inherent failure: singularities left out from the sphere of particularity, competing universalities devoid of hegemony. This unavoidable failure in negotiating hegemony or the status of particularity leaves remainders, and these are pushed back again to the sphere of the singular, completing the circulation. As Butler claims in her reading of the Hegelian universal: 'not only does universality see itself as negative, and thus as the opposite of what it thought it was; it also undergoes the pure transition from one extreme to the other, and so comes to know itself as transition' (*CHU*, 23). Thus the process of translation reaches the final stage of the circulation: what remains from the universal is pushed towards the singular, and failure ensures constant movement in the system. The circulation starts again: singular ⇒ particular ⇒ universal ⇒ singular and renews the universal again and again, each time with a difference. Circulation is conditioned by the constant necessity of repetition, re-establishing the dominant discourse, which introduces change due to the unavoidable failure of political and cultural performativity. A never-ending mechanism is taking place in Butler's system as applied to the Hegelian framework. The question that remains is whether this failure in the transfer of the singular towards the particular, and the particular towards the universal, is a necessary spectre, something that has to haunt the system in order for the system to function, in order to preserve the system and to keep it moving. The question of the universal is thus inextricably connected to the questions of ethics and social transformation.

NOTES

1   Judith Butler and William Connolly, 'Politics, Power and Ethics: A Discussion between Judith Butler and William Connolly', *Theory and Event* 4:2 (2000), §31.

2   This is how Butler describes Jean-Luc Nancy's work on Hegel in her preface to the paperback edition of Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire. Hegelian Reflections in the Twentieth Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012),

xviii (first published in 1999 and hereafter referred to as *SD*); see Jean-Luc Nancy, *Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative*, translated by Jason Smith and Steven Miller (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

3 Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, translated by Lisabeth During (London: Routledge, 2005).

4 See Bruce Baugh, *French Hegel. From Surrealism to Postmodernism* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 119–73.

5 See Butler and Connolly, 'Politics, Power and Ethics', §38.

6 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Logic. Part I of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, translated by A. V. Miller, J. N. Findlay, W. Wallace, T. M. Knox and H. S. Macran, electronic edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); §20, §163–§165 (hereafter *Enc I*).

7 Compare Michael Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary*, Blackwell Philosopher Dictionaries (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 303.

8 This being the case the question might reasonably be asked: how could any social transformation be possible if singularities only appear in already 'visible' (recognized) particularities? How would the 'new' come into existence at all? A philosopher like Alain Badiou would answer—through the event. In Butler, however, it is the failure of complete inclusion, an inherent failure in performativity, that is the source of social transformation as it creates 'new particularities' which, in their turn, affect the universal.

9 See Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (London & New York: Verso, 2000), 41; hereafter *CHU*.

10 Judith Butler, *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 13 (hereafter *PW*). For her acknowledgement of the influence of Gloria Anzaldúa, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi Bhabha and Talal Asad on her conceptualization of translation, see *PW*, 12–13, as well as Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (London & New York: Routledge, 2004), 228 (hereafter *UG*), and Judith Butler, 'Universality in Culture' in *For Love of Country. Debating the Limits of Patriotism*, edited by Joshua Cohen (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 49–52 (hereafter UC). With reference to Benjamin, she says 'one cannot understand the Levinasian demand except through Benjamin's account of translation. (. . .) Translation makes the demand available' (*PW*, 13); see too UC, 45–52. On the genealogy of Butler's concept of translation see Moya Lloyd, *Judith Butler: From Norms to Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press), 150–4.

11 See Michael Inwood, *Hegel* (London: Routledge, 2002), 429.

12 Compare Colin Davis, *Levinas. An Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), 40–1.

13 The idea of 'citationality' or 'iterability' is of course borrowed from Jacques Derrida's work, mainly from 'Signature, Event, Context' in *Limited Inc.*

(Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 1–23. We indicated in the introduction that Butler takes a different stand to that of Derrida on the question of dialectics in Hegel. Nevertheless, Derrida has had a significant influence on many aspects of her thinking. Three important ideas from Derrida should be mentioned in this context: 'democracy to come' (*la démocratie à venir*), that is Butler's *the 'not yet' realized* of democracy (*CHU*, 39); the importance of contextualization; the question of repetition as 'powered' by failure that is described in 'Signature, Event, Context' as the condition of 'citationality'. On the importance for Butler of Derrida's discussions of contextualization and citationality, see in particular Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech. A Politics of the Performative* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997).

14 Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 1–2; hereafter *BTM*.

15 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 200; hereafter *GT*.

16 I deal here only with Butler's appropriation of *homo sacer* and will not comment on Agamben's original concept or the relationship between the two thinkers. Let us briefly note, however, that the question that Butler poses throughout her work: 'who counts as living' or perhaps, as in the case of *Precarious Life*, 'who does *not* count as living', is precisely the question of *homo sacer* ('bare life') discussed in Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998). Butler critically considers Agamben's ideas from *Homo Sacer* in the context of the Palestine/Israel conflict and the 'war on terror' and in a way continues Agamben's reflection on 'bare life' in the context of American politics after September 11. For extended discussion of Agamben's ideas on *homo sacer* in the context of Guantanamo prison see Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London and New York: Verso, 2004), 60–100 (hereafter *PL*).

17 I would like to thank an anonymous *Paragraph* reviewer for this invaluable comment.

18 This comes down to the question of political agency that is not very clear in Butler. This is partly because it is directly related to an account of collectivity, which in turn is missing from her philosophical system.

19 This concept of 'competing universalities' resembles some aspects of Hegel's 'concrete universal' by which it was probably inspired. It is a notion that is highly equivocal in Hegel's work (see Michael Inwood, *Hegel* (London: Routledge, 2002),366–80).

20 Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 5–7.