

Mimesis: Judith Butler, Visual Practice, Tragic Art

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by

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Abstract.

The project grounds the use of mimesis in my video art practice. In the written element I query equivalence between mimesis and performativity in Judith Butler's conception; I consider the tragic and hyperbolic faculties of these, as ways of promoting expansion of context in received convention. My video clips have performance in them and mime destructive regimes in mainstream conventions of visual culture, of sexual identity and of political position, to challenge these. They mobilize convention and deviation from it, through ineptitude of performance or my ambiguous relation to the convention that I use. Butler conceives the generative possibility in regulation (prohibition and/or "law"). This is my source for prioritizing failure, and conceiving mimesis a practice of power in modification.

Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe is an additional source in my writing, and Luce Irigaray a hovering presence. They are deployed to support my conviction that speculative theory mimes tragic art; Hegelian dialectical philosophy and Freudian psychoanalytic discourse founded in tragic art endow a mutual system of logic and belief that mobilizes rejection of *difference*. In these tragic discourses mimesis links death and desire. As a force in hyperbole and the constitutive site of all discursive and artistic conventions or tropes, mimesis may suspend as much as confirm the very truths it promotes. Mimesis may *turn* or exceed anything that can be mimed - I propose.

Throughout the project (art practice and written element) I ask - *how is it possible to re-conceive the terms of the representational conventions to which I object without sharing in the mechanisms that denote those terms?*

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For Ziva and Aaron Tomares my parents.

Introduction.

The dissertation questions mutual determination between art practices and publics - organized socio-cultural terms. Concentrating on limit-practices in art and in subjectivity - unintelligible identities, it interrogates the relation between ancient Greek tragic art and speculative philosophy, stipulating that this relation is mimetic, that speculative philosophers mime tragic art in the process of speculating upon it to determine and theorize psychic life and subject formation. Critically exposing the speculative philosophical momentum as a tragic mimetic mode of definition, I consider how speculative philosophers deploy art practice - tragic literature to render symbolic intolerability, exclusionary-exclusive schemes of identity and representation. And, how mimetic speculation can be done alternatively - to expand symbolic tolerability and render more inclusive publics, via Judith Butler's interpretation of the Sophoclean figure of Antigone in *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death*. My primary concern is links between theories of *representation, desire, the subject* and *subjection*. I consider how *desire* emerges as formative power in speculative conventions, how *subjections* proceed in both *complicity with* and *defiance of* symbolic imperatives, how symbolic systems are constituted by their limits, and how mimetic appropriations in symbolic imperatives may expand the limits of representation. My aim - to develop strategies of modifying received symbolic terms and systems, to expand ideas of *context* and *convention*, to deploy these in my visual art practice.

Representation is explored as a function of speculative interpretations of tragic art in the work of Judith Butler, Jacques Lacan, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Suzanne Gearhart, Renee Girard and tangentially Sigmund Freud and Luce Irigaray's (i.e. without citing Freudian and Irigarayan texts on tragic art). These thinkers make connections between tragic art, mimesis, *death, desire, sex* and symbolic tolerability. I query these connections. Hegelian speculative dialectic is crucial to these various thinkers while Irigaray's mimetic strategy of reading the philosophers is critical to my own readings, because Irigaray proffers a feminist symbolic proposition through it. Lacan's conception of representation is likewise important, productive in thinking

visual cultural norms and visual art practices. In breaking the connection between *signifier* and *signified* Lacan facilitates a dynamic conceptual system of signification, which takes references and referential links as never stable. In stark contradiction to this though Lacan maintains that incestuous desire is the permanent conceptual bearing to the establishment of *symbolic law* - possibilities and limitations to intelligibility in representation. In incestuous desire Lacan conceives a desire for self-destruction and more than simply an intolerable deviation in the possibility of kinship formations. Symbolic law in Lacan's view refers *and* fails referring to incestuous desire. Incestuous desire is forever hampered from fully manifesting symbolic terms in this view, which erases *incest* from *deviant desire* and alludes to other sexual deviants who are not incestuous, to preclude their possibilities in symbolic terms. This motivates my interest in speculative philosophical interpretations of tragic art. I consider the status of *deviation* in the organization of heterosexually hegemonic socio-cultural terms - how unintelligible identities manifest in terms of *deviation*, and how these limit subjects and their limit practices challenge hegemony in its organization of symbolic terminology.

Judith Butler is my choice thinker for this project. Butler consistently engages hetero-normative imperatives in the tropological confluence of *death* and *desire* in Western metaphysics, which she does in terms of queer feminist agendas. Butler's conception and deployment of the performative power of language are productive in terms of interpreting art practice, contemporary visual art and ancient Greek tragic art. In *Antigone's Claim* Butler elaborates incest taboo as the regulative term of hetero-normative discourse and *desire*, as the emblem of heterosexual intelligibility and cultural coherence, its own and that of its alternatives. Reading in Sophocles, Hegel and Lacan's texts, Butler considers how the coherence of heterosexuality is a function of its incoherent alternatives in deviant desires, how the norm and its deviation are mutually determined in tragic art and in its various interpretations, and how mutual determination as such may hamper hetero-normative law - the privileging of heterosexual desire.

My understanding of mimesis prizes Butler's view of the generative power of the incest taboo (2000a, 66-68). It allows me to think that regulations establish and facilitate the terms of transgression in their own agenda, that efforts to work *properly* within received convention inevitably appear with their own variation. The more you attempt to accommodate convention your chances of varying convention increase. This notion that I take from Butler facilitated my readings in Butler's texts. I think that in her writing Butler's steadfast espousal of the conventions that she deploys transforms those conventions. In my own writing I develop this. I propose that in conceiving performativity as she does, Butler mobilizes it as a mimesis and power of modification, a mimetic strategy of alteration in language (grammar), normative discursive convention, propriety standards and conceptions of *desire*.

Performativity is a function of *iterability* - she says (BTM, 95, 244n-7). Iterability, coined by Jacques Derrida, is "the logic that ties repetition to alterity (Derrida, 1977, 180)" - the idea *identity* consists of that which deviates from *identity*. It promotes Derrida's conception of *context* as a temporally specific but never absolute perspective (177-178). Derridean iterability is a version of mimesis, which withdraws mimesis's sexual edge - I suggest. In *Antigone's Claim* iterability emerges as the social feature of performativity (Butler, 2000a, 29) - the idea that performing the symbolic kinship norm, like performativity in any norm, transforms that norm because norms are founded (depend) upon social deviancies, are temporally specific and context-based; and contexts never finite. In *Antigone's Claim* Butler mobilizes the ambiguities, excessiveness and sexual features of mimesis. Her reading in the Lacanian conception of symbolic law implements iterability - I propose. Butler mimes the Lacanian symbolic proposition by performing its alternative as inherent to its claims. I show how Butler's commitment to the Lacanian symbolic function (*to represent the un-represent-able*) questions the constancy of the Lacanian imperative to depict Antigone as unintelligible, revealing instead, that Antigone's desire and her speech are recognizable and coherent from Lacan's perspective, hardly enigmatic as he claims. This kind of reflexive turning is evident throughout the dissertation. It is the speculative double gesture, a mimetic

performative mechanism of redefinition I suggest. It emerges as a strategy in my art practice.

The dissertation was written in conjunction with the production of my visual art practice. Analysis of speculative philosophical mechanisms of inquiry and definition was guided by the direction of my artwork. Alternatively the visual practice was informed by speculative mechanisms as these were explored through research and in writing. As the project progressed questions about the representation of art practice were raised - *how to represent an artwork in the act of writing about it, what this does to the artwork?* I explored these as speculative concerns in themselves, through Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's conception of speculative philosophical desire and exegetical approach.

For Lacoue-Labarthe the speculative is always Hegelian, and a violent mechanism of inquiry directed at all things unknown particularly at *death* and *desire*. Lacoue-Labarthe thinks that Hegelian interpretations of tragic art produce speculative conceptions of *desire* in terms of *death*. He explains that Hegel, who venerates tragic art because he thinks it an exemplary rendition of (the concept of) *death*, mimes tragic art in his writing, reduces tragic art to a speculative object of inquiry, subordinates it to his claims, which is a kind of death. Hegel denies the constitutive status of tragic art in his project, this is the performative gesture, which constitutes speculative philosophy in its violent momentum Lacoue-Labarthe suggests (208-209). He conceives *hyperbologic* to immobilize this violent trend. In hyperbologic Lacoue-Labarthe re-elaborates the speculative dialectic in its reduction (he says "attenuation") and subordination of tragic art, so that each in its turn - speculative philosophy and tragic art - subordinate the other (230, 234). This immobilizes subordination itself, it equates the two conventions and prevents exclusionary systems of representation (235). Hyperbologic emerges in my visual art practice but the difficulty posed by speculative theoretical writing about art practice remains in the dissertation. In the final chapter I speculate about my own art practice. In this respect the dissertation performs (exemplifies) the violence of the speculative that it interrogates.

This ambiguity of representation is raised throughout the dissertation. I do this in terms of the concept of mimesis, honing its sexual features. In my third chapter, by querying speculative conventions of interpretation in the extended discussion about symbolic kinship law - how speculative philosophers mime tragic art in efforts to determine fundamental laws that regulate *desire*, and how they mime each other to alter regulative conventions and symbolic law. In the second chapter representation is elaborated as a function of discursive tropes. I consider how discourse forms-performs (linguistically constitutes) *the subject*, *performativity* itself and other tropes like *sex*. And how these terms inform hetero-normative law and its re-signification. This chapter presents performativity in language as a tragic convention that dooms its users to reiterate the terms of their own demise yet which itself is doomed to “die” through linguistic *turns* and unpredictability of usage. The first chapter explains how the speculative works (functions). I consider how speculative philosophers mobilize the violent and sexual implications of mimesis, and how they represent each other. First, how Butler simultaneously embraces and objects to Irigaray’s mimetic practice of reading Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s text. Further I suggest, Butler embraces Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological conception that elsewhere she deplores, only to criticize Irigaray’s mimetic strategy that she herself (Butler) mimes. In the latter part of the chapter I present Lacoue-Labarthe’s conception of hyperbolic. I consider how using it, Lacoue-Labarthe redefines *mimetic desire* in Renee Girard’s conception, to reduce Girard’s violent sexist ideology, a move that like Butler’s re-elaboration of Lacanian symbolic law, sustains the question of mimesis as a violent speculative mechanism. These engagements suggest that the speculative is a strategic sway, ad hoc affiliations created to promote alternative agendas where *the alternative* is always a relative stance, though precisely tethered to the ideology, which it comes to replace. The speculative as such emerges in my art practice to consider possibilities of altering received visual cultural norms. Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological approach emerges in my artwork in terms of *visibility*, as a facet of Butler’s thought and as the façade of *possibility* i.e. to facilitate new norms. My artwork produces the confluence of mimesis and desire to reclaim sexual erasures in received visual conventions.

In the next part of the introduction I review the chapters of my dissertation through the chronological development of their themes.

Chapter Plan.

'The speculative Modus Operandi: Judith Butler, Luce Irigaray, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe' is the title of my first chapter. It has two sections that together impart the speculative modus operandi - the manner by which speculative philosophical thought functions (is done). Each section highlights and expounds an aspect of the speculative modus operandi. The first is *objection*, the second *hyperbole*, to argue that speculative thought is *conclusive opinion based on inconclusive evidence* and accomplished mimetically and in terms of opposition. I mobilize this argument by comparing Butler, Irigaray and Lacoue-Labarthe in regard to their various positions on mimesis, what each thinks of mimesis and how it emerges in each discursive practice. The chapter is based in the assumption that Butler, Irigaray and Lacoue-Labarthe proffer projects that are at once *the same as* and different from each other in terms of deploying mimesis as a critical discursive strategy. And, that Butler's is the most critical of the three. Butler's thematic orientation and accomplishment - queer politics and its installation in the philosophical canon makes her mimetic discourse so critical in my opinion. Critical mimesis emerges as an objection in both Irigaray's and Butler's writing, which establishes theirs as archetypal speculative discourse. Focusing on Butler I elaborate her methodology as an open-ended objection (unresolved) in the first part of the (first) chapter. In the latter part of the chapter Butler proceeds devoid of objections in a comparison with Lacoue-Labarthe who conceives speculative mimetic opposition/s as crucially uncontrollable.

I begin the first chapter by briefly establishing the three theorists in a mutual effort to critique the negative attribute of *difference* in the speculative canon understood as the Hegelian dialectic, and then I move to focus on Butler. This part of the first chapter is titled 'Butler's Objection.' It involves three texts in which Butler explicitly objects to Irigaray's mimetic style of writing, and a fourth pertaining indirectly to Irigaray's methodology. In "The Future of Sexual Difference: An Interview with Judith Butler and Drucilla Cornell" (Cheah and Grosz. 1998) I review Butler's notion that in miming the heterosexually foundational discursive traditions Irigaray is

masochistic-sadistic. I consider the debate this entails, which explores how if at all performativity in Butler's conception relates to Irigaray's deployment of mimesis as a strategy. Proponents of Irigaray's deployment of mimesis in the interview consider that through it Irigaray prompts identification and ambiguity to tender an inclusive discursive future. In objecting to this Butler endorses Lacoue-Labarthe's position on identification, which implicates her objection to Irigaray's mimetic method in an embrace of Lacoue-Labarthe's notion of identity politics. Despite the brevity of this textual moment I think it enacts a mimetic strategy. I develop this.

Looking at Butler's "Sexual Difference As a Question of Ethics: Alterities of the Flesh in Irigaray and Merleau-Ponty" (Butler, 2001) I reveal Butler's pronouncedly ambiguous analysis of Irigaray's mime in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *intertwining*. Elaborating the mechanics of Butler's critical methodology I suggest she draws uncritically from Freudian psychoanalysis to stage a debate in and through her text. Considering Butler's queer political orientation in that debate and her later work I think that Butler's objections to Irigaray express a concern with the unknown future of discourse and her obligation to Irigaray; I suggest that Irigaray facilitates the future of Butler's discourse and that Butler acknowledges this in that text via her objections. However considering that Irigaray engages Merleau-Ponty's sexist views accordingly I go to a text in which Butler's position on Merleau-Ponty is established without Irigaray, to see if Butler's embrace of Merleau-Ponty persists outside the double bind of her speculative methodology - *an objection that implicates an embrace*.

Reviewing "Sexual Ideology and Phenomenological Description: A Feminist Critique of Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception" (Butler, 1989) I elaborate Butler's extensive (initial) objection to Merleau-Ponty's sexist trends and the course of her ultimate endorsement of his later, posthumously published project; Butler elaborates her conception of the cultural construction of sex in terms of her objection to the early Merleau-Ponty. To fuel the connection between mimesis and the cultural construction of the body (sex), I move to "Bodies That Matter" (BTM, 27-55). My discussion explains Butler's objection to Plato's conception of mimesis as *contiguity* - indisputable referential relations between discursive and "real" bodies. This objection

emerges as an embrace of Irigaray's mime in Platonic mimesis. However, considering that Irigaray mimes Platonic contiguity Butler also objects to it in Irigaray's text. Nevertheless and ambiguously indeed Butler embraces Irigaray's mimetic engagement with Plato by miming it herself. As a preamble to my following chapters I propose that Butler renders mimesis a viable practice of critique, not despite but because of all her objections to deploying mimesis in feminist politics and strategy.

The second part of my first chapter is titled 'Hyperbologic.' It reviews "The Caesura of the Speculative," the third chapter in *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics* (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1998, 208-235). Considering that in my opinion both Irigaray and Lacoue-Labarthe inform the mimetic feature of Butler's oeuvre, it is meaningful that Lacoue-Labarthe does so without drawing Butler's objections. It leads me to foreground Lacoue-Labarthe's point of view in this part of my (first) chapter. I do so in an effort to convey Lacoue-Labarthe's position as realistically (loyally) as I can, by maintaining his logic, or structural arrangement (hyperbologic). "The Caesura of the Speculative" proceeds in a series of arguments that repeat the same idea by varying it with each repetition. The argument is that mimesis and tragic art are implicated in speculative theory because speculative philosophers mime tragic art. This remains the same throughout Lacoue-Labarthe's chapter. Its variations pertain to how tragic art is implicated in speculative theory, how speculative philosophers deal with tragic implications in their own thinking, what this does to their work, and what this demands of them according to Lacoue-Labarthe.

I begin 'Hyperbologic' by elaborating the crisis that Lacoue-Labarthe perceives in speculative discursive conventions, and his strategy of addressing it. Briefly reviewing "The Caesura" from beginning to end I introduce the crisis and strategy together as they are one and the same. Lacoue-Labarthe conceives the Hegelian dialectic as a *constraint of opposition* - a logic that arrives from tragic art but which renders a subordinating objection to tragic art in its Hegelian manifestation. Lacoue-Labarthe elaborates this by modifying it, by deploying hyperbologic - the logic of oppositions that exceeds oppositions, as a strategy of re-elaboration, an

unacknowledged critical practice of mimesis that hampers exclusionary representational conventions.

Following this I return to the start of Lacoue-Labarthe's chapter. I provide an example of hyperbologic in his *speculative tragic matrix* using the seventh chapter of Suzanne Gearhart's *The Interrupted Dialectic: Philosophy, Psychoanalysis, and Their Tragic Other* (Gearhart, 1992, 206-182) to analyze it. Gearhart explains how Lacoue-Labarthe's matrix establishes tragic art in terms of an *irresolvable ambiguity* that challenges speculative philosophical claims to truth. Considering this to be the tragic implication in speculative conventions, Gearhart elaborates it in terms of *radical difference*; *radical difference* she suggests, prompts identicalness between hyperbologic and the Hegelian dialectic, which is also identicalness between tragic art and speculative philosophy. I propose that while Gearhart's reading in Lacoue-Labarthe affords a critical possibility it reveals that Lacoue-Labarthe finally distinguishes hyperbologic and the dialectic in terms of mimesis. This leads me back to the beginning of "The Caesura of the Speculative" again, to consider if this is true.

I broaden the crisis in Lacoue-Labarthe's description of the speculative, in terms of *desire to oppose and master death* and this, as a structurally reflexive negative mimesis. I explain the performative element of the Hegelian dialectical - a gesture of refusal that Lacoue-Labarthe sees repeating in the foundational processes throughout the philosophic generations prior to Hegelian dialectic, (in Platonic mimesis, Aristotelian mimesis and catharsis, in the psychoanalytic concepts *identification* and *repression*). And, I explain how hyperbologic is meant to correct this program; I provide more examples of hyperbological exchanges, first my own and then Lacoue-Labarthe's, to show how re-elaboration disarticulates speculative philosophical truth-claims. For Lacoue-Labarthe Sophocles's *Antigone* is the definitive hyperbologic exchange. I show how it facilitates his modification in the Rene Girard's *mimetic desire* to render inclusive discourse; I begin this discussion by elaborating Lacoue-Labarthe's position on interpretation as an act of violent appropriation and misrepresentation, I proceed by elaborating Girard's conception of *mimetic desire* and end with Lacoue-Labarthe's interpretation of the Sophoclean dramatic image of Antigone. I show how

Lacoue-Labarthe implicates hyperbologic in Girard's conception and then I compare Girard's conception of mimetic desire with Lacoue-Labarthe's, praising Lacoue-Labarthe vis-à-vis Girard but criticizing him in a comparison with Irigaray's mimetic practice. The comparison between Irigaray and Lacoue-Labarthe focuses on their varying conceptions of *crisis* (without actually bringing in Irigaray's texts). Assuming (adopting) Lacoue-Labarthe's understanding of hyperbologic I consider that identicalness between his project, Butler's and Irigaray's pronounces vast differences between the three. I suggest that in challenging speculative truth claims (theory) Lacoue-Labarthe affirms the tragic implication in speculative theory while denying the sexual implication in tragic art. Considering that this makes tragic implications conclusive, which is contrary to Lacoue-Labarthe's unacknowledged intentions, I rearrange his matrix to improve his deployment of hyperbologic. Proposing a mimetic hyperbological matrix instead of a speculative tragic one, I prioritize mimesis instead of tragic implications. Finally, I consider that Butler and Lacoue-Labarthe have mimetic practices that relate hyperbologically.

In the second chapter titled 'Butler's "Theory" of Performativity,' I consider the linguistic facet of power in Butler's conception of performativity. Butler conceives the generative power of language as the inherent possibility of alteration in linguistic-discursive conventions. I am interested in this for my art practice and propose that any convention or practice, popular view or dominant custom, may be deployed in terms of its own possibility of variation. The problematic I address in the chapter is around Butler's paradoxical and binding conception of performativity. She sees the subject bound to, formed and informed by the terms that describe it in discourse and in social injunction or ruling even if these are demeaning. She says interpellation is a public "queering" (BTM, 232) implying that performativity is an embodied self-negating power. Her conception of *the turn trope* suggests that *convention* imbricates customary practice and is the medium (substance) via which custom is maintained. This seems to enable the subject. The subject can manipulate its definitive terms via the manner it uses these terms. But elsewhere Butler says that performativity is a system of tropes. Considering that rhetoric diminishes the performance, Butler suggests that language,

discourse, any established convention is a reflexive economy, self-sustaining and circular, that conventions create their users and doom them to take on their terms - tropes-ideologies, that regardless of usage given, received conventions prevail. I proceed then, in answer to this question - *how is it possible to work an unaccommodating system that sustains one, within which one is permanently lodged regardless of will or desire, when working the system and any effort to renovate it entails being consonant with it and its terms?* In answer I combine and mix (edit) Butler's various texts in an arrangement that foregrounds her conception of performativity as a function of iterability as understood by Jacques Derrida. Butler's convergence of performativity and iterability explains and renders the power of discourse *to turn words into action* as an all-encompassing cumulative force that wavers in its own sweeping determination. Performativity as a function of iterability demands an explanation in the metaphysical terms: ethical *being*, presence and absence, life, death, failure, infinitude, the identities of temporality and of sex, of identity itself, of the sexual body and of sexual practices; these, bound in a tight web of relations are still malleable in Butler's formulation.

I begin the second chapter by introducing performativity as a revision in polysemy and a death driven ritual regulated by repetition but with unforeseen consequences. I also establish the themes that repeat throughout the chapter: failure is possibility, iterability is recitation in acts, performativity as repetition is re-formulation and *historicity*, historical labour, a genealogical quest devoid of a subject, agency - a paradoxical struggle in violations fashioned in temporality. The opening discussion considers how Butler's understanding of Hegelian desire motivates her methodology and her work in binary oppositions, and how these establish her ethical position and reaction to hetero-normative law (social and discursive conventions that regulate sexual practices by foreclosing homosexuality and lesbianism).

Honing ambiguity as the structure of power in Butler's conception I consider how mimesis in Butler's project resignifies the abject element in hetero-normative law. Considering the psychoanalytic trope of identity, I proceed in respect to the question - *what is subversive repetition?* I elaborate Butler's conception of *tropological turning*,

the reflexive, performative and mimetic status and structure of the *turn trope*. I explain the tropological inception of the subject and how the subject's fictional status is the generative/dissimulative capacity of tropes i.e. tropological power. I explain the power of tropes as normalizing operatives - linguistic components that perform "desirable" tasks or that advocate the terms of the system in which they emerge, and conversely that tropological power is an action of modification in *operational environment* - the established version of *reality* that enables tropes to be recognized and useable linguistic terms despite their ontological uncertainty. I consider how tropes may extend norms or the conventions in which they are used and to which they belong and are bound. Following this, I consider power in the form of disappearance, taking Butler's interpretation of Irigaray's mimetic engagement of Plato in "Bodies That Matter" as an example of this. My discussion considers various terms of performative power (*assuming, owning, transferring, strategic overlap of strategy and crisis*) and elaborates how the vanishing terms in a text may be deployed as a medium of its contrary power. I elaborate Butler's criticism of this in Irigaray's usage and consider how it, nevertheless, informs Butler's *phallic lesbian*, and, how via the *phallic lesbian*, Butler suspends the power of originality in both Plato's and Irigaray's sexual prohibitions. This explanation considers slippage between *act* and *identity* to propose mimetic possibilities that exceed mimesis in binary hierarchical sexual terms.

In conclusion to my discussion about Irigaray I resume with the generative division in the structure of power - Butler's notions of *irresolvable ambiguity* and *exceedance*. Next I explain iterability as a paradoxical hindsight and elaborate its ethical import, the implication of ambiguous presence and of *death* as life affirming perceptions; how iterability promotes contextual infinity as ineptitude for Derrida. Considering that iterability is linguistic repetition (among additional things), I explain the tropological status with which Butler endows performativity; as a function of iterability performativity is an operation of *citational chains*, remnant acts of past, disembodied practices. Performatives such as *agency, intentionality, the subject, performativity* itself imply embodied action yet as tropes these cancel their own implication; tropes annul the body they imply. I explain how performativity, understood

as *historicity* (“authenticity”) and as *historical sediment* (re-contextual-ity) nevertheless empowers the subject, is a non-bodied effort in or of words to accommodate and fit in the “present,” a process of renewal happening continually in language to signify (the meaning of) *intelligibility* in language, discourse, and other exchanges, as the only viable feature of performative power. These establish Butler’s call to think performativity an operation of resignification in social ritual. It promotes a political stance that alters the binary self-contradictory structural division in power in theories of (psychic) subjection. After considering this I elaborate temporality as an additional alternative (to the binary division in the structure of power).

The discussion on temporality entails the identity of temporality and of sex understood as constructions. Considering that the concepts of *identity* and of *difference* are constructions that imply a disconnection, I explain Butler’s conception of temporality as an operation of performative power - the synthesizing (temporal) process that animates sexual norms, and how temporality alone - the fact of *being* in time enables reworking the tropological facet of performatives to facilitate *deconstitution*, the undoing of constitutive conventions. As (provisional) closure to the sweeping power of performativity-iterability I return to Butler’s Hegel - the dialectic understood as a function of desire in which absolute dependency between the subject and alterity renders mutual *displacement*. I embrace this conception however I consider it is inapplicable in practice considering the fictional status of the subject in Butler’s oeuvre. This leads me to analyze the relationship between art practice and critical theory, to suggest that this relationship is not necessarily mimetic (as Hegel, Lacoue-Labarthe and Gearhart would have it) and that tropes are instabilities in any text, visual or linguistic.

In the preamble to my third chapter I introduce Butler’s deviation in structuralism and the direction of her interest in Hegel’s interpretation of the Sophoclean image of Antigone, which is also my own. My third chapter is titled ‘Butler’s Antigone.’ It presents a very close reading of the first two chapters in Butler’s *Antigone’s Claim, Kinship Between Life and Death* (2000a, 1-55), a mimetic reading subdivided into five sections using titles. The section-titles highlight the central idioms.

All the sections except for the third (titled 'Confounding Distinctions') follow the chronology of Butler's text. Butler's text is itself mimetic, a rereading in Hegelian and Lacanian interpretations of Sophocles's *Antigone* though Butler also reads the Sophoclean text directly mobilizing an alternative interpretation to the one that Hegel establishes, and to Lacan's, which disputes Hegel and Lacan's interpretations despite being set in Hegel and Lacan's terms of interpretation.

Butler indicates that her own interpretation of the Sophoclean image of *Antigone* compiles Sophocles's three dramas, *Antigone*, *Oedipus at Colonus* and obliquely (she says,) *Oedipus Tyrannus*.¹ Daughter of Jocasta and Oedipus, mother and son, *Antigone* is born of incest. *Antigone* performs sexual transgression simply by being. Incest mobilizes her identity in interchangeable familial terms. She is her father's daughter and sister at once. Identity interchange-ability complicates *Antigone*'s actions by default. This becomes critical when she commits a crime on behalf of another brother - Polyneices, who is also her uncle. *Antigone* commits two crimes. The first crime was a transgression in the king's prohibition against burying Polyneices. Polyneices initiated a war against Eteocles, another brother. Both brothers Eteocles and Polyneices were killed in action. Creon, their maternal uncle and king of Thebes decreed Polyneices a traitor for initiating the war and punished him by denying his burial rights, commanding his body be left to rot in public (Butler, 2000a, 6). *Antigone* buries Polyneices twice and then she acts for a third time, in language. Butler thinks that *Antigone* was punished by death for her transgression in language (discourse).

Yes I did it. I do not deny I did the deed - a line in Sophocles's *Antigone*, which in Butler's usage constitutes *Antigone*'s claim in language and to the power of language; a *claim* in the sense of an argument, a possession and a birthright. Butler's reading in Sophocles's text centres on and amplifies *Antigone*'s act in language to unleash the mimetic facet in the linguistic-discursive exchange. Butler suggests that *Antigone*'s words render a mimetic linguistic aberration in Creon's vocabulary and

¹ Butler indicates that her text does not consider *Antigone*'s appearance in Greek myth or in other classical or modern tragedies (Butler, 2000a, 83).

Butler promotes an analogy between Antigone's mimetically aberrant words and her representational status in the Hegelian and Lacanian interpretations of the drama. In these interpretations Antigone stands for an aberration of symbolic kinship constraints, a foundational aberration endowed with the status of a law - *alternate legality*, which Antigone facilitates, to facilitate legal, kinship, ethical and political possibilities from which she is excluded in Hegel's as in Lacan's interpretations. Through a Hegelian dialectical conception of Antigone's aberrational symbolic function and status in law, Butler alters this evacuative operation in both Hegel and Lacan's accounts. Through a Lacanian analysis of Antigone's words, Butler alters the Lacanian symbolic order and law. Throughout I show how *Antigone's Claim* - Butler's text and her interpretation of Antigone's words in Sophocles's text mime to modify the authorities that spawn *Antigone's Claim* - Creon, Hegel, and Lacan. I mobilize Butler's text in terms of mimesis, as a theory of power in language, in order to bring the Lacanian conception of symbolic order to its demise.

Butler's readings in Lacan in *Antigone's Claim* addresses two texts, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-1955 (Seminar II)* in which Lacan considers the question of how *the symbolic function* functions, and *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960 Book VII (The Ethics)* in which Lacan attributes a symbolic ethical function to Sophocles's image of Antigone. For Lacan Antigone's life and her death confirm the existence of an eternal and constant symbolic kinship arrangement and ethical order set in terms of incestuous desire. Lacan deploys Antigone's fate and her punishment of death to explain her desire and deviation in kinship; he conceives ethical symbolic value in her death, as due punishment for her deviant desire. And he thinks that Antigone's death is her desire - a desire of death. Butler counters Lacan in conceiving the kinship norm as contingent and malleable, as a function of social and dynamic intelligibility, and in conceiving Antigone's death a consequence of her claim in language, as a discursive mimetic deviation from normative discourse.

Butler implores revising those interpretations of Antigone's drama that establish Antigone's death as a death preordained. This marks an effort to rescind rigid

kinship conventions - the heterosexual mandate, to accommodate progress and promote alternative family arrangements. Butler suggests that the Lacanian conception of symbolic order does just the opposite. In "Competing Universalities" Butler criticizes the deployment of Lacanian discourse in public efforts to impede legalizing limited rights to non-married couples (civil partnerships) in France '98, public efforts in which the debate over the participation of lesbian women and homosexual men was explicit and vital (Butler, 2000b, 146). Butler says that the Lacanian claim in those debates was that sexual difference is foundational to any possibility of the emergence of culture.

Indeed, this claim was made so successfully that the version of the law that finally won approval in the French National Assembly explicitly denies the rights of gays and lesbians to adopt, fearing that the children produced and raised under such circumstances, counter to nature and culture alike, would be led into psychosis. (Butler, 2000b, 146.)

In *Antigone's claim* Butler considers that Antigone's claim in language destroys sexual difference, constitutes an act that marks the death of normative heterosexuality (2000a, 72), that Antigone is fatally punished for this, first by Creon, later by Hegel and then by Lacan.

Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe co-wrote *The Title of the Letter: A Reading of Lacan*. They argue that in questioning the linearity between *signifier* from *signified* in Saussurian linguistic theory Lacan destroys the sign, its representational function and signification itself (Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, 1992, 39). Lacan mobilizes a theory of signification in which meaning is continuously on the move, destroyed in the process of becoming apparent. Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe credit Lacan for simultaneously disrupting the realms of speculative theory and practical psychoanalysis (Ibid.) and for perpetuating what Freud began as interconnection between speculative philosophy and clinical medical praxis, by mobilizing *theories of praxis* (7-8). However, Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe explain, Lacan maintains an indelible foundational link - *the bar* (36, 112) - a kind of repressive action that

establishes desire in terms of lack (109). Elizabeth Grosz says, “It is this movement from one signifier to another, which Lacan claims is the very movement of desire, the endless substitution of one object of desire for another, none of which is adequate to fill the original lack propelling desire - the lost or renounced mother. (Grosz, 1989, 24.)” Like Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, Grosz thinks that in claiming for impermanence Lacan requires permanent links. In Grosz’s example Lacan permanently links lack and desire, motherhood, renunciation and loss.

Considering that the Lacanian symbolic performs *emptying of the sign*, a failed gesture in signification marked by foundational lack and a death-wish, and considering that for Lacan mimesis designates the universally constitutive criminal deviant desire of Sadean acts - perversion understood as absolute freedom from bodily constraints, I explain how Butler mobilizes the crisis of representation in the Lacanian formulation to reconfigure it; how she uses the Lacanian prospect of meaning’s motility to assign new meaning to Lacanian terms, to the law of desire, to mimesis and to the mutually constitutive relation of criminality/legality. In elaborating the terms of symbolic intelligibility Lacan equates symbolic law and its transgression, and he conceives the symbolic transgression - incestuous desire as a criminal deviation in symbolic law that fails to manifest, that marks an always already failed referential operation. This enables Butler to revise Lacan’s claims and conception ‘criminal desire,’ to mobilize its function as a symbolic foundation in cultural intelligibility and coherence anew. I propose that Butler’s interpretation of Antigone’s linguistic claim prompts mimesis as *the generation of simultaneous and varying contextual possibilities in discourse*. I show how Butler modifies Lacan’s very words by using mimesis as such (citations in his text). I show how Butler’s interpretation of Antigone’s words relies upon and installs the Lacanian version of symbolic functionality, repeats it exactly and nevertheless generates its alternative. My reading as such is an example of mimesis understood as *mobilized multifarious contextual layering* - work in constraining convention that through particular usage, despite and because of constraints (convention) modifies the terms of systematic closure. I arrived at this conclusion via the mutual exchange between my artwork and writing.

The fourth chapter is titled 'Speculating My Art Practice.' Its aim is twofold, to affirm the speculative as an appropriative gesture of mimesis that redefines art, and to promote my art practice as a unique speculative endeavour that defines philosophy. This chapter elaborates my visual art practice in the speculative terms of the previous chapters, primarily in Butler's terms. I begin by providing an overview of the artwork - four video movies that I later describe individually. The initial discussion elaborates the central terms of my art practice - *sex, desire, intimacy, the political, domesticity, self-impelled-seclusion, originality, identity, fiction, re-enactment, recognition* and *reflexivity*. I explain how these terms emerge in the artwork, how they relate to one another and to the concept of mimesis. I promote mimesis as a way of altering received visual cultural norms, focusing on conventions of sexual representation. Following this I review the third chapter of the dissertation - 'Butler's Antigone' - to propose that *partial residence in law* is the basis of my artwork. In this discussion I explain how Butler redefines (alters) the Lacanian symbolic through the paradoxical facet of Antigone's dialectical force (subjection). I suggest how the notion of *partial residence* facilitates my artwork, and then I return to the central terms of my art practice, adding more terms to the discussion - *possibility, visibility, the visual, and drastic presence*. I explain how *speculative reflexivity* emerges in my artwork regarding its construction of the body and depiction of private practices. I also note how reflexivity emerges in the three preceding chapters, providing a very brief review of the dissertation in this respect. After this I elaborate the identity of the visual and *visibility* in my artwork, which leads me to (the notion of) *literalism* in exegesis. I review the emergence of literalism in *Antigone's Claim*, as elaborated in the third chapter of my dissertation. I then begin describing the four artworks individually starting with *The Secret Life of Dafna Ganani* (2002-2003). I elaborate it in terms of a literalism in hetero-normative law. *The Secret Life of Sergeant Ganani: A Trilogy* (2003-2004) is elaborated through a comparison between it and Antigone's claim in language. *Jaffa Bollywood* (2006) is elaborated in terms of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's conception of hyperbolic, and *Love and Exile* (2007) in terms of the speculative gesture of reflexivity.

Chapter 1 - The Speculative Modus Operandi: Judith Butler, Luce Irigaray, Philippe
Lacoue-Labarthe.

(A) Butler's Objection.

Judith Butler, Luce Irigaray and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe impart related mimetic projects. They converge around an effort to redress exclusionary representational conventions disseminated by canonical speculative theory. Hegelian speculative dialectical philosophy is their mutual resource and Hegelian conceptions of *difference* mark a negative founding momentum for them, which they address through mimesis. They convey a pro-alterity politics - inclusive discourse by iterating speculative negation to reconfigure negative-negated *difference* in positive terms.²

Lacoue-Labarthe mimes Hegel and thinks that repetition always implies *difference* (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1998, 222). For Butler *difference* in its Hegelian understanding institutes a relation that “simultaneously distinguishes and binds (GT, 51.)” Lacoue-Labarthe and Butler embrace binding-division as an ethical demand. Irigaray thinks that the articulation and inclusion of *difference* is an ethically binding imperative which has been neglected in Western speculative theory - philosophy and psychoanalysis, which she thinks articulate *difference* in denigrating quantitative and sexual terms, as “*more or less* [their italics] with reference to a single term (Irigaray, 1986, 18)” (according to Diana Knight and Margaret Whitford, translators of Irigaray's “Women, the Sacred and Money”). For Irigaray the speculative canon disseminates male-morphology-centred imagery as the standard, a normative (standardizing) discourse and regulative symbolic order in which feminine bodies are understood as a sexual signifier that departs from the standard - from the sexual norm. Irigaray thinks

² In *Negativity and Politics: Dionysus and Dialectics from Kant to Poststructuralism* Diana Coole distinguishes *negativity* and *negation*. For Coole negativity is more complex than negation, is politically motivated and includes negation (Coole, 2000, 2). For me negativity is produced via (the operation of) negation; I don't distinguish or separate negativity and negation.

that by stressing a death drive and a repetition compulsion Freud questions philosophical conceptualization of *presence* (Irigaray, 1985b, 72). She suggests that *presence* is discontinuous and adulterated by default and that in recognizing this, and conceiving sexuality in socio-cultural discursive terms - sex as a discursive object, Freud is praise worthy (73) yet she thinks that by mobilizing denigrating representations of women (68-76), by defining women in terms of men and as deficient atrophied men (68) Freud fails “to analyze the presuppositions of the production of discourse (73)” - the sexualized determination of his own discursive scenography - representational objects and tragic artistic imagery, and how his articulation of sexual difference partakes the metaphysical presuppositions of his speculative (philosophical) predecessors (Ibid.). The speculative is an operation that specularly (visually) objectifies *the feminine*, vehemently opposes and alters it in its (self) image - Irigaray objects. This is a modifying mimetic convention that “reduce[s] all others to the economy of the Same (74,)” to disadvantage women. Irigaray’s *feminine* is refused in and by normative discourse and marks its unknown, an *outside within* it. Irigaray proposes claiming the designation *difference*, conceiving divergence from dominant discourse in terms of feminine morphology; that *the feminine* is produced as the inherent deviation in and by the speculative masculine canon and that the speculative masculine canon depends upon *the feminine* as such for its constitution (68). Her mimetic method she argues, departs the exclusionary system, does not simply reverse the terms to which she objects (Ibid.); is an act of modification.

Lacoue-Labarthe and Irigaray epitomize the speculative-specular philosophical canon; both avowedly embrace mimesis as a strategic methodology of inquiry. In doing so they pronounce links among mimesis and denigrating exclusionary conventions in canonical speculative theory as in psychoanalysis. Focusing on philosophy, Lacoue-Labarthe provides a genealogy to mimesis, by establishing mimesis as the founding condition of speculative Hegelian dialectical philosophy and by using mimesis as the methodology of interacting with that tradition in his effort to modify it. In miming the Hegelian dialectic Lacoue-Labarthe animates its conception of (the identity of) *difference* in a tragic artistic development, which underscores tragic art in the

becoming of speculative thought, in the speculative philosophic identity - as a discursive genre and theory of *the subject*. He seeks redeeming speculative dialectic development of its negative momentum, the negating conception of alterity (difference) there.

Irigaray focuses on the links between mimesis and misogyny in the becoming of Western philosophy and in Freudian psychoanalysis. She sees *the feminine* of these traditions emerging in terms of negating a morphological ideal, a negative rendition with which women are required to identify. In *Speculum of the Other Woman* she calls it 'mimesis imposed' (Irigaray, 1985a, 59-61). Irigaray seeks to expose *mimesis imposed* as the crucial feature of speculative conventions. She conceives herself as the *disruptive excess* of phallic discourse - the male-morphology centred representational system that she is required to mime; she argues that phallic discourse allocates her the *disruptive excess* role (Irigaray, 1985b, 78). And she performs it excessively, excessively citing it to critically expose it as itself inclined excessiveness. Both Irigaray and Lacoue-Labarthe attempt to thwart the negativity implied by mimesis by using mimesis to reveal the crisis in the canon. They relate to each other as opposites. Lacoue-Labarthe sees fragility in speculative theory while Irigaray sees an aggressor. Lacoue-Labarthe repeats the quality he wishes to engender - fragility. Arguably, Irigaray engenders the quality she repeats - aggression.

Explicitly, Butler objects to using the concept of mimesis as a strategy because she thinks it is ontologically implicated in the history of injury. In an interview taken by Pheng Cheah and Elizabeth Grosz Butler deplores Irigaray's use of mimesis, suggests it is crucially intrinsic to a notion of sexual difference that mandates foundational heterosexuality. In this interview Butler suggests that mimesis cannot sufficiently disrupt foundational heterosexuality because it partakes it.

JB: Clearly there is a presumptive heterosexuality in all that reading, which allows us to go back and see some of that really aggressive early reading as part of a certain heterosexual trauma as well. [...] But the intense over heterosexuality of *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* and indeed of the sexuate

rights discourse, which is all about mom and motherhood and not at all about postfamily arrangement or alternative family arrangements, not only brought to the fore a kind of presumptive heterosexuality, but actually made heterosexuality into the privileged locus of ethics, as if heterosexual relations, because they putatively crossed this alterity, which is the alterity of sexual difference, were somehow more ethical, more other-directed, less narcissistic than anything else. (Cheah and Grosz, 1998, 27-28.)

Sexuate rights forms Irigaray's proposed amendment to what in her view is a bogus concept of parity (equality before the law). She conceives a legal system in *sexuate rights* - special rights for women - to restore equality in a system she thinks privileges men to women's detriment (Irigaray, 1999, 204-212). For Butler this perpetuates family life in heterosexual arrangements, which deprives homosexuals and lesbians of equal rights. Butler argues that Irigaray's heterosexual trauma makes Irigaray aggressive. She attributes a "masochistic sadistic erotic engagement with the philosophers (Cheah and Grosz, 1998, 20)" to Irigaray's citational methodology repeatedly saying she (Butler) is frightened by it (19-20). Elizabeth Grosz on the other hand, considers that Irigaray mobilizes a full-on engagement with the violence of global capitalism. She suggests that Irigaray is not the victim who retaliates, as does Butler, rather, that Irigaray partakes canonical aggression in attempting to curb it. Drucilla Cornell takes this up:

DC: It may be true of all of us that we have not yet fully confronted it. But whatever we have to deploy against it, it would not be enough to speak through Heidegger about the disclosure of Being as a couple. There has to be a place - and this is what I was saying about her conserving of the categories, particularly when she uses Heidegger - for that kind of critique and that kind of head-on confrontation with violence. I think the only place where I have spoken to it is [in] the chapter in *The Philosophy of the Limit* on *Bowers v. Hardwick* as the ruthless violence of the law. (Cheah and Grosz, 1998, 38.)

Heidegger's "copula of Being" is the notion that heterosexual couples are always fecund, giving and founding life for everyone (Cheah and Grosz, 1998, 27). Cornell considers it marks a violent view the likes of which she dealt with only in addressing *Bowers v. Hardwick*, a 1985 court-case set in discriminatory application of sodomy prohibition in the USA. In *The Philosophy of the Limit* Cornell elaborates *Bowers/Hardwick* in terms of *the violence of the law* understood as an overlap between legal and symbolic foundational systems (Cornell, 1992, 155-169). Sodomy was and is illegal in many states in the USA and *Bowers v. Hardwick* revealed that in implementing sodomy statutes the legal and judiciary systems were conflating the act of sodomy with the homosexual identity in the assumption that sodomites are always homosexuals. This resulted in a distinction between homosexual and heterosexual sodomites and in the arrest of homosexuals even if they did not engage in sodomy. Further, it allowed heterosexual sodomites to "escape justice" (Brown and Halley, 2002; Halley, 1993). Cornell compares her discussion in *Bowers v. Hardwick* with Irigaray's critical mime in Heidegger's text. Irigaray, she suggests, engages with Heidegger in his own fundamentally deterministic terms, a dialogue in violence that preserves Heidegger's violent symbolic system in the effort to redress it.

Grosz on the other hand, says that Irigaray was never afraid of using the kind of intellectual aggression that women theorists before her were prohibited from using (Cheah and Grosz, 1998, 38). In response, Butler says, "I agree. I think it is very interesting and important. But I do worry that her aggressive engagement was in some sense a function of her attachment to these texts. (38.)" "I've never seen her read a woman, and I wonder what that would look like. (38.)" Butler suggests that for the most part Irigaray's mimetic form of writing discloses her (Irigaray's) attachment to a male oriented heterosexist fundamental symbolic aggression. Considering that Irigaray avoids mimetic readings in women's texts Butler thinks that she refuses detaching from that aggressive symbolic system.

Grosz suggests that in using mimesis as a strategy Irigaray mobilizes *identification anew*, "as a mode of breaking out of identification, which is so necessary

for critique (Cheah and Grosz, 1998, 38).” In response Butler questions this: “But to what extent does the identification [with her source texts] work against her strategy? I am tempted to say that this identification is strategic, but in fact, I wonder if it doesn’t disrupt or limit the possibility of strategy. (39.)” For Butler Irigaray fails to break the mould because the strategic use of identification ruins the strategy. She goes on to consider that in mimetically reading the work of others Irigaray gives herself over to them and “she [Irigaray] hates them massively for it! (39.)” And then Butler says that for Lacoue-Labarthe identification is the central question (problem) of the political. Lacoue-Labarthe expresses this view on the final page of *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics* (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1998, 300). In noting it here Butler inversely connects Irigaray to Lacoue-Labarthe, to suggest that in using identification strategically Irigaray proffers a political proposition (identity politics) that is questionable in Lacoue-Labarthe’s view.

Butler elaborates her conception of Irigaray’s manner of identifying with her source texts: “By “identification” I don’t mean Irigaray the person identifying with Freud the person or Freud the text. I’m really talking about a way in which the authorial perspective, as articulated in the narrative perspective of the work, goes in and out of being indistinguishable from the position that she is explicating. And this strikes me as a textual analysis. It doesn’t necessarily involve any postulation of a psychological state. (Cheah and Grosz, 1998, 39.)” In this Butler contradicts her previous statements i.e. that Irigaray is psychologically traumatized.

Grosz considers that underlying Irigaray’s mimetic strategy is profound ambivalence, as a means to a hopeful future (Cheah and Grosz, 1998, 39). Butler’s response, “I think all mimesis has ambivalence in it. But I wonder whether mimesis isn’t precisely that kind of thing that is so fundamental that it actually defeats any strategy that might be built upon it? (Ibid.)” Butler concedes, in using mimesis Irigaray prompts ambivalence as a critical possibility, however she suggests that ambivalence is not unique to Irigaray or to Irigaray’s deployment of it because for her, for Butler, any deployment of mimesis implies ambivalence. In Butler’s view mimesis recalls the fundamental features of philosophy’s foundations and as such it precludes any strategic

possibility including ambivalence. She seems to promote using ambivalence strategically as a means to a hopeful future yet without mimesis and without identification.

Following this, Grosz asks Butler if her understanding of performativity is not very close to this. In response Butler says her own theory of performativity is not a strategy: “Probably. That’s why one can’t understand performativity fully as a strategy. That’s correct. (Cheah and Grosz, 1998, 40.)” Grosz responds,

Nor is mimesis fully a strategy or only a strategy. They are both attempts to generate an anomaly [deviation from the norm or a difficulty in terms of identifying with it] that produces a new future, an anomalous working of the system, the breakdown from inside the system itself to generate a future that isn’t containable by that system. In a way, isn’t mimesis just a nifty word to capture this bringing into being of something that hasn’t existed before, which is hope, or more precisely, the condition of hope? (Cheah and Grosz, 1998, 40.)

Grosz thinks that mimesis in Irigaray’s usage like performativity in Butler’s engenders departure from the system in question - a promising kind of nihilism. So despite Butler’s reservations or ambiguous agreement Cheah and Grosz see a similarity between Irigaray’s mimesis and Butler’s performativity.

Grosz goes on to suggest synonymous terms for mimesis in Irigaray’s usage: “It’s not the only word. There are many more interesting words that deal with the same phenomenon. “Utopia” is another such word, as is “becoming,” “performativity,” “difference,” “iteration.” They are attempts to think from the limits of the present what a future outside those limits are. (Cheah and Grosz, 1998, 40.)” In response Butler considers that Grosz’s notion of *the present limits as future’s prospect* opens discursive space (possibilities), which she says is crucial to conceiving the (subject’s) relationship to alterity (Ibid.). She adds that this was put in terms of ethics and politics earlier in their discussion and considers that Irigaray’s explication of an ethical relation is founded upon a political relation, which she (Butler) thinks is questionable. In this

Butler refers to Irigaray's *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, which she critically reviews in "Sexual Difference As a Question of Ethics: Alterities of the Flesh in Irigaray and Merleau-Ponty" (Butler, 2001).

In that text Butler criticizes Irigaray's mimetic style of writing. Focusing on the fourth chapter of Irigaray's *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* - "The Invisible of the Flesh: A Reading of Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, "The Intertwining - The Chiasm,"" Butler considers that Irigaray provides a particularly aggressive mime in Merleau-Ponty's *The Visible and the Invisible* and further, that in miming Merleau-Ponty Irigaray fails the ethical project, first in proffering an inconsistent (hypocritical) ethical stance and second in over-focusing on sexual difference, by taking sexual difference as archetypal *difference* (and/or alterity) and as foundational to the ethical project (Butler, 2001, 67). Butler thinks that a discourse about ethics requires critical attention to received notions - constitutive relations of power and to how these promote (notions of) ethical subjects and ethical *being*, which in her view Irigaray fails to address. Butler says that Irigaray's specific blend of psychoanalysis and structuralism in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* would oblige her (Irigaray) to think that homosexual and lesbian relationships are not ethical because they are set in over-identification and in narcissism and that for her, for Butler, same-sexed relations are ethical indeed while Irigaray's relation to Merleau-Ponty is not (Ibid.).

Butler explains that in Irigaray's own view her (Irigaray's) mimetic methodology presents an act of speech that constitutes her ethical relationship with Merleau-Ponty (Butler, 2001, 66-67). Butler articulates her objection to Irigaray's notion of ethical discourse via a set of ideas that in her later work she (Butler) deploys to articulate constitutive power and performativity as prospective un-doings in homophobic discursive design (obstruction to alternative family arrangements). Ambiguity is a concept that prevails Butler's work and so does the paradox, which is a form of ambiguity that combines oppositional positions in a single position.³ In Butler's later

³ In *Seven Types of Ambiguity* William Empson considers that ambiguity emerges in seven varying types. The seventh type in his list is that of full contradiction, which he

work as we will see in my next chapter ('Butler's "Theory" of Performativity') Butler conceives the structure of power in terms of ambiguity and of the paradox, and she considers that as such the use of power *turns* - is a tropological operation that manifests a performative mimetic figure which affords futuristic unanticipated possibilities (PLP, 202n-1). (I elaborate this in my second chapter.)

In reviewing Irigaray's *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* Butler endows Irigaray with a conflicted, ambiguous, paradoxical authorial identity. This happens at the start of the essay when Butler considers that Irigaray simultaneously thinks against and within Merleau-Ponty's terms when she mimes his conception of the intertwining. Butler focuses on identity and identification in Irigaray's manner of miming Merleau-Ponty's text and animates Irigaray's mimetic engagement with ambiguity.

Irigaray enacts an ambivalent relation to the power attributed to these texts, a power that she at once attributes to them but also seeks to undo. What is perhaps most paradoxical and enigmatic about her textual entanglement with these texts, and with Merleau-Ponty's in particular, is that it enacts and allegorizes the kind of entanglement - or intertwining - that characterizes relations of flesh. In this sense, then, the text enacts the theory of flesh that it also interrogates, installing itself in a hermeneutic [interpretational] circularity from which it cannot break free and in whose hold it appears quite willfully to stay.

Irigaray's reading of Merleau-Ponty's "The Intertwining" is in many ways quite dismissive and contemptuous, attributing to him an arrested development, a maternal fixation, even an intrauterine fantasy. And yet, her dependency on his theorization of tactile, visual, and linguistic relations seems absolute. There is no thinking outside his terms, and, hence, there is always an attempt to think against his terms. (Butler, 2001, 60.)

thinks marks a division and a conflict in the author's mind (Empson, 1963, 193). The paradox may be understood as this type of ambiguity I suggest.

Irigaray is paradoxically intertwined in Merleau-Ponty's *intertwining* as she enacts it - Butler says. And she suggests that Merleau-Ponty's *intertwining* is a trap and Irigaray its prey, which is also to suggest that Irigaray is not exactly acting wilfully. For Butler Irigaray is not required to mime Merleau-Ponty in her own text but chooses to do so and through this choice Irigaray displays her will power and a desire to partake Merleau-Ponty's conception and be trapped in it. Butler suggests that Irigaray exercises freedom of choice to be absolutely dependent upon Merleau-Ponty's text, and that scorning Merleau-Ponty is the aim of Irigaray's desire in absolute dependence. Through her analysis of Irigaray's text Butler conflates Merleau-Ponty's authorial identity with Merleau-Ponty's text to suggest that for Irigaray Merleau-Ponty is his text, that Irigaray conflates Merleau-Ponty's *being* with Merleau-Ponty's text.

In explaining Irigaray's critical methodology Butler avoids criticizing Merleau-Ponty, which seems odd considering Butler's argument: in miming Merleau-Ponty's *intertwining* Irigaray performatively allegorizes it and fails ethically in the process, an argument, which presents the possibility that Merleau-Ponty's *intertwining* is the cause of ethical failure as much as or instead of Irigaray or her mimetic method.

Butler argues that Irigaray cannot think without Merleau-Ponty ("There is no thinking outside his terms"), which leads Butler to conclude that Irigaray attempts thinking against Merleau-Ponty or against his terms. *Thinking with* turns into *thinking against* in Butler's text. Butler's thinking is based in Freudian mechanisms of *turning in opposites* and *turning around upon the subject's own self*. In *The Language of Psychoanalysis* Laplanche and Pontalis explain 'reversal into the opposite' and 'turning round upon the subject's own self' as crucial instincts and processes in Freudian theory, as crucial as is repression (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1988, 399). These two processes they say, "are so closely bound up with each other - as is shown by the two major instances of sadism/masochism and voyeurism/exhibitionism - that they cannot be described separately. (Ibid.)" Freud, they suggest, conceives a general mechanism of turning in oppositional terms that he associates with a self-embrace that turns hateful. And, he also establishes a turning of content such that love and hate alternate,

as do activity and passivity (400). Sadism, understood as satisfaction accomplished in terms of the infliction of pain upon others, is a perversion fundamental to instinctual sexual development according to Freudian psychoanalytic theory (Ibid.). Considering that sadomasochism is an oppositional pairing and turning in Freud's thinking, Laplanche and Pontalis explain that Freud links it to identification (402), which he understands, they explain, as a series of acts in which the subject assimilates its object or other, turning the other into itself in the process of recovering (normalizing) its identity (205). Butler's description of Irigaray's authorial identity and of Irigaray's identification with Merleau-Ponty mobilizes these Freudian links between identification, turning, sadomasochism, self-hate/self-love and sexual perversion/sexual-norm to amplify them rhetorically.

From Butler's perspective Irigaray's derisive treatment of Merleau-Ponty's text is excessive and it denigrates the whole of Merleau-Ponty's project. For Butler Merleau-Ponty's *intertwining* conveys an absolute interdependence between *the subject* and *the object* of inquiry and of the gaze, and it is a totalizing philosophic methodology that nevertheless is not reductive, that hampers the notion of *the other* as a function of *the self*. Butler explains that Merleau-Ponty's *intertwining* replaces the priority of the knowing subject in Cartesian convention and establishes a theory that imbricates the knowing subject and embodied reflexive sensate experience (Butler, 2001, 65-66). Butler considers that for Irigaray Merleau-Ponty is solipsistic while for her, for Butler, Merleau-Ponty's metaphorical language renders the touch-sight relationship fully reversible and mutually implicit, that by linking the two Merleau-Ponty equates the sense of touch with visual economy (72).⁴

⁴ A brief review of psychoanalysis as a visual economy: Psychoanalytic discourse gauges the subject's relation to itself and to others in terms of *identification* understood as a failed visual recognition economy in which the visual-visible body and desiring subject correspond. Describing sexual identification in young children Freud suggests that bodily imagery understood as the surface, initiates a sexual identification process in tandem with oedipus complex and ambivalence (Freud, 1974, 31-32). Lacan suggests

“Looking” in Merleau-Ponty’s *The Visible and the Invisible* reveals a prioritized male sexed visible body - a visual (constitutive) economy. He describes a *thickness of flesh* “naturally destined to be seen by a body (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, 135.)” He reduces *the other to the self*, contrary to what Butler says, and he does so in sexual terms that are solipsistic and self-referentially reductive as Irigaray thinks:

[...] I have a man’s senses, a human body - because the spectacle of the world that is my own, and which, to judge by our confrontations, does not notably differ from that of the others, with me as with them refers with evidence to typical dimensions of visibility, and finally to a virtual focus of vision, to a

that the body’s visual image and (its) sense of self are discrepant; a discrepancy that establishes the boundary between the self and the other: “We have only to understand the mirror stage as an identification, [...] namely the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image [...]. (Lacan, 1977, 12).” Mary Ann Doane explains that Freud sees a compulsion to repeat happening in respect to a pleasure in or of visual recognition (together with oedipus complex) in the establishment of the self/other boundary (Doane, 1991, 16-17, 20). She says,

The work of Luce Irigaray suggests that the woman does not have the same access to the mirror-definition as the man. For Irigaray, the woman is relegated to the side of negativity. Because she is situated as lack, non-male, non-one; because her sexuality has only been conceptualized within masculine parameters (the clitoris understood as the “little penis”), she has no separate unity which could ground an identity. In other words, she has no autonomous symbolic representation. (Doane, 1991, 22.)

In a footnote to this passage Doane considers that Irigaray risks provoking essentialist discourse, which Doane cautions against and also notes she respects (Doane, 1991, 25).

detector also typical, so that at the joints of the opaque body and the opaque world there is a ray of generality and of light. (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, 146.)

Merleau-Ponty speaks of a visual current that traverses bodily functions and is maternally enabled,

a labor upon itself the visible body provides for the hollow whence a vision will come, inaugurates the long maturation at whose term suddenly it will see, that is, will be visible for itself, will institute the interminable gravitation, the indefatigable metamorphosis of seeing [...] (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, 147.)

He explains the “ontic visible (152,)” as *the condition of knowing intertwined with the condition of being*, which he does via sexually implicit language - “secret membranes (146)” “folding back, invagination (152).” Merleau-Ponty mobilizes sexist descriptions via a maternal fascination that erases the maternal as Irigaray says (Irigaray, 1993, 153). Irigaray’s effort Butler says, is to return the erased maternal to the scene of its erasure i.e. Merleau-Ponty’s text, to which Butler objects in Irigaray’s text.

Butler develops “Sexual Difference As a Question of Ethics” in terms of her own ambiguity; her critique of Irigaray’s mimetic engagement with Merleau-Ponty’s text is fully contradictory. Butler endows Irigaray with assimilative trends that are out of control when she says that Irigaray’s textual strategy performs a “conflicted and ambivalent deployment of power, radically implicated in what it opposes, opposing the Other through a strange participation and consumption of his terms. (Butler, 2001, 61.)” But then Butler says that “Significantly, [...] the relation of power and the relation of the flesh, understood as allegorized by the textual relations that Irigaray draws from his text to hers, is not one of *opposition* [her italics] rallying the feminine against the masculine, but [one] of exposing and producing a mutually constitutive relation. (Butler, 2001, 61.)” In this Butler suggests that *opposition* informs the sexualized relation between Irigaray’s and Merleau-Ponty’s texts, that Irigaray conveys this relationship in her text yet that the oppositional relation she conveys is not reductive,

negative nor negating. Rather Butler suggests, Irigaray's text provides a theory and practice of power set in terms of mimesis and mobilized as the mutually constitutive site of that sexually differentiating relation. And then Butler says this:

Conversely, Irigaray's miming of Merleau-Ponty's prose, her insinuation into his terms, not only proves the vulnerability of his terms to what they exclude, but exposes that vulnerability to what they exclude as a constitutive vulnerability. His text is disclosed as having her text intertwined within his terms, at which point his text is centered outside itself, implicated in what it excludes, and her text is nothing without his, radically dependent upon that which it refuses. (Butler, 2001, 61.)

Butler considers that Irigaray, forcing her way into Merleau-Ponty's text refuses his terms; that this deployment of refusal in and by Irigaray's text establishes Irigaray's text as a mutual constitutive site for both herself - Irigaray and for Merleau-Ponty, which, Butler suggests, establishes Irigaray's site of vulnerability and rupture as Merleau-Ponty's. Later Butler will attribute assimilative refusal to Antigone as the prospect of communicability and life (alternative family arrangements). Here Butler considers that for Irigaray Merleau-Ponty's text mobilizes a concept of sexual difference to refuse and erase sexual difference while Irigaray, turning refusal, erasure and sexual difference around, back upon Merleau-Ponty or his text, enforces sexual difference as his inherent weakness, as the inherent weakness of his text as much as her own (Irigaray's) in her text. Butler says that Irigaray means to undo the problem of asymmetry and substitution that Irigaray believes Merleau-Ponty's text mobilizes yet that paradoxically Irigaray ends up duplicating the presumption of the universal norm in the notion of sexual-difference that she promotes (Butler, 2001, 63).

What Irigaray will term masculinist will be this effort to return all Otherness to the self, to make sense of the Other only as a reflection of myself. [...] We might read the profusion of citations in her text as sympathetic efforts to put

herself in the place of the Other, where the Other this time is a masculinist subject who seeks and finds in all alterity only himself. Oddly, in miming the masculinist texts of philosophy, *she puts herself in the place of the masculine* [her italics] and thereby performs a kind of substitution, one she appears to criticize when it is performed by men. Is her substitution different from the one she criticizes? (Butler, 2001, 63-64.)

Butler suggests that Irigaray, victimized by her own mime in manly-aggressive convention turns into a man. In describing Irigaray's authorial identity Butler endows it with mimetic desire in masculinity, in rivalry, hostility, ambivalence, contradictory emotions and sexual turning (bisexuality). This is hardly "a strange participation and consumption of his terms. (Butler, 2001, 61.)" It sounds like identification as Freud describes it in *The Ego and the Id*⁵ and reverberates in the *miming of manhood to*

⁵ In *The Ego and the Id* Freud describes sexual identification as the Oedipus complex in young children and in terms of ambivalence. Freud explains that a boy's object choice is his mother and his identification choice his father. These two relationships "proceed side by side," he says, "until the boy's wishes in regard to his mother become more intense and his father is perceived as an obstacle to them [...]" (Freud, 1974, 21-22)". Freud argues that hostile rivalry and the wish to be rid of his father infuses the boy's relation with his father and makes him want to be like his father (22). "Henceforth his relation to his father is ambivalent; it seems as if the ambivalence inherent in the identification from the beginning had become manifest. An ambivalent attitude to his father and an object-relation of a solely affectionate kind to his mother make up the content of the simple positive Oedipus complex in a boy. (22.)" The Oedipus complex is "twofold," he continues, "positive and negative, and is due to bisexuality originally present in children: that is to say, a boy has not merely an ambivalent attitude towards his father and an affectionate object-choice towards his mother, but at the same time he also behaves like a girl and displays an affectionate feminine attitude to his father and a corresponding jealousy and hostility towards his mother. It is this complicating

vanquish manhood in Butler's interpretation of Antigone's treatment of Creon, as we shall see in my third chapter 'Butler's Antigone.'

For Butler the paradoxical implication of Irigaray's mimetic practice is that it traps Irigaray in the texts that she mimes. "She is, as it were, locked in dialogue with these texts. The model for understanding this dialogic relation will not be one which presupposes simple equality and substitutability, nor will it be one which presupposes radical opposition. (Butler, 2001, 64.)" Here again Butler credits Irigaray's mimetic methodology yet thinks that Irigaray loses her sense of ethicality in the process of miming Merleau-Ponty's language; "the ethical procedure of substitution thus reduces paradoxically to an act of domination. (63.)" Butler sees Irigaray meaning to dominate Merleau-Ponty and ending up being dominated herself. And then Butler reveals her own "strange" participation in the terms she attributes to Irigaray when she explains Irigaray's position:

[...] if from a subordinate position within language, a woman substitutes herself for a man, she imagines herself into a dominant position, and sacrifices her sense of difference from the norm; in such a case, the act of substitution becomes an act of self-erasure or self-sacrifice. (Butler, 2001, 63.)

element introduced by bisexuality that makes it so difficult to obtain a clear view of the facts in connection with the earliest object-choices and identification and still more difficult to describe them intelligibly. It may even be that the ambivalence displayed in the relations to the parents should be attributed entirely to bisexuality and that it is not, as I have represented above, developed out of identification in consequence of rivalry. (Freud, 1974, 23.)" In this portion of his writing Freud desperately seeks explaining ambivalence as the complicating element in bisexuality, intelligibility and sexual identifications but when this fails he turns it around, says that identification, which has rivalry in it causes ambivalence and bisexuality.

Iterating Irigaray's views in "The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine" (Irigaray, 1985b), Butler considers that because Irigaray is a woman she is subordinated in and by the power of philosophical and psychoanalytical discourse - the discursive norm that women are forced to partake with their subordinators - men. For Butler, in miming masculine discourse Irigaray allows her womanhood to be erased, to be sacrificed in the process of substituting herself for a man, a self-impelled subordination, a self-sacrifice that manifests an objective i.e. the ruination of the dominant normative discourse. The simultaneity of acknowledgement and refusal - the self-sacrificial partaking of the subordinator's terms, are themselves the very terms by which Butler explains Antigone's claim. Butler's conception of Irigaray's mimetic relation to Merleau-Ponty informs Butler's articulation of the generative and transformative prospect of repeating the rigid Lacanian symbolic law in *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death*. But the homophobic dimension of Irigaray's conceptualization of sexual difference in ethical terms is implicated in Butler's embrace of Merleau-Ponty, mobilizes that embrace. To unlink the objection from the embrace I look at Butler's relation to Merleau-Ponty without Irigaray.

In "Sexual Ideology and Phenomenological Description: A Feminist Critique of Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception" Butler profusely criticizes Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*. Butler considers that in this text Merleau-Ponty formulates sexuality as coextensive with existence. She lists the problems with his conception: a hetero-normative understanding set in a master/slave-based model of sexuality (Butler, 1989, 86), a model that is solipsistic (87), that conflates biology and the social-sexual by ignoring sex's historical socio-cultural terms (87) to present a reductive understanding of Freudian psychoanalysis in "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes" in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Butler notes that Merleau-Ponty's understanding ignores "Freud's longstanding ambivalence toward a theory of instinctual sexuality (88)" in that text. She suggests Merleau-Ponty misses Freud's point in conceiving sexual drives outside the ambivalences with which Freud endows them. Butler criticizes Merleau-Ponty's reliance on the Freudian naturalistic theory of drives that valorizes heterosexuality as the norm in *Three Essays on a Theory of Sexuality* (88), and further,

for “gloss[ing] over the psychoanalytic critique of the conscious subject as a product of unconscious desires and the mechanism of repression (88)” while promoting the notion that sexuality is natural and prior to culture (91).

Under the section titled “Misogyny as an Intrinsic Structure of Perception” (Butler, 1989, 92) Butler considers that Merleau-Ponty generates a misogynous and homophobic conception of femininity; in taking a universalizing approach to sexuality that overlooks cultural features as proponents of sexual life he renders the category of *the normal*: “Not only does Merleau-Ponty fail to acknowledge the extent to which sexuality is culturally constructed, but his descriptions of the universal features of sexuality reproduce certain cultural constructions of sexual normalcy. (92.)” Merleau-Ponty considers the female body to be outside of culture, Butler explains. In his view, she says, the female body “exudes a natural attraction. This is a body rendered unreal [illusory and not actually in existence], the focus of solipsistic fantasy and projection; indeed, this is a body that does not live, but [is] a frozen image which does not resist or interrupt the course of masculine desire through an unexpected assertion of life. (92-93.)”

Butler suggests that the *Phenomenology of Perception* may be seen as “an expression of sexual ideology” that constructs a disembodied masculine subject, a voyeur, considering, she says, the “prevalence of visual metaphors in Merleau-Ponty’s descriptions of normal sexuality. (Butler, 1989, 93.)” “Indeed, it sometimes appears as if sexuality itself were reduced to the erotics of the gaze. (93.)” At this point in her text, in a footnote, Butler indicates that in *The Visible and the Invisible* - the text Irigaray critiques in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of sexuality “focuses on tactile experience and marks a significant departure from the visual economy of the *Phenomenology of Perception*. (100n-18).” This partially explains her critical stance vis-à-vis Irigaray’s critique of Merleau-Ponty; for Butler Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology* is the problem while his *The Visible and the Invisible* is not. The latter departs from the sexual ideology of the *Phenomenology of Perception*.

Butler goes on to explain that in the *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty stages the erotic experience via the epistemic model in which the knowing

subject exclusively owns the experience of perception (Butler, 1989, 93), which she says is the “solipsistic circle of the masculine voyeur (94)[.]” This is Irigaray’s opinion in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* but in reference to *The Visible and the Invisible*, the text that for Butler pronounces Merleau-Ponty’s pardon. Noteworthy is Butler’s anti-essentialist stance (Butler, 1989, 156-166); in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Butler says, Merleau-Ponty generates an essential feminine category:

[...] female bodies appear to have an essence which is itself physical, and this essence designates the female body as an object rather than a subject of perception. Indeed, the female body is seemingly never a subject, but always denotes an always already fixed essence rather than an open existence. She is, in effect, already formed, while the male subject is in exclusive control of the constituting gaze. She is never seeing, always seen. If the female body denotes an essence, while bodies in general denote existence, then it appears that bodies in general must be male - and existence does not belong to women. (Butler, 1989, 94.)

Under a section titled “Toward a Phenomenological Feminism” Butler says that in his posthumously published *The Visible and the Invisible* Merleau-Ponty “criticizes Sartre for maintaining the subject-object distinction in his description of sexuality and bodily existence. (Butler, 1989, 97.)” Butler understands this text to replace the phenomenological canon that she calls “a social ontology of the look,” with “an ontology of the tactile[.] (97.)” For Butler *The Visible and the Invisible* conveys sensual life through communal *being* - “that shared domain of the flesh which resists categorization in terms of subjects and objects. (97.)” Butler considers the possibility that at the end of his life Merleau-Ponty accomplished “philosophical distance from the sexual Cartesianism of his phenomenological colleagues,” invalidating his earlier valorising espousal of traditional voyeurism and objectification.

Butler thinks that for the early Merleau-Ponty the subject and object manifest given “metaphysical constructs that inform and obfuscate the theoretical ‘look’ that

constitutes sexuality as a theoretical object. Indeed, the greatest obfuscation consists in the claim that this constructed theoretical vocabulary renders lived experience transparent. (Butler, 1989, 97-98.)” Butler contests the disembodied conception of sexual life generated in the discursive language of the Cartesian dichotomous formulation, a vocabulary that prevails philosophical discourse, she says, turns sex and sexual life into unknown objects (of inquiry-desire). Butler thinks that in presuming to describe a natural history of bodies and sexual life Merleau-Ponty references a historical socio-cultural context that he at once elides and eliminates. Instead, Butler prioritizes the historical genesis of “the subject” over and against its given assumptions. Butler argues that feminist appropriations in Merleau-Ponty is necessary in order to query the terms of sexuality and their reified socio-cultural constructions in his text:

A feminist critique of Merleau-Ponty necessarily involves a deconstruction of these obfuscating and reifying structures to their concrete cultural origins, and an analysis of the ways in which Merleau-Ponty’s text legitimates and universalizes structures of sexual oppression. On the other hand, a feminist appropriation of Merleau-Ponty is doubtless in order. If the body expresses and dramatizes existential themes, and these themes are gender-specific and fully historicized, then sexuality becomes a scene of cultural struggle, improvisation, and innovation, a domain in which the intimate and the political converge, and a dramatic opportunity for expression, analysis, and change. The terms of this inquiry, however, will not be found in the texts of Merleau-Ponty, but in the works of philosophical feminism to come. (Butler, 1989, 98-99.)

Butler calls for feminist appropriations in Merleau-Ponty as a way of deliberating and transforming socio-sexual and cultural themes, the terms (theory) of the body in philosophical inquiry and political discourse, which Irigaray’s appropriation in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* fails to deliver.

In *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* Butler embraces Irigaray's appropriation in Platonic discourse of origins yet this embrace is again formulated in terms of an objection. Butler disputes the essentialist feature of Irigaray's mimetic engagement.

Through miming, Irigaray transgresses the prohibition against resemblance at the same time that she refuses the notion of resemblance as copy. She cites Plato again and again, but the citations expose precisely what is excluded from them, and seek to show and to reintroduce the excluded into the system itself. In this sense, she performs a repetition and displacement of the phallic economy. *This is citation, not as enslavement or simple reiteration of the original, but as an insubordination that appears to take place within the very terms of the original, and which calls into question the power of origination that Plato appears to claim for himself* [her italics]. Her miming has the effect of repeating the origin only to displace that origin as [her italics] an origin. (BTM, 45.)

Irigaray's mime in Plato is not *enslavement or simple reiteration* - the binary oppositional mime in Merleau-Ponty - Butler seems to say. In "Bodies that Matter" Butler is again ambiguous about Irigaray's mimetic method and yet she considers that through it Irigaray alters the object to which she objects. Embracing Irigaray's transgression in Plato's prohibition against female instigated mimesis, Butler conceives Irigaray appropriating to subvert Platonic phallic economic terms - hierarchical origin-copy power structure and metaphysics. Irigarayan mimesis emerges as a performative and generative operation of citation in Butler's text. In my second chapter - 'Butler's "Theory" of Performativity' I elaborate Butler's understanding of Irigaray's mime in Plato's text as a sexually implicit transformative power in the discussion on sodomy and other illicit penetrations. In this chapter I introduce the body-mimesis connection as Butler's objection to deploying mimesis strategically.

In “Bodies that Matter” Butler’s objection to Irigaray’s mimetic practice pertains to what Butler understands as Irigaray’s approximation of Plato’s conception of matter (BTM, 31). Irigaray, Butler explains, establishes the notion of the body as an extra-linguistic material substance, a materiality located outside and preceding discourse, which assumes an indisputable referent and epistemic ground of discourse (35). Butler considers that Irigaray partakes Plato’s origins discourse, understands mimesis as Plato does, as contiguity: proximity and connection between (the notion of) the extra-discursive body and its discursive signifier. Butler objects to this understanding of mimesis and thinks Irigaray regenerates Platonic exclusions through it (46).

Though Butler objects to deployment of mimesis as contiguity - the notion of *the body to which discourse refers* - she agrees with Irigaray, Plato denies sexual difference. And she suggests that Irigaray mimes to refuse Plato’s discourse as a site of sexual erasure while occupying it at once. On the other hand, Butler explains that the Platonic economy of signification (symbolic system) maintains the notion of *unintelligible matter* as extra-discursive to support its male-centred economy. This formulation of matter facilitates both the organization and the denial of sexual difference; conceived in terms of a material origin sexual difference is denied in that formulation (BTM, 52). The prohibition against mimesis transpires in Plato’s text where materiality is installed as the non-contributing double (the copy of Forms) Butler explains (52). Irigaray, Butler says, proposes materiality as a contributing possibility via her mimetic engagement with Plato, as a way of countering sexual erasure. However, Butler considers, because resemblance is at all possible it questions the originality of the original, by default (51). The very possibility of miming *the masculine*, Butler says, “exposes the masculine’s claim to originality as suspect. (52.)” And instead of impelling that already critical momentum in Platonic economy Butler suggests, Irigaray’s insistence on doubling the form/copy configuration is not only useless it maintains materiality as that outside-of-discourse and indisputable referent. And while Butler agrees that Plato excludes materiality she considers he generates additional exclusions:

There is no singular outside, for the forms require a number of exclusions; they are and replicate themselves through what they exclude, through not being the animal, not being the woman, not being the slave, whose propriety is purchased through property, national and racial boundary, masculinism, and compulsory heterosexuality.

To the extent that a set of reverse-mimes emerge from those quarters [the outside of discourse-within], they will **not** be the same as each other [*difference* is not a homogenous category]; if there is an occupation and reversal of the master's discourse, it will come from many quarters, and those resignifying practices will converge in ways that scramble the self-replicating presumptions of reason's mastery. For if the copies speak, or if what is merely material begins to signify, the scenography of reason is rocked by the crisis on which it was always built. (BTM, 52.)

Butler refutes the notion that the body outside of discourse may be articulated in terms that are not discursive; any reference to the body is always discursive. And she suggests that Irigaray's focus on the excluded feminine of Platonic discourse is too narrow. She argues that critical reverse mimesis is necessary and useable to render crises that modify the concept of the body in Platonic economy. However, Platonic prohibition is not just about mimesis or the feminine body she says, it is about repressing any sexual possibilities that rival masculinity in the institution of sex (BTM, 51) and in seeing only the feminine body Irigaray excludes other bodies and thereby reiterates the tradition from which she assumes to depart.

Butler sees a broad range of exclusions in Plato's text yet she supports Irigaray's mimetic engagement nonetheless, in suggesting it tenders hyperbolic rejoined to the discourse on the *sex of materiality* (BTM, 49) in which a foundational mechanism of erasure and of exclusion secured prolonged injury (37). Butler mimes Irigaray when she conceives *the phallic lesbian* (36-37, 51). In avoiding Irigaray's understanding of mimesis as contiguity between discourse and the body Butler validates mimesis as a strategic practice and viable operation of critique yet is her phallic

lesbian not the same singularizing erasure that Irigaray mobilizes via the erased Platonic feminine? I return to this in my second chapter.

Chapter 1 - The Speculative Modus Operandi: Judith Butler, Luce Irigaray, Philippe
Lacoue-Labarthe.

(B) Hyperbologic.

Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe identifies a crisis in Hegelian speculative dialectical philosophy. He elaborates the crisis in his third chapter of *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics* "The Caesura of the Speculative" (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1998, 208-235). He conceives the crisis in terms of tragic art, a caesura, *constraint of opposition* (212), and *paradoxical gesture* (213). He suggests that opposition marks a structural limitation in the speculative Hegelian dialectic (211-212), which he generalizes to all philosophical forms. He says,

there is a closure of the speculative that is by right insuperable [impossible to overcome, oppose, be rid of, or deal with successfully]. And it is also this inexhaustible power of reappropriation which always menaced the Heideggerian procedure from within and which does not cease to oblige us, today, to take up anew the question of the relation between dialectical process and the aletheic structure. (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1998, 212.)

Alethic means *relating to the philosophic concepts of truth and possibility, and especially to the branch of logic that formalizes these* (Encarta World English Dictionary). Lacoue-Labarthe suggests that speculative philosophers are troubled by philosophical representations of truth and possibility (terms of enablement and metaphysic - the theory of causality, *presence, identity, being*); that the depiction of truth and *presence* in philosophical theory is law-like ("by right") and established via dialectical force of appropriation, an unlimited ("inexhaustible") force, predetermined ("closure") and impossible to oppose or overcome ("insuperable"). He proposes ascertaining the process by which these representations are obtained to consider how the process affects speculative conclusions, and he thinks this an obligation established

in and by the menacing dialectical force of appropriation - that force which renders truth-claims in the first place.

He says, “the completion of philosophy is the passage of the gap or the closing of the wound (re-)opened (212.)” Speculative claims eradicate the unknown and with eradication the unknown reappears; the crisis in philosophy is its vulnerability (“wound”), it both engenders and limits philosophy’s law-like ends - conclusive metaphysics and truth claims. Lacoue-Labarthe considers “the impossibility of covering over this crisis, this wound still open in the tissue of philosophy, a wound that does not heal and that reopens constantly under the hand that would close it. (213.)” He suggests that attempts to resolve the crisis of caesura in the speculative end in its reassertion; opposition is futile because efforts to oppose the dialectical force of appropriation result in more appropriation.

A caesura is a brief interruption. For Lacoue-Labarthe the caesura in the speculative is brief indeed, the speculative - a machine that thrives on its own brief interruptions:

[...] this dialectical starting device, constantly reengaged, always lacks a principle of resolution. Everything happens, therefore, as though we were dealing with [...] a kind of immobilized attenuation of a dialectical process that marks time in an interminable oscillation between two poles of an opposition, always infinitely distant from each other. The act of suspension is this: quite simply, the incessant repetition of the engaging of the dialectical process the - never changing - form [structure] of *the closer it is, the more distant it is; the more dissimilar it is, the more adequate it is; the more interior it is, the more exterior it is.* [His italics.] (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1998, 230.)

The speculative is always restarting for lack in a final principle of resolution. The dialectical process marks an oppositional effort to decrease the distance between *the known* and *the unknown*. The more it (this process) decreases the gap the larger the gap becomes; the nearer the opposite poles move towards each other the farther apart

they get. This is an oppositional relation ultimately thwarted by its own driving force, a suspended motion of reduction (“immobilized attenuation”).

The speculative (and synonymously the dialectic) is, for Lacoue-Labarthe, motion in suspension, motion that dismantles itself as a system of coming to knowledge, a possibility that he questions:

How is it [...] that the speculative (de)constitutes itself - I mean, dismantles itself, [...] in the same movement by which it erects itself, installs itself and constitutes a system? And what does this imply about the possibility and the structure, about the logic, of truth and of property in general? (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1998, 212.)

Lacoue-Labarthe suggests the speculative dynamic of doing/undoing is a critical element that implicates the structure of the speculative modus operandi, its logic, metaphysical system, truth-claims, objects of inquiry (“property”) and theoretical import. The crisis in the speculative works both ways Lacoue-Labarthe seems to say, damaging (opposing) the speculative itself and its objects of inquiry. After putting forth the question around the possibility of constitution/de-constitution, Lacoue-Labarthe says that the question pertains to a single problematic, that of mimesis (214). Mimesis implies a contradictory structure, structural ambiguity in the speculative modus operandi he says (231). And then he says this:

[...] nothing would prevent us from recognizing in this paralysis affecting (without end) the very movement of the dialectic and the ontologic [the theory and logic of *being*], and beyond the evident gesture of conjuration, the return effect of mimetology within the speculative, and, consequently, within the general discourse of truth and presence. (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1998, 231.)

Lacoue-Labarthe coins *mimetology* by combining *mimesis* and *ontology* - I propose.⁶ In this he suggests that mimesis is ontologically implicated in the speculative, returns in speculative theories, in its metaphysics and truths; that speculative representations of *being* proceed mimetically, as a false presumption of truth, that mimetology renders paralyzing caesuras - the suspended momentum that he identifies as the crisis. He suggests this happens in addition to the conjuration-gesture in that discourse, (which I elaborate later in this chapter as the dialectical mimetic performative gesture of *Aufhebung* in Lacoue-Labarthe's conception, and in the next, as *the turn trope* in Butler's).

In hyperbologic Lacoue-Labarthe redresses the crisis. He installs hyperbologic, a mimesis of sorts into the philosophical momentum, rewrites that momentum by halting its oppositional force to enable modification in its negative negating exclusionary rendition of ontology and metaphysics. He explains hyperbologic "[as] "logic" of the open-ended exchange of the excess of presence and of the excess of loss, the alternation of appropriation and disappropriation [...] (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1998, 231.)" In putting quotation marks around *logic* he maintains hyperbologic as an economy of reason while limiting its scope as such. Hyperbologic, he suggests, is *exchange in endless alternation, the logic of excess and opposites that exceeds opposition*. Hyperbologic affects the oppositional element in metaphysical conceptions, prompts endless turning - alternation in the oppositional logic of philosophical truths. *Presence*, a divided onto-metaphysical proposition is constituted in terms of its absolute opposite - loss - Lacoue-Labarthe objects prompting us to conceive *presence* in hyperbological

⁶ I expand the meaning of *mimetology* in Lacoue-Labarthe's understanding through Jacques Derrida and Suzanne Gearhart later. For Derrida mimetology is "originary mimesis," Platonic mimesis and fear of mimetic appropriation (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1998, 7). Gearhart reads it in French, as *mimetologie*, which she explains in terms of Lacoue-Labarthe's conception of generalized mimesis in Aristotelian conception - as a paradoxical theory of representation that assumes chronological linearity between nature-*origin* and art-*copy*, to conflate it (Gearhart, 1992, 188).

terms instead. Hyperbological conception of *presence* maintains the oppositional relation by alternating *presence* and *loss*, constantly turning the one into the other to equate them, to impede and exceed the binary oppositional absolutism in one or the other. This is likewise the case with *appropriation* and *disappropriation*. Importantly, Lacoue-Labarthe says that hyperbologic underlies the definition of the tragic (231). Hyperbologic is the logic of tragic art he suggests.

In conclusion to “The Caesura of the Speculative” Lacoue-Labarthe says this:

[R]e-elaboration of the interpretation of tragedy cannot fail, in its turn [via *the turn* that is a component of it], to touch the dialectical-structural conception of the organization of tragedy. It results, in any case, in the subordination of the theory of the alternation of tones. (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1998, 234.)

Re-elaboration, a mimesis of sorts endowed with alternation (“in its turn”), affects (“touch”) dialectical philosophy’s association with (“organization”) tragic art. This subordinates alternation-theory (“the theory of the alternation of tones”). In again other words, re-elaboration, which is speculative philosophic interpretations of tragic art, affects the speculative method of inquiry or its theory but even if (“in any case”) this fails - if tragic art does not affect philosophy, re-elaboration definitely affects alternation-theory. Re-elaboration makes alternation an inconclusive exchange in power - a relationship in which speculative philosophy subordinates tragic art and then they alternate so that tragic art subordinates speculative philosophy. This redefines them both along with their mutual logic - alternation. And then, Lacoue-Labarthe says, re-elaboration ceases to guarantee a “return to the same (234.)” In other words, re-elaboration is always transformative.

The structure of tragedy itself becomes immobilized and paralyzed. Yet this does not in any way prevent this “neutralization” of the dialectical dynamic from being constantly *active* [his italics]. For the tragic structure also remains dialectical [...] (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1998, 234.)

Tragic art and dialectical philosophy are identical; the dialectic is a tragic structure and the tragic structure is dialectical. Their exchange in re-elaboration is a double gesture. It both immobilizes them and prevents immobilizing them (“neutralization”). After this he says that re-elaboration in the theory of alternation “does not do away with the logic of exchange and alternation. It simply brings it to a halt, re-establishes its equilibrium; it prevents it [...] from carrying along its representations exclusively [...] (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1998, 234-235.)” This argument ends “The Caesura of the Speculative.” The argument is, that although alternation maintains itself, it halts exclusionary representational conventions, taking us back to our starting point, to the description of the crisis of the caesura in which the dialectical menacing force was both the cause and effect of unlimited re-appropriations affecting speculative truths.

Lacoue-Labarthe never explicitly says that the Hegelian speculative dialectic is the overpowering assimilative force of mimesis-mimetology that he fears. Nor does he say he addresses or redresses it via hyperbolic as a mimetic convention in re-elaboration to avoid being dialectically assimilated, negated or opposed. Jacques Derrida writes the introduction to *Typography*. He suggests that Lacoue-Labarthe’s desistance is strategic. Derrida says this: “Assimilation or identificatory projection: these are what Lacoue-Labarthe constantly puts us on guard against. He uncovers their fatal character, the *political* [his italics] trap they hold, even in [...] mimetology, in an interpretation of originary mimesis as imitation. (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1998, 7.)” Derrida suggests that Lacoue-Labarthe is concerned with the problem of assimilation that occurs via representation (“projection”) in discursive conventions oriented to or motivated in terms of identity politics; that assimilation happens through identification and through mimetology that are foundational in these conventions. In “originary mimesis” Derrida refers to what he understands as Plato’s explicit apprehension of mimesis (Ibid.). Derrida considers that Lacoue-Labarthe thinks that fear of mimesis is often unacknowledged (editor’s note, 7n-4) and that Lacoue-Labarthe addresses that version of mimesis too, *as an implicit apprehension of the assimilating force of mimesis*. Derrida says that Lacoue-Labarthe addresses this fundamental problem of

appropriation in mimesis in terms of an “equivocal and troubling repetition. (Ibid.)” Lacoue-Labarthe, “does not oppose it and does not criticize it; he is not even sure [...] of] the best word for describing what he does with it by reinscribing it in another structure: [...] double bind, hyperbology. (8.)” Lacoue-Labarthe mimes the problem to which he objects to tacitly criticize it, using a methodology that Derrida tentatively calls hyperbologic that he describes as an alternative structure in mimesis.

Lacoue-Labarthe opens “The Caesura of the Speculative” with a description of the speculative tragic matrix: “I would like to show [...] that tragedy, or a certain interpretation of tragedy, explicitly philosophical, and above all wanting to be such, is the origin or the matrix of what in the wake of Kant is conventionally called speculative thought: that is to say, dialectical thought, [...]. (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1998, 208.)”

Lacoue-Labarthe says that tragic art and its philosophic interpretations form an origin to speculative thought. This is illogical considering that philosophic interpretation of tragic art *is* speculative thought. Lacoue-Labarthe suggests that philosophy is constituted in its own interpretations of tragic art and as such it is reflexive. His equation between tragic art and its interpretation is hyperbological. It is set in excess of the oppositional alternation that it mobilizes.

Suzanne Gearhart explains Lacoue-Labarthe’s speculative tragic matrix in the seventh chapter of her text *The Interrupted Dialectic: Philosophy, Psychoanalysis, and Their Tragic Other* - “The Tragic Matrix of Speculative Philosophy: Generalized Mimesis and the *Paradoxe sur le comédien*,” (Gearhart, 1992, 182-206). Gearhart considers that Lacoue-Labarthe deploys a methodology of appositive expressions in many of his formulations. *Apposition* is “a grammatical construction in which two adjacent nouns having the same referent stand in the same syntactical relation to the rest of a sentence. (Webster’s, 1977.)” Lacoue-Labarthe describes the origin (source or matrix) of speculative dialectical philosophy in a sentence that juxtaposes tragic art and its interpretation. Tragic art and its interpretation, two adjacent nouns in the sentence, refer to the same thing - *the matrix* (of speculative dialectic thought). Their adjacency (in the sentence) equates the disparate discursive conventions - tragic art and exegesis - via the mutual referent i.e. the matrix of speculative thought.

Gearhart considers that Lacoue-Labarthe's appositional methodology reflects his relation to Hegel, which reflects Hegel's relation to tragic art:

It is significant that, while Lacoue-Labarthe, explicitly attaches the greatest possible critical value to art, he nonetheless repeatedly portrays himself as seeking a 'minimum of lucidity' in his writing concerning the problem of art and philosophy, rather than any sweeping reversal or upheaval of established philosophical values.⁷ This modesty corresponds to an important component of his analysis of the relation between art and philosophy: art is not absolutely other than philosophy, at least not in the usual sense, Lacoue-Labarthe repeatedly stresses. Lacoue-Labarthe's insistence that the era that is constituted and recapitulated by Hegelian philosophy is still ours is another sign of the emphasis he places on the metaphysical character of art. It implies that any question we ask of Hegel, any critical strategy we use to read him is already to some extent implicit in Hegel's philosophy. Even in approaching Hegel from the standpoint of a critical concept of art, we are in a sense under his power. (Gearhart, 1992, 183-184.)⁸

Gearhart suggests that Hegel assimilates Lacoue-Labarthe in the same way that Hegel assimilates tragic art; that assimilated, Lacoue-Labarthe shares in Hegel's understanding of tragic art. Like Hegel Lacoue-Labarthe thinks that tragic art is metaphysical i.e. devoid of a distinct material substance and identity, and that as such tragic art presents a possibility of critique. Gearhart explains that Lacoue-Labarthe amplifies the ambiguity ("minimum lucidity") of tragic art in writing about it. She argues that the crucial implication of Lacoue-Labarthe's speculative tragic matrix is

⁷ Gearhart indicates that Lacoue-Labarthe says this in *The Literary Absolute*, written together with Jean-Luc Nancy in 1988 (Gearhart, 1992, 263n-2).

⁸ Gearhart indicates that her understanding pertains to Phillip Lacoue-Labarthe's, "L'Impresentable," *Poétique* no.21 (1975): 54 (Gearhart, 1992, 263n-3).

that tragic art is the source of philosophy even while it is explicitly not philosophical; “as aesthetic, literary, or poetic - [tragic art] is implicitly part of this matrix in which the interpretation of tragedy also figures. (Gearhart, 1992, 185.)” Gearhart thinks that art is speculative and philosophical (206) but here she expresses the speculative philosophic perspective i.e. Hegel’s and Lacoue-Labarthe’s. In that perspective tragic art is a non-speculative discursive practice that speculative philosophy objectifies, a program that Lacoue-Labarthe’s matrix modifies, Gearhart suggests, by rooting the speculative “in its aesthetic other. (186.)” The implication of this - that the aesthetic object of inquiry is a part of the method of inquiry, the object forms the inquiring subject. The speculative tragic matrix thwarts definitive (onto-metaphysical) positioning, conflates the subject and the object by conflating philosophy and tragic art; maintains binary objectifying division to confound it.

As a result, philosophy itself can be dislocated, though not overturned or dispensed with, its claim to truth contextualized in terms of its desire to provide the ultimate interpretation of tragedy. The critical power of tragedy (and more generally art) in relation to philosophy derives from the ambiguity of its status as matrix: both the other of philosophy and the same as philosophy. By implication, both aspects must be affirmed if tragedy is to retain its critical value. Much of Lacoue-Labarthe’s work can be interpreted in terms of this double exigency. (Gearhart, 1992, 186.)

Lacoue-Labarthe seeks upholding speculative appropriation, which is the desire to provide the ultimate interpretation of tragic art. But he wants this in a limited way. He achieves it, Gearhart explains, by endowing tragic art with ambiguity vis-à-vis speculative philosophy, a double status in the matrix of speculative thought (Gearhart, 1992, 186). The ambiguity of tragic art in the matrix is that it is at once identical to and different from philosophy. She says that both aspects must be affirmed to form the double exigency in the matrix - a critical pressure leading to a crisis that urgently demands resolution yet which must always remain unresolved - open-ended. The

double exigency of tragic art presents a critical context to speculative philosophy, to its truth-like claims to truth and presence. Gearhart considers that in the majority of Lacoue-Labarthe's work tragic art has this position of irresolvable-ambiguity vis-à-vis speculative philosophy. However, she adds, in some instances Lacoue-Labarthe resolves ambiguity, subjects the speculative to a tragic artistic dialectical operation (186). Ultimately, Lacoue-Labarthe draws a distinction between tragic art and philosophy Gearhart says (187). To understand this distinction she continues, it is necessary to consider that for him art and philosophy have a mutual structural component - representation and mimesis (187).

Gearhart suggests that the terms mimesis, imitation, representation and identification are interchangeable in Lacoue-Labarthe's arguments, that interchangeability as such is the critical dimension of mimesis in Lacoue-Labarthe's writing (Gearhart, 1992, 188).

For Lacoue-Labarthe, the critical potential of the concept of mimesis is already implicit in Aristotle's *Poetics* and, more specifically, in his conception of art as the *perfection* [her italics] of nature. In Lacoue-Labarthe's terms, this definition of art involves a paradox. It implies that art or, more specifically, tragedy, is *at once* [her italics] imitation and original. For Aristotle, nature retains its originality insofar as art is an imitation of it, but art *also* [her italics] has an originality inasmuch as the *perfected* [her italics] nature it reproduces is not purely natural. Lacoue-Labarthe sees this paradox as evidence that Aristotle's *Poetics* already implies what he calls a *mimetologie*, that is, a theory of the "original" or poetic nature of representation - in other words, a notion of mimesis in which the re-production or copy is (also) "original." (Gearhart, 1992, 188.)

Gearhart defines Lacoue-Labarthe's mimetology in respect to Lacoue-Labarthe's conception of Aristotelian mimesis - as *generalized mimesis* and a paradoxical theory in which the origin/copy dichotomy in Platonic conception of mimesis alternates.

Aristotelian mimesis for Lacoue-Labarthe, Gearhart says, is a theory of representation that stages a paradoxical linear relationship, a correspondence that turns the original into the copy and vice versa. For Lacoue-Labarthe, she says, this alternation is mimetology's critical aspect because it conflates oppositions and disorients chronological linearity in hierarchical terms.

The original character of mimesis almost always implies quotation marks around the term *original* [her italics] in his work. If this were not the case, Lacoue-Labarthe's position concerning the original character of mimesis would simply be an inversion of the philosophical interpretation of mimesis, and mimesis itself would simply be another form of origin. Lacoue-Labarthe's work involves a transformation, or at the very least an analysis of the ambiguity of the concept of mimesis, rather than a demystification of it, and this is why the term itself is neither simply positive nor simply negative for Lacoue-Labarthe. (Gearhart, 1992, 189.)

Lacoue-Labarthe uses citation marks around *origin* when he wants to express mimesis as hierarchical chronology, as an origin followed by a copy. Gearhart suggests that Lacoue-Labarthe mystifies the concept of mimesis when he avoids inverting hierarchical-chronological mimesis - confounds the copy/origin arrangement. And anyway inversion (or turning) is immanent to Platonic origins discourse when Aristotelian mimesis inverts it. In stressing ambiguity Lacoue-Labarthe hampers finalizing oppositions - positive/negative, original/copy, same/other, which transforms hierarchical mimesis.

Likewise Lacoue-Labarthe equates and alternates the dialectic and hyperbologic, because they have mimesis in their structure. Gearhart considers that the affinity (resemblance) between the terms indicates "the radical nature of the difference between them (Gearhart, 1992, 191.)"

Though he [Lacoue-Labarthe] never makes the point explicit, it is not difficult to discern that the relationship between the two forms of logic [hyperbologic and dialectic] is not itself dialectical but rather hyperbological: that is, the hyperbologic is so radically different from the dialectic because it resembles the dialectic so closely. The hyperbologic is nothing more than a generalization of the dialectical principle of the exchange of contraries, in which the process of exchange between the opposing terms is unlimited: in which no absolute term exists to close off and provide an ultimate reconciliation to the process of opposition and exchange. [...]. A hyperbologic is an integral part of mimetology because only such a logic can account for a conception of mimesis or identification in which the original is the copy and vice versa, and in which the possibility of exchange between these two opposites is unlimited - that is, in which neither the copy or the original can ever be determined to be original. (Gearhart, 1992, 191-192.)

Hyperbologic and the dialectic, modes of thought and of representation, are the same and different at once for Lacoue-Labarthe. Both are founded in the principle of oppositions and both entreat or activate alternation in oppositions. A hyperbological exchange renders endless alternation yet arguably the dialectical exchange is absolute - renders final closure. This is arguable because in explaining the distinction between the two forms Lacoue-Labarthe obfuscates it; we can only assume that for him the dialectic is a final or negating resolution because in re-elaborating it he modifies it.

Gearhart explains that Lacoue-Labarthe understands hyperbologic as a kind of generalized mimesis, which she explains as the Aristotelian conception of mimesis in which art perfects nature and as such is as original as nature, more original than nature, an alternative original and at once the destruction of originality itself. Likewise hyperbologic generalizes the dialectic, mimes the dialectic, perfects it and obviates its mobilizing feature i.e. a final exclusionary negation. Hyperbologic activates an exchange between itself (hyperbologic) and the dialectic, an exchange in which neither one can finally be understood as the opposite of the other nor as its original or copy.

The relationship between hyperbologic and the dialectic is itself hyperbological Gearhart says; it is oppositional yet it exceeds oppositions. (Earlier) Gearhart says that Lacoue-Labarthe finally distinguishes tragic art and philosophy (Gearhart, 1992, 187). (Here) she considers that this distinction is finally a function of how mimesis facilitates each convention for Lacoue-Labarthe; that hyperbologic alone is integral to *mimetology* because only hyperbologic can explain the unlimited mimetic exchange - perpetual turning in oppositions. In this Gearhart establishes the ultimate distinction between the two forms in terms of mimesis, she resolves the radical nature of the difference between hyperbologic and the dialectic - irresolvable mimetic identity ambiguity via mimesis itself. This is false distinction, in her own words, “hyperbologic is none other than the speculative itself, in its strange relationship of non-identity with itself. (206.)” Gearhart says in other words, that the two forms are completely interchangeable based on their mutual identity of *non-identity*, which is their mimetic implication - a product of their mutual claim to/in mimesis.

I return to “The Caesura of the Speculative” to consider Gearhart’s distinction asking - is mimetology as integral to the dialectic as it is to hyperbologic? In the opening page of the chapter, just after the appositional description of the matrix Lacoue-Labarthe says this:

[...] the dialectic - the mastering thought of the corruptible and of death, the determination of the negative and its conversion into a force of work and a production, the assumption of the contradictory and the *Aufhebung* as the very movement of the auto-conception of the True or the Subject, of absolute Thought - that the *theory* of death presupposes [...] a *theatre*: a structure of representation and a mimesis, a space which is enclosed, distant, and preserved (that is, safeguarded and true if one hears, as Hegel did, [...]). On the other hand, what is a little less known - and which I would like to emphasize for this reason - is that in the earliest stages of absolute Idealism, we find the speculative process itself (dialectical logic) founded quite explicitly on the model of tragedy. In reconstituting this movement [...] in the very

denegation [a request-refused] or disavowal of theatricality, [...] one can detect [...] the philosophical exploitation [...] of the Aristotelian concept of catharsis. [...] it is not simply mimesis or simply the “structure of representation” that turns out to be surreptitiously involved in the dialectic [...] along with what essentially defines it for the entire classical tradition, namely, its proper *effect* [his italics]: the “tragic effect,” the so-called “purifying effect [is involved in the dialectic]. [All italics his.] (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1998, 208-209.)

Hegel means to regulate (“the mastering”) the unknown (“the negative”) - to protect pure and ideal thought (“the corruptible”) from being adulterated. The crisis in the speculative happens in the course of Hegel’s failed desire to overcome and master death and the unknown. Hegel idealizes tragic art and its representations of death and mimes tragic art for this. Desire to know and master death informs speculative theory, implicates speculative philosophical representations in a mimetic relationship with tragic art; constitutes the speculative dialectical system of representation - ontology and metaphysics in tragic artistic terms. A performative gesture Hegelian dialectic alters the negative-the unknown, turns it into a knowable object (“production”); *inability of knowing death*, the fact of dying becomes an alterable, pure and ideal thought in the course of speculative inquiry. As a process of coming to knowledge, a generative regulatory motivation and method of enlightenment, the speculative dialectic - *aufhebung* is a theory of death and a mimesis. It turns (alters) that which it mimes and assumes the finality of death that it purports to overcome. It is negative mimesis that preserves the tragic terms that it “overcomes.” It conveys a false rendition of death and of the unknown (“a theatre”), which forms an enclosure Lacoue-Labarthe says, a protective covering that contradicts the truth - the fact of dying and that some things may never be known. And this theory “knows” it is lacking, that it will never finally resolve the unknown; a reflexive method (“auto-conception”) it imparts its sense of self-lack, renders a death driven subject consumed with denying its immanent death - the unknown. For Lacoue-Labarthe the dialectic and its subject are

implicated in mimesis; mimetology *is* equally integral to both representational systems - the dialectic and hyperbologic.

(Still in the above citation,) Lacoue-Labarthe suggests that in addition to mimesis in the structure of speculative representational conventions, is the tragic effect. He likens *aufhebung* to the sacrificial heroic function in tragic literature. Like in tragic art that expels its hero, the speculative *modus operandi* is informed and constituted in tragic ritual - catharsis. Lacoue-Labarthe is concerned that the speculative thrives on but refuses its own tragic constitutive elements, that the whole of philosophy is tragic artistic in this sense of sacrificing its idol, that speculative conventions emerged throughout their variations in the history of philosophy beginning with Plato, as a “gesture of expulsion (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1998, 224)” - a performative momentum in refusal (“denegation or disavowal of theatricality”); that refusal mobilize the mimetic relation that the Hegelian gesture performs (enacts without explicitly saying) and which is repeated in foundational processes throughout the philosophic generations prior to Hegel, in Platonic and Aristotelian mimesis, in Aristotelian catharsis as in the Freudian psychoanalytic concepts of repression (disavowal) and identification. Lacoue-Labarthe suggests that all these foundational conventions elaborate and regenerate the unknown in terms of miming-to-refuse it. Hyperbologic is meant to perform a correction to this refusal effect of tragic expulsion.

A hyperbological exchange pits the truth of one convention against the truth in another to delimit the absolute truth in the one as in the other. Consider for example that Freud understands sadomasochism as a negative action that is fundamental to the development sexual desire; the subject, who identifies with alterity turns in opposition to itself in disregard of alterity. And consider that this is likewise the case for Sophocles, who endows Antigone with the kind of desire that prompts her to destroy Creon’s authority at her own peril; the satisfaction of her desire, which is to destroy Creon impels a turn against herself. For Freud sadomasochism is a proper component of

instinctual life, is normal in infants⁹ yet in adult life its connection to violence in sexual gratification establishes it in terms of a perversion that requires medical attention (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1988, 400) and it may even be morally debilitating.¹⁰ For Sophocles on the other hand, while Antigone's desire is sadomasochistic, is mobilized in oppositional terms, is aggressive and deviant, her act and especially its deviant sexual component extends Creon's negating terms of authority, contextualizes his sovereign power of negation anew, in terms that exceed negation, as we will see in my third chapter - 'Butler's Antigone.' Hyperbological exchange between this interpretation of Sophoclean tragic art and Freudian psychoanalytic theory re-elaborates sadomasochism in the latter; modifies the negative terms - pathological, moral or social deviancy comprising the norm (sadomasochism) in Freudian conception.

Lacoue-Labarthe's example of a hyperbological exchange is Sophocles's *Antigone*. For Lacoue-Labarthe *Antigone* presents the ultimate tragic implication in the speculative - a hyperbological exchange between the original and the copy, which dislocates speculative truth claims from within them. Lacoue-Labarthe thinks that tragic art in general and *Antigone* in particular renders an access to a truth (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1998, 223), an understanding of truth that he distinguishes from truth in the speculative sense. While speculative truth is an insurmountable contradiction precipitated by the double law of mimetic desire he says (223), the truth of tragic art interrupts the speculative claim to truth, by provoking an immobilizing spasm in it (227).

⁹ Under the term 'Anal Sadistic Stage' Laplanche and Pontalis explain that Freud considers that sadomasochism appears in infants aging two to four years and in correlation with their muscular development (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1988, 35-36).

¹⁰ Under the term 'Masochism' Laplanche and Pontalis propose that in 'The Economic Problem of Masochism' written in 1924 Freud is concerned "with a state of affairs that lies at the root of the masochistic perversion and that is also to be found in moral masochism: the fact of sexual pleasure being bound to pain. (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1988, 244.)"

To show this or rather to performatively instantiate it, Lacoue-Labarthe mobilizes a hyperbological relationship between two Sophoclean texts, *Antigone* and *Oedipus the King*. Lacoue-Labarthe admittedly mobilizes the two texts in a confrontation (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1998, 219) - a dialectical-hyperbological relation that emerges for him via the story of their translation and which interrupts the very terms (mimetic desire) that Lacoue-Labarthe deploys to explain that relationship (confrontation). He explains that *Oedipus the King* and *Antigone* are both Sophoclean tragic dramas translated by Friedrich Holderlin. And, that while Sophocles wrote *Antigone* before writing *Oedipus the King*, *Antigone* appears second in the editorial arrangement of Holderlin's text (220) to suggest that *Oedipus the King* was written before *Antigone*, that *Oedipus the King* is the more ancient of the two. This forms the basis of Lacoue-Labarthe's argument, that true chronology - the truth of the origins - is corrupted by its speculative interpretation; that speculative interpretations deny and turn origination around.

Lacoue-Labarthe thinks *Antigone* impedes its own translation because it is the utmost generically Greek Ancient tragic drama (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1998, 220), that the impossibility of translating *Antigone* exacerbates speculative mimetic desire - desire to overcome or negate it.

Moreover, this is why there cannot be a modern tragedy (at least in the rigorous sense) except in and through the translation of ancient tragedy. And this is also why - a general rule, even if it can be illustrated by only one example - the translation must be all the more violent and transformative in that it involves a text more properly Greek. (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1998, 220.)

For Lacoue-Labarthe there is no modern tragic art only revision in ancient tragic Greek art (literature). In translating *Antigone*, he argues, Holderlin deliberately and admittedly intensifies the violence that he identifies in the original drama, in order to approximate a modern mode of representation (220). Modernity is an act of interpretation set in violent modification - Lacoue-Labarthe thinks. He generalizes this

to all modes of representation, suggests that the whole enterprise of interpretation is a rewriting and an imitation that alters an existing original historical scheme (221-2). Representation as violent appropriation, he suggests, is constitutive of the modern relation to the past, a method of repetition that destroys the origin, “[...] this [is the] difference that repetition implies [...] (222,)” “the repetition of what occurred there [in ancient Greek tragic art] without ever taking place, [...]. (221.)” He suggests that truth is **unknowable** outside its original context, that to be known truth must be altered or adjusted. In its desire to exceed the past the speculative refuses its own origins, alters them in what Lacoue-Labarthe refers to as “the problematic of the tragic effect (222-223)” - catharsis or momentum in refusal and expulsion, which he elaborates via Renee Girard’s conception of *mimetic desire*, “the double bind that structures mimetic identification (“Be like me”/”Do not be like me”) (223.)” I now consider Girard’s argument following which I explain how Lacoue-Labarthe re-elaborates it.

In *mimetic desire* Girard proposes a universal theory founded in a violent convergence between mimesis and desire. He says he promotes mimetic desire as an alternative to the Oedipus myth founding the Freudian psychic model (Girard, 1995, 183). And that he appreciates Freud’s revelations in the ambivalence of desire in the psychic mechanism of identification, however, he argues, Freud over-focuses on patricide and incest and thereby loses the prospect of a superior utility in mimetic desire (183) yet in elaborating mimetic desire Girard focuses on these likewise. Girard considers that the men in tragic dramas rival for divine placing. They desire being divine Girard says. He understands this desire as violence incarnate and sees it reciprocated among and spread by men (143-144). *Desire to be divine* is often misconceived as what propels the violence in tragedy while what tragic heroes seek most is violence itself - he says. Absolute violence is men’s object of desire, which leads to tragic sacrificial conflict he says (144). Recounting Oedipus’s meeting with his father Laius at the crossroads, that famous patricide, Girard suggests that Laius prompts the violent altercation and that for this he is the father figure. First comes violent behaviour then comes role allocation he says. He suggests that violence prompts identity. Violence plays the central role in the awaking of desire (144). Later he says

that Laius's violence was awakened by Oedipus's desire for the object (145). Desire turns into violence and violence turns into desire he suggests finally.

Our modern terms for this phenomenon are *sadism* or *masochism* [his italics] [...that] we regard [...] as a pathological deviation from the norm. We believe that the normal form of desire is nonviolent and that this nonviolent form is characteristic of the generality of mankind.

But if the sacrificial crisis is a universal phenomenon, this hopeful belief [that sadomasochism is pathological] is clearly without foundation. [Sadomasochism is the norm.] At the very height of the crisis violence becomes simultaneously the instrument, object, and all-inclusive subject of desire. This is why social coexistence would be impossible if no surrogate victim existed, if violence persisted beyond a certain threshold and failed to be transmuted into culture. It is only at this point that the vicious circle of reciprocal violence, wholly destructive in nature, is replaced by the vicious circle of ritual violence, creative and protective in nature.

At the height of the sacrificial crisis man's desires are focused on one thing only: violence. And in one way or another violence is always mingled with desire. (Girard, 1995, 144-145.)

Girard thinks that desire is always violent and sadomasochistic and that sadomasochism is the normative universal manner of exchange among men, a sacrificial crisis of a natural order or category that insures cultural order and stability ("ritual violence, creative and protective in nature"). He sees a vicious circle in which cultural order and violent nature turn one into the other. As the crisis peaks, violence, which already vitally assumes manly desires for him, spreads to assume every ontological position (subject, object) and social convention (medium of exchange). Sacrificing a victim ends the crisis, a violent act that establishes social coexistence that gradually develops into the sadomasochistic exchange that repeats the process all over again.

Re-elaborating Freudian theory of identification Girard considers that the sacrificial crisis is not about a violent death drive in desire but rather about the mimetic rival (Girard, 1995, 145). The father figure, he says, is the subject of desire, the mother - its object, their son - the father's mimetic rival.

The rival desires the same object as the subject [...] the subject desires the object because the rival desires it. In desiring an object the rival alerts the subject to the desirability of the object. The rival, then, serves as a model for the subject [...]. (Girard, 1995, 145.)

In desiring his mother the son initiates desire in his father, precipitates the father's violent desire. Rivalry sets the terms of exchange between these two men and is their mutually implicating desire; the rivalling son's desire is the object of his father's desire, which he - the father mimes according to Girard; he suggests the father desires being his son and fashions his desire according to that of his son.

We must understand that desire itself is essentially mimetic, directed toward an object of desire by the model [the rivalling son]. [...]

Two desires converging on the same object are bound to clash. Thus, mimesis coupled by desire leads automatically to conflict. However, men always seem half blind to this conjunction, unable to perceive it as a cause of rivalry. (Girard, 1995, 146.)

Girard refers to oedipus complex when he says that blindness is a consequence of the clash of desires in mimetic rivalry.

The mimetic aspects of desire must correspond to a primary impulse [...] exacerbated in man to the point where only cultural constraints can channel it in constructive directions. Man cannot respond to the universal human injunction, "Imitate me!" without almost immediately encountering an

inexplicable counterorder: “Don’t imitate me!” (which really means, “Do not appropriate *my* [his italics] object”). [...] Man and his desires thus perpetually transmit contradictory signals to one another [...] neither perceives that his desire has become the reflection of the other’s. (Girard, 1995, 147.)

Girard sees a universal order facilitated by a mimetic exchange in oppositional desire. Turning in contradictory terms - *do/don’t imitate me* promotes and also curbs mainly violent mimetic desires in the process of facilitating cultural order and stability (“constructive directions”). Girard takes tragic art as exemplary of this. He explains how everything in tragic art alternates (Girard, 1995, 149), “every motif in tragedy is governed by an alternating movement, [...] (150.)” “It is clear that alternation constitutes a relationship. In fact, alternation is a fundamental fact of the tragic relationship [...] a passage from being to nothingness or from nothingness to being. (150.)” “Only an act of collective expulsion can bring this oscillation to a halt and cast violence outside the community. (151.)” *Being* and non-existence (nihil) *turn* in the human tragic condition - an interminable turning, which the communal effort of expulsion alone may stop. “As long as violence remains present among men, and as long as men pursue it as an absolute, as a kind of divinity, it will continue its devastating oscillations. (151.)” Tragic art pronounces “successive inversion of differences. (158.)” “When differences begin to shift back and forth the cultural order loses its stability; all its elements constantly exchange places. (158.)” Antigone for example, who Girard does not mention in this respect is both daughter and sister of Oedipus and as such is set in a kinship situation (identity positioning) that keeps alternating, an intolerable contradiction in the tragic artistic terms, Girard would say. “When all differences have been eliminated and the similarity between two [tragic] figures has been achieved, we say that the antagonists are doubles. It is their interchangeability that makes possible the act of sacrificial substitution. (159.)” In Girard’s interpretation Antigone’s identification (loyalty) vacillates, perpetually shifts between her brother-father (Oedipus) and her brother-uncle (Polyneices) until her final sacrificial expulsion. Girard’s thesis, that the “sacrificial crisis can be defined [...] as a crisis of distinctions

[...] affecting the cultural order. This cultural order is nothing more than a regulated system of distinctions in which the differences among individuals are used to establish their “identity” and their mutual relationships. (49.)” Antigone’s death for Girard is inevitable and necessary in order to explain the truth about life. For Irigaray his is sexist theory facilitated by and facilitating the notion of the exchange of women in a sacred rite from which women are excluded as subjects yet to which they are bound as exchange objects (Irigaray, 1986, 8). For Lacoue-Labarthe Girard’s conception of mimetic desire refuses the possibility of a positive tragic hero. Lacoue-Labarthe precludes this refusal by interrupting mimetic desire in Girard’s conception.

The tragic fault consists [...] in the religious and sacrificial interpretation of the social ill. The tragic hero goes under [...] for wanting to carry out the ritual and for desiring [...] to remove the defilement which he imagines to be sacred. He is destroyed not by directly provoking punishment, but by calling up the old ritual of the scapegoat victim. He is destroyed, in short, by his belief in what Girard calls the religious “mechanisms,” which [...] presuppose the transgression of the human limit, the appropriation of a divine position (Antigone will be an exemplary case) and the appropriation of the right to institute difference by oneself (this will be the case of Oedipus just as well as that of Creon, for such a reading of tragedy indeed definitively precludes that one could even conceive of a “positive” tragic hero). Thus, he who desires difference and exclusion excludes himself, and suffers, to the point of irreversible loss, this inexorable, unlimited differentiation that the “hyperbologic” introduces in its doubling of the dialectical-sacrificial process in such a way as to prevent its culmination and paralyze it *from within* [his italics]. Tragedy, because it is the catharsis of the speculative, presents disappropriation *as* [his italics] that which secretly animates and constitutes it; tragedy presents (dis)appropriation. (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1998, 233.)

Lacoue-Labarthe suggests that Girard's religious manner of conceiving sacrificial purification mandates the tragic hero's destruction. Lacoue-Labarthe reads the figure of Antigone into Girard's formulation: like Oedipus and Creon in Girard's conception of the tragic fault, Antigone too, Lacoue-Labarthe suggests, is motivated by religious belief when she mimes to assume divine identity, which for Lacoue-Labarthe is more about the right to cleanse society of its sins by instituting *difference* than about violence. Lacoue-Labarthe considers that miming divine rights has fatal consequences ("irreversible loss") but after saying this he installs hyperbologic into Girard's formulation of mimetic desire, as the consequence of "inexorable, unlimited differentiation." For Girard collective expulsion alone finalizes interminable oscillation to "cast violence outside the community (151)" - a very violent act in itself, which according to Girard's rationale proceeds in more violence. Hyperbologic appears in Lacoue-Labarthe's text in quotation marks as if he cites it in Girard's when in fact Girard avoids using the term at all or in reference to Holderlin's interpretation of *Antigone*.¹¹

Lacoue-Labarthe focuses on the logic that in his view motivates Antigone's actions as a tragic heroine i.e. hyperbologic. Like Girard he considers that in miming divine law Antigone appropriates the right to institute difference. For Girard appropriation is mimetic desire and a violent manly activity. For Lacoue-Labarthe appropriation is hyperbologic - an immobilizing form of mimesis (doubling). In Lacoue-Labarthe's account Antigone manifests a hyperbological exchange that mobilizes unlimited alternation in the oppositional terms of *identity* and *difference*. Likewise Antigone immobilizes mimetic desire understood as an oppositional form (imitate me/don't). Lacoue-Labarthe argues that this prevents finalizing sacrificial expulsion. He suggests that Antigone's death need not be understood as a final necessary expulsion. And when Lacoue-Labarthe says that tragic art is the catharsis of the

¹¹ Hyperbologic is Friedrich Holderlin's term according to Lacoue-Labarthe. Girard makes no mention of hyperbologic in discussing Holderlin's interpretations of tragedy (Girard, 1995, 45, 155-158).

speculative he suggests that the tragic implication in the speculative modifies speculative philosophy as a process of coming to knowledge, that in its hyperbological relation to speculative philosophy tragic art interrupts speculative-appropriative desire and force; catharsis for Lacoue-Labarthe is never final, is hyperbological. In this he rewrites Girard's formulation, modifies the terms and outcome of mimetic desire, rivalry, appropriation, mimesis and identification alike.

For Girard as for Lacoue-Labarthe mimetic desire is the force that turns *difference* and *identity*, one into the other, in an ongoing and mutually implicating exchange. For both theorists mimetic desire is the crisis of identity and its resolution at once. Likewise for both theorists, *difference* is the binary opposite and integral element of *identity*, a stable referent in the promotion of coherent identity, cultural order and social stability. For Girard alone though, *difference* is associated with fundamental violence, a conception that demands final and fatal expulsion. In tragic mimetic desire Girard conceives identity interchange-ability building up until finally the tragic hero instigates absolute violence in a divergence from human order, manifests *difference* to be expelled in the process. In Lacoue-Labarthe's conception of mimetic desire on the other hand, *difference* is a self-imposed social exclusion. For both, *identity* always implies *difference* in the interminable oscillation of mimetic desire, but for Lacoue-Labarthe alone *difference* and *identity* are hyperbological, which means that their exchange immobilizes the sacrificial momentum (substitution) that from Girard's perspective is the chaotic interchange-ability principle of mimetic doubling that violently finalizes the identity crisis (Girard, 1995, 159). From Girard's perspective like in Lacoue-Labarthe's difference is a social position but only in Girard's view is it a violent deviation from the norm that manifests masculine homo-social terms. These terms are - "the subject desires the object because the rival desires it (Girard, 1995, 145.)" Lacoue-Labarthe's hyperbological intervention in Girard's mimetic desire aborts these male-centred sexually violent terms of rivalry as it also aborts the demand for fundamental violence, for assimilation, sacrifice and final ends.

For both Girard and Lacoue-Labarthe *imitate me/don't imitate me* (Girard, 1995, 147; Lacoue-Labarthe, 1998, 223) presumes an idea of original identity, the

identity of difference understood as a divine right to violent appropriation that calls to be imitated. Likewise for both, imitation destroys the original. For Lacoue-Labarthe this double gesture (imitate me/don't) marks the refusal of constitutive components and the destruction of truth, the destruction of the truth of historical authenticity and of the truth of tragic art, when *Antigone's* historicity is destroyed in its translation; the destruction of chronological linearity between original and copy, as between cause and effect is a desirable and violent outcome for both. For Lacoue-Labarthe this is the crisis and the critical momentum of mimetic desire that demands an adjustment, which he does by re-elaborating mimetic desire in terms of hyperbologic. Mimetic desire is thus hyperbological for Lacoue-Labarthe. Hyperbologic paralyzes the differentiation process that Girard so demands, renders differentiation in terms which are devoid of absolutisms; identity, the subject, the rival and the object of desire like sexual difference/s and any of the oppositional terms that found the exchange just keep inverting forever. Mimetic desire understood as hyperbologic establishes difference/s to bond diverging positions and to promote a notion of equilibrium in which difference is preserved as a critical moment, as identity's limits, a crisis never to be averted (expelled) - Lacoue-Labarthe seems to say.

Lacoue-Labarthe's repetition in mimetic desire rewrites that economy by tempering its violent and sexual specifications and foundation. This is extremely important. It improves Girard's notion of mimesis - mimetic desire. And yet, it diminishes the sexual implication in tragic art, not to rewrite it but to deny it - I argue. Lacoue-Labarthe fails to address the link between sex, the regulation of desire, tragic art and mimesis, a link made within speculative dialectical theory and specifically in speculative philosophical interpretations of Sophocles's *Antigone*. Lacoue-Labarthe's reading of *Antigone* misses the prominence of Antigone's sexuality that is so pertinent in the sequence of events leading to her death.

Like Irigaray Lacoue-Labarthe identifies a crisis around the generation and obliteration of difference in the speculative canon. In Irigaray's conception *mimesis imposed* is the crisis while for Lacoue-Labarthe it is "the constraint of opposition in general (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1998, 212.)" For Irigaray the crisis happens in the negating

refusing elaboration of feminine morphology as a marker of (sexual) difference. For Lacoue-Labarthe the crisis happens when tragedy is idealized, mimed and negated in its speculative interpretation, when tragic art is refused the status of a constitutive component in speculative philosophy. Ultimately both Lacoue-Labarthe and Irigaray observe a separation (cording off of) and a refusal of *difference* impelled by mimesis and resulting in exclusionary representational conventions. Finally, they share a common notion of *truth*; both think that while identity and difference are mutually implicated in the constitution of coherent identity there is and must be an origin. For Irigaray the origin is the feminine, for Lacoue-Labarthe it is ancient Greek tragic art.

Lacoue-Labarthe mimes the crisis of refusal in order to modify *absolute difference*, to entreat the acceptance of differences. Irigaray does the same thing, mimes the crisis of refusal to modify *absolute difference*, to entreat the acceptance of sexual difference. However, Irigaray is prohibited from miming at all because she constitutes *absolute difference* - is a woman. (I elaborate the specifics of Platonic prohibition against women mimes in the next chapter - 'Butler's "Theory" of Performativity.') For Irigaray the crisis of the speculative is this refusal. And when she mimes the crisis of refusal she mimes the terms or conditions that refuse her. However, she is said to be insinuating herself into these terms (that refuse her) and is identified with refusal (Butler, 2001, 61). In light of this, Irigaray's crisis is more demanding than Lacoue-Labarthe's. Lacoue-Labarthe acknowledges that mimesis is historically inscribed in misogynous terms: "In short, what is threatening in mimesis is feminization, instability - hysteria. (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1998, 129.)" He develops this by arguing that his line of thinking follows Irigaray's in *Speculum of the Other Woman* (129n-128). This reference to Irigaray tacitly equates the *refused feminine* with the refusal of tragic art in its speculative interpretations.

I embrace hyperbologic as catharsis that just keeps on, *aufhebung* as an assurance of resolution forever hampered. The idea of the speculative tragic matrix presents an important argument - that the generic identity of speculative conventions like speculative theory itself in all its conceptualizations is founded in speculative interpretations of tragic art, which makes it reflexive and tragic, imbued with tragic

implications; and an important strategy - that the refused constitutive components of fundamental (received) conventions return to challenge, re-contextualize and reformulate the fundamental conventions from which they were or are refused. However, in my opinion the crisis in the speculative is explicitly sexual. The tragic trend, or implication in speculative theory engenders a sexual crisis. The tragic implication in the speculative enables Lacoue-Labarthe's conception of hyperbologic, it *is* hyperbologic but it also engenders discriminatory sexual terms, a sexual division of labour and of possibility - onto-metaphysics established in terms of mimesis that restricts and refuses possibility. (I elaborate the sex-mimesis-metaphysics connection at length in the next chapter).

Lacoue-Labarthe says hyperbologic “underlies the final definition of the tragic (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1998, 231.)” If hyperbologic is structurally tragic artistic as he says, and if tragic art implies a sexual crisis as I think, then hyperbologic must imply the sexual crisis too. A hyperbological confrontation must engage the sexual crisis in tragic art in order to somehow affect it. Lacoue-Labarthe does this to an extent when he modifies Girard's mimetic desire. However, further to suppressing the sexual implications in and of tragic art Lacoue-Labarthe suppresses his own tacit link between *the refused feminine* and *refused tragic art*. His speculative tragic matrix maintains speculative thought and conventions in tragic terms (refusal), an emphasis that promotes a notion of alterity in terms that affirm its exclusion. Tragic art is the always on the brink of being excluded from the genealogy of speculative thought in Lacoue-Labarthe's speculative tragic matrix, and tragic art must remain in unreal positional terms of existence to promote a critical urgency Gearhart argues. Tragic art performs ambiguous identity in Lacoue-Labarthe's speculative tragic matrix - is neither a subject nor object of speculative interpretative desire but both, which presents speculative truth-claims with a challenge Gearhart explains. But this double status renders refusal a never-to-be-resolved crisis, which affirms the necessity of refusal and of the tragic status of the refused, I argue. Finally, I think Lacoue-Labarthe mystifies tragic art when he endows it with ambiguous presence, which, dematerializes tragic art, diminishes its critical possibility in my opinion. Hyperbologic would be more affective in an

alternative context I propose, one that overtly acknowledges the sexual implication of the tragic component in speculative philosophy. Lacoue-Labarthe theorizes hyperbologic to re-elaborate speculative thinking through its own tragic artistic genealogy. I agree but I propose re-elaborating his matrix, to accommodate the prospect of modification in the sexual implications of tragic philosophy.

In the fifth chapter of *Typography*, “Diderot: Paradox and Mimesis” Lacoue-Labarthe provides a promising extension to hyperbologic, which is the tragic implication in the speculative.

For here, finally, is the paradox, that hyperbological exchange between nothing and everything, between impropriety and appropriation, between the subject’s absence and its multiplication and proliferation: the more the artist (the actor) *is* [his italics] nothing, the more he can be everything. “An equal aptitude for all sorts of characters.” [On page 258 Lacoue-Labarthe indicates that in this section of his book he cites Denis Diderot in “The Paradox of Acting,” pp. 17-18.]

By consequence - and in a certain way, this is where I’ve been heading - the logic of the paradox, the hyperbologic, is nothing other than the very logic of mimesis. That is to say, [...] *mimetologic* [his italics].

This means simply that the logical matrix of the paradox is the very structure of mimesis. In general. [...] the logic of paradox is always a logic of *semblance* [his italics], articulated around the division between appearance and reality, presence and absence, the same and the other, or identity and difference. This is the division that grounds (and constantly unsteadies) mimesis. At whatever level one takes it - in the copy or the reproduction, the art of the actor, mimetism, disguise, dialogic writing - the rule is always the same: the more it resembles, the more it differs. The same, in its sameness, is the other itself, which in turn cannot be called “itself,” and so on infinitely... (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1998, 260.)

Intoning his eagerness to finally equate mimesis, hyperbologic, and mimetology, Lacoue-Labarthe says that the logic of the paradox is mutual to them all. Here as in his third chapter contradiction is a general principle in binding division (constraint of opposition) and in the turning of opposites. Both these ideas reiterate hyperbologic, which emerges here as the paradox; in the paradox is that hyperbological exchange in oppositional metaphysical positions Lacoue-Labarthe says. If in “The Caesura of The Speculative” we had the *paradoxical gesture* in alternation (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1998, 213) understood as mimetology’s critical aspect (Gearhart, 1992, 188), here the paradox is hyperbologic which is mimesis in the double gesture of the actor in theatrical performance, in the possibility of simultaneously occupying and vacating diverging specifications in subjectivity. In “Diderot: Paradox and Mimesis” Lacoue-Labarthe equates *appropriation* (assimilation) and *impropriety* giving us mimesis constituted in misconduct, which brings him closer to Irigaray and Butler. (I elaborate Butler’s conception of Irigaray’s deployment of mimesis as impropriety in my discussions on catachresis in my second chapter and in section D of my third.) Here further, (metaphysical) *absence* is *multiplication* and *proliferation*, which promotes quitting the binary. Instead of turning in the oppositional poles of *presence* v. *loss* to immobilize oppositional absolutisms, refusal, exclusion and/or negation, Lacoue-Labarthe suggests explosive excessiveness in the prospect of a more extensive mimetic deviation, one that is less tethered to the dialectical constraint of opposition.

In “Diderot: Paradox and Mimesis” Lacoue-Labarthe affords an alternative to the speculative tragic matrix. Prioritizing paradoxical division as the structure of mimesis in all its forms (“the copy or the reproduction, the art of the actor, mimetism, disguise, dialogic writing”) Lacoue-Labarthe establishes mimesis as the matrix and origin of the speculative modus operandi, which as we already know is tragic in more ways than one (creates cathartic rejection, refusal, denial, sexual discrimination, fear of *the other* - corruption of pure thought). In the speculative tragic matrix we had *tragic art and its interpretation is the matrix of speculative thought*. As an alternative I propose that *mimesis and hyperbologic is the matrix of tragic speculative thought*. In

this I prioritize mimesis - a mimetic implication instead of a tragic one. I am not suggesting that tragic art or tragic conventions should be ignored, abandoned nor done away with. My alternative matrix - a hyperbological mimetic matrix avoids naturalizing the inevitability or necessity of tragic fate and still it is consistent with Lacoue-Labarthe's views. I maintain tragic art in the constitutive genealogy and definition of speculative theory; I conceive hyperbologic as Lacoue-Labarthe conceives it - as a mimetic convention and the underlying definition of tragic art, the logic of oppositions that exceeds oppositions, which challenges speculative claims by miming them in a way that touches to immobilize them from within. Further like Lacoue-Labarthe, my alternative matrix promotes mimesis as a critical function of appropriation in misconduct, as modification via deviation from the norm and as expropriation - undoing of norms. And likewise mimesis-hyperbologic is an expression of admiration and dissemination for me, in my relation to Judith Butler's work, as it is for Lacoue-Labarthe in his relation to Hegel. I maintain that speculative theory is by definition a tragic art form, second-generation tragic art, the same and different from ancient Greek tragic art. Unlike the speculative tragic matrix my mimetic hyperbological matrix suggests that anything that can be mimed can facilitate speculative possibilities that are not necessarily tragic.

In modifying Lacoue-Labarthe's speculative tragic matrix I maintain his conception of hyperbologic unmodified, implementing it as is elsewhere. This is a strategy of appropriation on my part in which mimesis is *deployment of the same term in the same context to alter that context*. The mutual context is the tragic implication in speculative theory, which is hyperbologic, which is an essential tragic term - a fundamentally tragic condition of refusal for Lacoue-Labarthe, which I want to alter by proposing that tragic implications can change to become un-tragic. I elaborate an example of this in my third chapter, as Butler's methodology of reading Hegel's and Lacan's interpretations of Antigone's act in language, which I distinguish from mimesis understood as *deployment of the same term in the same context to maintain the existing context*. I think that in "The Caesura of the Speculative" Lacoue-Labarthe does the latter - maintenance of existing context, when he desists from directly charging

Hegel or his dialectical method with mobilizing a violent exclusionary miming-overcoming of tragic art because we can only assume, he fears being assimilated by it when in fact he is assimilated from the start (according to Gearhart). Lacoue-Labarthe does suggest that the Hegelian dialectical force of appropriation is an inexorable force that self-reaffirms with every effort to oppose it, that it preserves the negativity that it seemingly expels and that it renders ever-increasing violent interpretations-modifications of tragic art. He suggests that hyperbologic emerges in these terms of the dialectical violent transformative gesture, that hyperbologic is equally violent and appropriative but he refuses acknowledging this, which is to deny it, as he denies the sexual implications-suppressions of tragic speculative theory. In hyperbologic Lacoue-Labarthe maintains the Hegelian mimetic violent gesture, which is also the kind of mimesis Butler attributes to Irigaray when she argues that Irigaray maintains mimesis as contiguity that reiterates Platonic exclusions. However my distinction between mimetic practices is somewhat out of order considering that (the idea of) *context* is never final. (I elaborate this in the next chapter through Derrida.) And, considering that Butler deploys Irigaray's mimesis productively, as I show also in my next chapter, and that Butler's conception of the Hegelian dialectic is comparable with - equivalent to Lacoue-Labarthe's. I show this in the next chapter and at the end of section C of my third chapter - 'Confounding Distinctions.' Like Lacoue-Labarthe, Butler deploys Hegel to show that Antigone hampers her own rigid interpretation (literalism) in law (Butler, 2000a, 38). (I explain this in section D of my third chapter - 'The Lacanian Symbolic is a Death Trope.') For Lacoue-Labarthe *Antigone* impedes its own translation because it is the unbeatably generically Greek Ancient tragic (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1998, 220) and Antigone is a hyperbological figure that immobilizes social exclusion (sacrificial expulsion). For Butler Antigone is just the opposite but also the same; Antigone mobilizes an alternative symbolic communicational system to the one of refusal. I show this throughout my third chapter. In this sense Butler's interpretation of Antigone presents a mimetic practice that is hyperbological to Lacoue-Labarthe's - at once the same as and different from his.

Chapter 2 - Butler's "Theory" of Performativity.

Butler says that *performativity* in her usage is derived from J.L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words*, Derrida's interpretation of it in "Signature, Event, Context," and Paul de Man's understanding of *metalepsis*¹² in *Allegories of Reading* (Butler, 1995, 134). She explains performativity as a form of power: "A performative act is one which brings into being or enacts that which it names, and so marks the constitutive or productive power of discourse. (Ibid.)" In other words, a performative is a term that turns a word into an action but in a manner restricted to the discourse in which it appears; representing the task it describes in a limited way, a performative act regulates the description or discourse mobilizing it. Butler explains Austin's conception of the illocutionary force of performatives as the turning of words into acts in a way subject to misuse, misfire and failure (Butler, 1997b, 361). She argues that failure to reach consensus on the meaning of a single word presents the word's mutability possibility:

[I]f utterances can be the bearers of equivocal meanings, then their power is, in principle, less unilateral and sure than it appears. Indeed, the equivocality of the utterance means that it might not always mean in the same way, that its meaning might be turned or derailed in some significant way, and that words that seek to injure might well miss their mark and produce an effect counter to the one that is intended. The disjuncture between utterance and meaning is the condition of possibility for revising the performative, of the performative as the repetition of its prior instance, a repetition that is at once a reformulation. (Butler, 1997b, 365.)

¹² Metalepsis is "the exchange or substitution of cause and effect. (De Man, 1979, 108.)"

The ambiguity of words diversifies their possibility of enacting what they name. This is the performative power of language. The gap between a word and what it may mean is meaning's possibility and renewal. Polysemy, discrepant and contradictory multiple meanings to a single word engender contradictory and inconsistent interpretations, which may turn an intention to injure into a compliment. Repetition in words is reformulation, inadvertent revision of past performatives.

Butler argues that performativity is a function of iterability.

The Derridean notion of iterability, formulated in response to the theorization of speech acts by John Searle and J.L. Austin, also implies that every act is itself a recitation, the citing of a prior chain of acts which are implied in a present act and which perpetually drain any "present" act of its presentness. (BTM, 244n-7.)

As function of iterability a performative has a past, always references linkages among precedent performatives. Butler says this removes the sense of lived experience from performativity. We lose the sense of embodying the experience of performing a task - our singularity in time - when we realize that our task or the act we perform is a mere façade for a sequence of previous tasks that we did not perform and over which we had no control.

Here, at the risk of repeating myself, I would suggest that performativity cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed *by* [her italics] a subject; this iterability implies that "performance" is not a singular "act" or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of the production, but not, I will insist, determining it fully in advance. (BTM, 95).

Performativity is a function of iterability Butler says, affirming the confluence performativity-iterability. She reveals that death is a part of that confluence, which impacts normative *being*; iterability, a kind of repetition, is the deadly power informing norms, fashions what the performance will look like (the façade in the present), is a serial activity in the measured action of partaking exclusionary customary convention (“a ritualized production”). Performativity-iterability is the fatal fateful normalizing (“regularized”) action of redoing norms. It promotes possibilities unknown in advance beyond yet in terms of its deadly force.

Gender performativity is not a question of instrumentally deploying a “masquerade,” for such a construal of performativity presupposes an intentional subject *behind* [her italics] the deed. On the contrary, gender performativity involves the difficult labor of deriving agency from the very power regimes which constitute us, and which we oppose. This is, oddly enough, *historical work* [her italics], reworking the historicity of the signifier, and no recourse to quasi-transcendental selfhood and inflated concepts of History will help us in this most concrete and paradoxical of struggles. (Butler, 1995, 136.)

Performativity is not a theatrical operation; gender is not a role-playing. These would assume an intentional subject and dichotomous conception of the performance and of performativity; that the subject is separate from the task, which it performs, that performativity is an intentional activity. Performativity is just the opposite Butler says, is devoid of intentionality and a continuum (between the subject and its action). Gender performativity is historical labor, a looking back at discursive regimes where agency and its restriction are mobilized in tandem, in order to derive agency there, a paradoxical struggle and a reworking in the layers which amount to the meaning of (gendering) norms.

Butler argues “there is no possibility of standing *outside* [her italics] of the discursive conventions by which “we” are constituted, but only the possibility of

reworking the very conventions by which we are enabled. (Butler, 1995, 136.)”

Discourse - theoretical conventions used to describe the subject - is total and totalizing. Agency - the paradox enabling and restricting the subject. Butler suggests that violations define the lives of violated people and that the only way to remove violations is by considering how they are conveyed linguistically; conceiving offensive terms as the rules that govern violated lives and thinking these rules as the conventions by which agency is enacted (performed) enables deploying the rules in ways that deviate from their violating function and ostracizing effects, a deployment that may modify the rules themselves.

And yet Butler says that performativity is not fully a strategy (Cheah and Grosz, 1998, 40). Her explanation of it suggests otherwise. In explaining performativity Butler conflates discursive conventions and themes, rhetorical textual mechanisms, the subject, its becoming, its being, the power that constitutes the subject and the power it uses (agency), its body, and its sexuality, i.e., the trajectory of the subject’s desire, its material (morphological) sex, the discursive conventions that explain sex, and its sexual practices. This entwines terms of arguably varying categorical denomination (*sex* and *linguistic tropes*), an integrative methodology of exposing oblique discursive operations that generate exclusionary practices. It conveys Butler’s ethical-political position and activity. The interdependency among the terms that Butler deploys to explain *performativity* and additional conceptions, such as *power* and *ethical relations* facilitates and reflects her view that *the self* and *the other*, *the subject* and *alterity*, *identity* and *difference* like norms (consensus based practices and injunctions) and exclusionary conventions (male-centred scenography) are forever bound to each other in every imaginable way. In this, Butler partakes the phenomenologist tradition, the interest in binaries and their dissolution. Hegelian philosophy is foundational to this tradition. Butler’s interest in the Hegelian legacy applies to all of her work:

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 constitutive relation to alterity? (Butler, 1999a, xiv; Butler, 2004, 47.)

Butler writes this in 1999, in the preface to the second publication of *Subjects of Desire* which was first published in 1987. She rewrites it in *The Judith Butler Reader* published in 2004. This suggests that the Hegelian conception of desire and its constitutive links to/with alterity¹³ encompasses ongoing concerns throughout her work. After this, still in the introduction to *Subjects of Desire* Butler says that the question of whether or not Hegelianism constitutes a *death-bent enterprise* (her words) seems viable to her project but that this question is overly strong because the relationship between desire and metaphysics is set in a complicated history (Butler, 1999a, 15). She thereby installs the terms of her concern - Hegelianism as a death-bent enterprise in my view. She ends that chapter like this:

My task is to trace the latest stage of philosophy's quarrel with the life of impulse, the philosophical effort to domesticate desire as an instance of metaphysical place, the struggle to come to terms with desire as a principle of metaphysical dislocation and psychic dissonance, and the effort to deploy desire to dislocate and defeat the metaphysics of identity. Throughout my inquiry I will be concerned with the dissolution of Hegelianism as well as the peculiar forms of its insistent reemergence, its reformulation, and its inadvertent reappearance even when subject to its most vehement opposition.

¹³ I define *alterity* as a placeholder for divergence from human specificity and from the norm. (In this respect I define the *norm* as the dominant form of living and of *being* - as hegemony.) My definition of *alterity* modifies Butler's definition of *the Other* in Emmanuel Levinas's conception in her *Giving An Account of Oneself*. She says that for Emmanuel Levinas *the Other* in more than alterity, more than difference and divergence from the mainstream conception of human specificity. It "acts as a placeholder for an infinite ethical relation. (Butler, 2005, x.)"

Indeed, we will see the degree to which opposition keeps desire alive. (Butler, 1999a, 15.)”

(This passage is eliminated from *The Judith Butler Reader*. Sarah Salih the editor explains it in other words on p. 39.) Butler suggests that 20th century critical theory deploys Hegel’s struggle with desire to convey desire as a deadly motivation and disruption to metaphysics (of identity). Butler says her inquiry into Hegelian desire evolves differently, prompting and hampering the Hegelian grip on desire, to endorse desire’s release. She suggests that Hegelian philosophy keeps returning in the face of its opposition. Her task she says is to show how likewise opposition to desire only mobilizes it anew. This task pertains to her inquiry in *Subjects of Desire*. I propose it applies to all of her work, that in all of her work she mobilizes a Hegelian struggle to modify desire’s death-bent-Hegelian development to reconfigure Hegelianism itself (conceived as a deadly passion in 20th c. critical theory). In this effort Butler deploys oppositions strategically and in the Hegelian sense; *strategy* in the Hegelian sense is inherent to the method or process of a critical inquiry.¹⁴

Butler says that oppositions are necessary for intelligibility to happen as she “strategically” dissolves (the possibility of) *opposition* in the process of saying this:

This latter domain [of intelligible bodies] is not the opposite of the former [unthinkable, abject, unlivable bodies], for oppositions are, after all, part of intelligibility; the latter [abject bodies] is the excluded and illegible domain that haunts the former domain [intelligible bodies] as the spectre of its own impossibility, the very limit to intelligibility, its constitutive outside. (BTM, xi.)

While oppositions seem necessary to intelligibility’s onset, intelligibility is not always set up in terms of oppositions Butler suggests. Her example is *intelligible bodies* and

¹⁴ (Citing Adorno T., *Hegel. Three Studies*, 1993, p.6) Diana Coole says that “The substance of Hegel’s philosophy is process [...]. (Coole, 2000 55.)”

their presumed opposite, *abject bodies*. Intelligible bodies and abject bodies, she says, are not oppositional but rather constitutionally connected. Maintaining the binary oppositional structure Butler articulates a union in it, which she does among a range of binaries (normative/abject, subject/object, self/other, body/mind, subordination/liberation, male/female, heterosexual/homosexual). Explaining this requires assuming the distinctions that Butler suggests are false, participating in Butler's explanatory mechanism, her textual convolutions and the difficulties these present. This latter is an ethical imperative in her work; Sarah Salih considers that Butler's writing style presents *difficulty* "as an important ethical component of the radical democratic project within which Butler continues to situate her work (Salih, 2003, 42)."

Ideologically motivated conceptions emerge in terms of false distinctions, to establish false oppositional spheres as intelligibility's precondition - Butler reveals. She exposes the presumption of a distinction between "gender" and "sex" (in GT) as the generative possibility of each. "Gender" and "sex" mutually implicate and presuppose one another in the construction of their oppositional distinction. Gender understood as a social convention and designation is putatively the distinct opposite of sex understood as biological determinism, but the coherence of gender demands the assumption of biological determinism. Sex understood as biology, nature or morphological determinism separates the body from the social and symbolic spheres - a false distinction. The two words, "sex" and "gender" suggest a distinction when in fact the articulation of the one requires the notion of the other. The notion of a distinction between sex and gender reiterates that of a distinction between nature and culture only to conceal it and render an essential determination between the binary opposites. Butler's point, the distinction-conflation generates natural essence rarefied of the social and symbolic aspects of sexuality and vice versa - sex is generated as pure morphological matter and origin, *the body* understood as a precedent to discourse and outside of discourse.

In *Bodies that Matter* Butler elaborates the elusive structure of a distinction between the materiality of the body (or/and of sex) and its discursive explication, as

the basis of denigrating discursive conventions. Butler reveals the implication of the one in the other as indivisible. The discursive explanation participates as an element in the substance of the body substantiating sex in a process that goes practically unnoticed - Butler suggests. The production of the distinction demands a false separation only to be conflated in the process of the explanation. Butler's strategy is to repeat this convention in distinction-conflation, by bringing it into a crisis that in her view is anyway immanent to the generation of the distinction. This trope of a confounding distinction and others like it that Butler explores (such as *performativity*) and deploys is paradoxically ambiguous in structure. She does not attempt to resolve paradoxes or to question the contradictory structure of ambiguity in them but rather repeats these to justify her (own) ends - the re-signification of *abject bodies*. (I elaborate the confounding distinctions trope as the Hegelian dialectic in the third section of my third chapter - 'Butler's Antigone.')

Butler resignifies the abject element in heterosexually hegemonic (public) discourse by using performativity's contradictory structure.

It is in terms of a norm that compels a certain "citation" in order for a viable subject to be produced that the notion of gender performativity calls to be rethought. And precisely in relation to such a compulsory citationality that the theatricality of gender is also to be explained. [...] Within queer politics, indeed, within the very signification that is "queer," we read a resignifying practice in which the desanctioning power of the name "queer" is reversed to sanction a contestation of the terms of sexual legitimacy. Paradoxically, but also with great promise, the subject who is "queered" into public discourse through homophobic interpellations of various kinds *takes up* or *cites* [her italics] that very term as the discursive basis for an opposition. This kind of citation will emerge as *theatrical* [her italics] to the extent that it *mimes and renders hyperbolic* the discursive convention that it also *reverses* [her italics]. The hyperbolic gesture is crucial to the exposure of the homophobic "law" that can no longer control the terms of its own abjecting strategies. (BTM, 232.)

Butler suggests that interpellation in Louis Althusser's conception is synonymous with performativity as she understands it. Both terms render a conception of subjection - becoming a viable subject - that compels a citation in an authoritative imperative; that the subject must subject its own self to demeaning authoritative imperative in order to become viable. Considering that citation is mandated in both conceptions - interpellation and performativity as the only manner by which the subject and its sexual behaviour may be rendered legible, Butler questions the meaning of *a viable subject*. If the tenable possibility of subjection is *the viable subject*, what is the untenable possibility of subjection - *the unviable subject*? The notion of citation summons rethinking gender performativity she says. (In 'Butler's Antigone' I explain Butler's view that citation enables *and* kills Antigone - her citational acts, and how this informs Butler's re-signification in the Lacanian symbolic terms of liveability.)

Althusser explains *interpellation* in one of its popular examples, as the process by which a subject is hailed by a police officer and thereby regulated into *being*; the subject becomes a subject by turning in response to the name it is called (Althusser, 2001, 117-118). Interpellation is an embodied formative power in signification. It demands physical participation in legal regulative imperative. Any possibility of becoming the viable subject is a function of accordance with regulative convention in this conception. The subject must turn or else it will fail becoming a subject (subjection). In turning its body the subject embodies the law as its only possibility, is constituted in accordance with the name it is called and with what that name means from the legal perspective. There is but one possibility for the Althusserian subject i.e. to be subordinated by the name "queer," which from the perspective of heteronormative law is the ideal possibility. Butler promotes the subject's response in terms of the abjecting strategy in that law. The subject's turn (in response to the name it is called) is a site from which to oppose derogatory interpellations she says.

Using Althusserian interpellation - the *turning around* mechanism in it, its tacit oppositional distinction - ideal vs. abject, and the mimesis and ambiguity in its structure Butler proposes that the subject's response to the call may be done

hyperbolically - via an intentionally exaggerated gesture, to expose and turn - reverse and modify the abject element in regulative discursive convention. Laws are hyperbolic and mimetic anyway she suggests. Turning and complying with convention may be done not to be demeaned by the law; to fortify the subject through the homophobic law's power of abjection the subject must embrace the offensive call (name) she suggests. To become viable, the subject is required to mime the homophobic law's perspective of "the ideal" i.e. be abjected by regulative convention. And while the law promotes a single viability or ideal, possibilities of failing it are not defined in the law. The extent of or manner by which the subject fails the abjecting strategy in abiding the law by mistake or by intentionally disobeying in answer to it is unregulated in hetero-normative law and still the subject acts in a certain accordance with hetero-normative law and its strategy. In this respect Butler promotes mimesis as a theatrical hyperbolic operation, as an excessive gesture in the demeaning hetero-normative (homophobic) call "queer." The mimetic hyperbolic act of interpellation understood as a public queering exceeds the negative understanding of "queer," which enables any number of interpretations to the name "queer." Mimesis here is a resignifying practice of derogation - an intentional deviation from law set in terms of the law's negative feature.

The Sophoclean image of Antigone in Butler's interpretation is extremely relevant to the exposure of heterosexually hegemonic kinship interpellations. Butler notes that while Antigone is far from a queer heroine and really refrains from accomplishing any sexuality that is other than heterosexuality, her language, noted as ambiguous throughout Butler's text, "disinstitute[s] heterosexuality (Butler, 2000a, 76.)" Antigone, Butler says, is the conclusive element of the Oedipal drama "but fails to produce heterosexual closure for that drama[.] (Ibid.)" Antigone is punished by death. She dies before marrying and conceiving children. Paradoxically, this punishment impels failure in hetero-normative kinship ideal ending her father's dynasty that in canonical perspective started the notion of *the ideal* as a failure. For Butler Antigone's drama reveals the failings of heterosexual hegemony. Contradictory elements in hetero-normative ideal lead to its immanent failure (de-institution).

The contradictory terms of the psychoanalytic law may be redeployed subversively to facilitate agency contrary to the psychoanalytic ideal:

In a sense, all signification takes place within the orbit of the compulsion to repeat; “agency,” then, is to be located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition. [...] The injunction *to be* [her italics] a given gender produces necessary failures, a variety of incoherent configurations that in their multiplicity exceed and defy the injunction by which they are generated. (GT, 185.)

The psychoanalytic conception of sexual identity entails a compulsory repetition to render sexual coherence understood as heterosexual subjects. Heterosexuality, the only coherent sexual possibility is staged as a willing accordance; though a generative obligatory mime in hetero-normative injunction, heterosexuality spawns multiple and varying fallibility possibilities. Variation in repetition promotes these possibilities, establishing agency in excess of the hetero-norm. In using quotation marks around agency Butler suggests that any alternative to the heterosexual ideal is always limited (tethered) to and regulated by heterosexuality.

She considers that heterosexuality may be subverted if it is thought of as drag, parody in gender performativity (GT, 175-190).

And yet, 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. (GT, 176-177.)

Butler suggests that subversive repetition requires maintaining hegemony without reinforcing hegemony, that to be subversive the acts being mimed need to activate “the ideal” in the norm without actually facilitating it; to evoke and perpetuate the viable subject i.e. the heterosexual, by reiterating to disrupt it and the dominant

cultural conventions by which it is constituted. “[P]erformativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate “act,” but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names, (BTM, 2.)”

Performative power, she says, is established over time and is the power of discourse to generate what it describes. (Gender) performativity is not a willed, one-off act she says. Performativity, the act being repeated, needs to address the ongoing process by which cultural hegemony came about.

Butler recommends abandoning the notion of deliberate action in the effort to vary the norm. She obviates the idea that performativity is enabling and that it requires an enabled subject or an embodied practice. Instead, performativity and repetition must be thought of as the reference to a multiplicity of previous repetitions in discursive conventions. Repetition facilitates hegemony. It is the power, which serves convention - dominant representational regimes. It enables hegemonic sexualizing acts over time and it self-reinforces to naturalize these.

That the power regimes of heterosexism and phallogocentrism seek to augment themselves through a constant repetition of their logic, their metaphysics, and their naturalized ontologies does not imply that repetition itself ought to be stopped - as if it could be. If repetition is bound to persist as the mechanism of the cultural reproduction of identities, then the crucial question emerges: What kind of subversive repetition might call into question the regulatory practice of identity itself? (GT, 42.)

Repetition is unstoppable and inevitable. Butler suggests that the very repetition used in the dissemination of heterosexuality may be used to perforate heterosexuality and its regimes - conventions of regulatory power - the power that regulates identity and sex. The ambiguous (paradoxical and contradictory) logic and power of denigrating metaphysical and ontological conjecture may be repeated to subvert the self-aggrandizing techniques that establish this power and logic. This is no simple task.

Butler accounts for the subject in terms of its performative process - a locus of material, temporal, historical and often, random contingencies: “*a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter.* [Her italics.] (BTM, 9).” Biology and culture are fused in this understanding; there is no way to think them apart. For Butler the subject is not pre-given but is nevertheless given to (determined by) the assumption of its own pre-giveness (pre-existence). This always already situates the subject in materiality (discourse), in time, in space and in repetition. The subject as such abides the norm where not abiding is a form of abiding also. The norm is not prior to the subject; it is an activity of the subject that constitutes the subject. “My argument is that there need not be a “doer behind the deed,” but that the “doer” is variably constructed in and through the deed. (GT, 181.)” (Butler refutes the notion this argument returns some existential theory of the *self* constituted temporally; existential theory maintains a prediscursive structure while she does not - she says, GT, 181.) She evacuates the subject understood as prior to the norm; the subject becomes via its activity of practicing, performing, executing or doing the norm. Its activity always eclipses the norm with the dis-norm, an eclipsing that is the inherent ambiguity in the norm and of the power it exudes.

Power acts on the subject in at least two ways: first, as what makes the subject possible, the condition of its possibility and its formative occasion, and second, as what is taken up and reiterated in the subject’s “own” acting. As a subject *of* [her italics] power (where “of” connotes both “belonging to” [being owned by] and “wielding” [owning]), the subject eclipses the conditions of its own emergence; it eclipses power with power. (PLP, 14.)

Power is an eclipsing of two types, the first is *the conditions that form the subject*, the second is *the deployment of those conditions*, which is also the formative type however it is based in an assumption of ownership. The subject believes that it owns the power that forms it and that it can deploy this power, that it may use its conditions of

emergence as its own instrument. Actually, all the subject can do is *eclipse* these two kinds of power.

In *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (PLP) Butler explores the discursive traditions that establish a pre-given subject passionately attached to its own subjection. *Subjection*, which for Foucault is the set of regulative discursive conventions that form and regulate the body in terms of various disciplinary conventions, is, in the PLP established as *the turn trope* - a *turning against the self* and a possibility of power.

The form this power takes is relentlessly marked by a figure of turning, a turning back upon oneself or even a turning *on* [her italics] oneself. This figure operates as part of the explanation of how a subject is produced, and so there is no subject, strictly speaking, who makes this turn. On the contrary, the turn appears to function as a tropological inauguration of the subject, a founding moment whose ontological status remains permanently uncertain. Such a notion, then, appears difficult, if not impossible, to incorporate into the account of subject formation. What or who is said to turn, and what is the object of such a turn? How is it that a subject is wrought from such an ontologically uncertain form of twisting? Perhaps with the advent of this figure, we are no longer in the business of “giving an account of the formation of the subject.” We are, rather, confronted with the tropological presumption made by any such explanation, one that facilitates the explanation but also marks its limit. [My emphasis]. [...] The figure to which we refer has not yet acquired existence and is not part of a verifiable explanation, yet our reference continues to make a certain kind of sense. The paradox of subjection implies a paradox of referentiality: namely, that we must refer to what does not yet exist. Through a figure that marks the suspension of our ontological commitments, we seek to account for how the subject comes to be. That this figure is itself a “turn” is, rhetorically, performatively spectacular; “turn”

translates the Greek sense of “trope.” Thus the trope of the turn both indicates and exemplifies the tropological status of the gesture. (PLP, 3-4.)

A trope is a term that facilitates an explanation that it also demonstrates. It is rhetorical - a linguistic device which argues a position (ideology). And it is performative - a generative discursive power that brings into *being* that which it names. *The turn*, a specific kind of trope, provides an account of the subject’s emergence and also mobilizes that emergence. Butler argues it involves a paradox, a logical gap suppressed in the account of the subject’s emergence: the act of turning happens to an in-existent subject who turns nonetheless. This is how the subject emerges. *The turn* refers to and at once elides the instance in which the subject emerges, *becomes* or originates. It refers to the fictional body in the very explanation of that body’s becoming - the image of a turning subject. *A paradox of referentiality* Butler calls it. And even while the turning subject is ontologically uncertain, is fictive, a conjecture (construction) really, it is logical, makes sense, Butler says. It marks both the limit and the possibility of subjection in the discursive traditions that mobilize *the turn* to explain the subject’s relationship to the discourses about it. Althusserian interpellation, as an embodied account of power, is annulled here, there is no subject who turns in response to the call that determines its (the subject’s) viability - Butler suggests. Still, the turn trope is promising. Its power is precisely in generating beyond its certitude and the verifiability that it lacks.

In note 1 that follows Butler says this:

Tropes are “deviations” from customary language, but they also generate figures of speech or thought [...]. In this sense, a trope can produce a connection between terms that is not considered either customary or logical. For our purposes, this means that a trope operates in a way that is not restricted to accepted versions of reality. At the same time, a trope cannot operate, that is, generate new meanings or connections, if its departure from

custom and logic is not recognized as such a departure. In this sense, a trope presupposes an accepted version of reality for its operation. (PLP, 201n-1.)

“Turn” was an English term for “trope” in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries [...]. That this turn is considered generative or productive seems especially relevant to our consideration of the production or generation of the subject. Not only is generation what a trope does, but the explanation of generation seems to require the use of tropes, an operation of language that both reflects and enacts the generativity it seeks to explain. Irreducibly mimetic and performative. (PLP, 202n-1.)

Butler considers that despite being illogical and unverifiable, tropes are identifiable in their operational environment - the prevailing custom, convention or discursive norm that makes them possible, which is also the discourse in which they are explained and at once demonstrated. Importantly, she says tropes have mimesis and performativity in their structure; they are mimetic in the sense of reflecting to exceed the discursive norms (or “accepted versions of reality”) that enable them. They are performative in the sense of enacting what they describe by reiterating convention. Tropes reflect the discursive mainstream as they add or connect something new to it but not so new as to be unrecognizable there, abnormal or senseless. Tropes are a generative form of power that retains custom or consensus. They are a part of customary language despite exceeding customary language. They form an organic (naturalized) deviation within (or from) their operational environment. Overlapping conventional linguistic practice (custom) and its deviation, tropes lessen the sense a deviation is occurring, make deviations bearable for norm-minded people. This promotes existing convention, upholds customary language but in terms that extend it. As a component of the conventional view a trope may establish the norm or conventions anew.

The functionality and operative possibility of tropes depends on how good they are at miming, assuming or being identified with normative ideology - the discourse

that is by consensus recognized as the mainstream, which spawns them in the first place. In this sense tropes dissimulate the deviations they perform, which enables dis-normative minded people to modify normative ideology. As paradoxically self-referential discursive elements - fictional figures devoid of ontological certitude - tropes are unrestricted to conventional rules of reality. By enacting the fictions they describe they may reconfigure the terms of their operational environment to enhance “the ideal” in a norm. As reflexive performative gestures tropes enable thinking power (subjection) as non-substance, non-unified a not-absolute force, which is not external to the subject. We will return to this.

Butler describes the destructive operation of tropes that quash sexual miscellany by generating the deadly threat of a bogus power - the incest taboo, Oedipus complex. In this respect, she says that Jacques Lacan’s theory is religious tragedy, effectively precluding any strategic cultural or political manoeuvres toward an alternative imaginary “for the play of desires. (GT, 72.)” Butler calls this discursive predisposition “the heterosexual matrix of desire (GT, 42-43, 45-100.)” Still, she proposes a way of working within its terms.

[The act of] Assuming power is not a straightforward task of taking power from one place, transferring it intact, and then and there making it one’s own; the act of appropriation may involve an alteration of power such that the power assumed or appropriated works against the power that made that assumption possible. Where conditions of subordination make possible the assumption of power, the power assumed remains tied to those conditions, but in an ambivalent way; in fact, the power assumed may at once retain and resist that subordination. This conclusion is not to be thought of as (a) a resistance that is *really* [her italics] a recuperation of power or (b) a recuperation that is *really* [her italics] a resistance. It is both at once, and this ambivalence forms the bind of agency. (PLP, 13.)

Butler suggests that the power of the heterosexual matrix of desire is self-divided. She considers that this divide may be used to empower the subject instead of hindering its sexual possibilities yet that the subject cannot simply wield that divided power to remove its constraint. Using power is an appropriation she says, which involves modification in the power appropriated while modification is always a function of power's intended mandate and structure. (In the heterosexual matrix of desire the mandate is to restrict desire by quashing its manifestation in forms that deviate from heterosexuality.) When Butler says *assuming* and *assumption* she sets limitations on proprietary distinctions in power - the notion of owning power. She refutes conceiving power as a moveable substance or a reified object and considers it is not possible to simply transfer power from one place to another in order to counter its subordinating terms. Using power involves power's internal division even when this operation seems to contradict agency. When circumstances allow, the subordinating power exerted upon the subject - the terms of its emergence - may be engaged with but this is not a straightforward task because the divide in power is not clear-cut. The subject remains ambiguously tethered to the subordinating terms of emergence in its effort to remove them. Taking the Foucaultian idea that power is a distributed effect in regulatory discursive conventions to its extreme, Butler implores,

There is no power that acts, but only a reiterated acting that is power in its persistence and instability. [*Right!* - I respond sarcastically.] (BTM, 9.)

As Butler herself says, conditions of subordination don't always enable the assumption of power (cited above - PLP, 13). Still, it is strategically enabling to think of power as no more than a repetition in subordination, as non-singular, unsexed, not divine design, but rather power is a divided a disappearing material substance - I return to this momentarily.

Power is not intact prior to the subject, the appearance of its priority disappears as power acts on the subject and the subject is inaugurated (and

derived) through this temporal reversal in the horizon of power. As the agency of the subject, power assumes its present temporal dimension. (PLP, 13-14.)

Butler argues that power is unspecific in terms of its strategy or agenda yet that it is very specific in the sense of always having a context - temporal, historical, discursive or otherwise. Power is unanimous (undisputed) only in its ambiguity and reflexive structure, which is the turning mechanism that enables “using” - reworking power. Otherwise, power is a ubiquitous not-unanimous substance. Butler insists that power does not pre-exist the subject, is local, unfixed and alterable, alternating in its temporal dimension - the sequence of past repetitions - performativity-iterability. She suggests it is possible to turn power around and against itself, to reverse the temporal discursive process of subjection and empower the subject who is subordinated by power. This is de-constitution. “Agency” understood as the subject’s power teams the subject’s emergence, vulnerability and subordination with a critical force. Yet power is disembodied and still, not external to the subject. Power appears when it is erased; agency entails an important erasure.

Butler considers that erasure comes to function as a foundational possibility in the field of power that Foucault describes (BTM, 35). She criticizes him though:

Does Foucault’s effort to work the notions of discourse and materiality through one another fail to account for not only what is *excluded* [her italics] from the economies of discursive intelligibility that he describes, but what *has to excluded* [her italics] for those economies to function as self-sustaining systems? (BTM, 35.)

In accounting for the productive and formative dimension of power Foucault lacks (a) genealogy of exclusions and erasures. Alternatively Butler credits Irigaray for raising this question in her analysis of the form/matter distinction (in Irigaray’s essays “Plato’s Hystera” and “Une Mere de Glace” in *Speculum of the Other Woman*).

Butler considers that for Irigaray the philosophical and psychoanalytical discursive canon is founded in the explicit erasure of the feminine (BTM, 35). For Irigaray, Butler explains, the problem is not that *the feminine* is associated with matter in Platonic economy but that it completely disappears from the form/matter and universal/particular binaries (BTM, 42). Butler concurs with Irigaray on this; like Irigaray she thinks that the Platonic system of representation is a hierarchical binary power dynamic that erases (excludes) *the feminine*. Like Irigaray, Butler sees erasure and binary turning in power as a part of discursive hegemony and as an inhabitable site and performative possibility yet for Butler the crisis in Platonic conception of the body is general, not specific to the female body (BTM, 48-49).

Butler refutes Irigaray's deployment of erasure in morphological specification i.e. as *the feminine*, yet she thinks that Irigaray's mime in Plato diverges from Plato's conception of power and is a performative practice. "This miming is, of course, tactical, and her reenactment of philosophical error requires that we learn how to read her for the difference that her reading performs. (BTM, 36.)" Mimesis in Irigaray's reading mobilizes a performative differential, performs a distinction between Plato's text and Irigaray's text - Butler suggests. Butler's question in the chapter, *does Irigaray partake or refrain from partaking the grandiosity and errors of the discourse she mimes?* (BTM, 36-38.) Butler considers that Irigaray presents a critical departure from the discursive canon that she mimes although or maybe because Irigaray may be identified with that discourse in terms of faithfully replicating its crisis and strategy.

Skimming Butler's reading in Plato's *Timaeus* (BTM, 40) we have a receiving principle (called "hypodochē") to which Plato refers in the grammatical feminine, a place and an enclosure (called "chora") paradoxically devoid of placing, of a proper shape or content. Devoid of anything that it receives it must always remain the same and never resemble that which enters it - according to Plato in Butler's reading. If Plato establishes a notion of the feminine in metaphysical terms - an identity or identifiable presence - he does so to erase to it. Feminized yet forbidden from taking or having a likeness to any human form, Plato's feminine is established in terms of the

prohibition against mimesis, a prohibition against representing and being represented - Butler explains.

Deposed of metaphysical placing within this economy, Plato's feminine is void-like, defined only by *what it is not*. Butler considers that Irigaray collapses the notion of the feminine as a non-represent-able figure in Plato's text with feminine bodies. Irigaray takes after Plato, Butler suggests, in generalizing feminine bodies and associating this generalized notion with morphological specifications understood as extra discursive. Butler considers that while Irigaray's mimetic reading in Plato in *Speculum* subverts Platonic metaphysics by establishing *the feminine* as a viable subject and a viable body, Irigaray does this in terms of fundamental conceptions - nature understood as external to and preceding discourse. Butler critically considers that in this Irigaray's engagement with Platonic economy preserves the crisis of self-division in Plato's text; that Irigaray loyally transfers Platonic binary centralized conception of power and strategy of exclusion - the internal dispute by which Plato excludes a term from his own binary economy. Internal dispute and exclusion become Irigaray's own discursive formative conditions as much as Plato's - Butler suggests. Irigaray, she says, is not somewhere in between the binary poles of the Platonic representational system that she mimes. Irigaray replicates Plato's binary exclusionary perception, transfers it to her own text by *occupying* his text however this occupancy establishes that the transferral (of terms from his text to hers) is finally not loyal.

"Where and how is the critical departure from that patrilineage performed in the course of the recitation of his terms? If the task is not a loyal or proper "reading" of Plato, then perhaps it is a kind of overreading which mimes and exposes the speculative excess in Plato. (BTM, 36.)" Butler suggests that Platonic representational economy is hyperbolic and that Irigaray's mime in it tells this. Irigaray appropriates the split voice of the philosophical father together with his hyperbolic gesture exacerbating these to disclose Plato's divided self-conception to proffer it as his metaphysical crisis. Platonic metaphysics - the categories by which Plato defines *being* (presence), identity and subject/object relations is set up in two contradictory principles and the erasure of one - the Platonic feminine. By erasing the one term from his binary divided system

Plato presumes a unified metaphysics, a coherent theory of *self*. Erasure resolves his binary crisis. It is the strategy by which he addresses his crisis of contradictory self-division.

For Irigaray, Butler suggests, Platonic erasure of *the feminine* presumes a cohesive self-same economy while in fact Platonic economy depends upon that erasure or in miming Plato's text Irigaray performatively engenders Plato's dependence on the erasure of (his notion of) femininity. Irigaray does this to render femininity Plato's foundational principle. Butler considers that in miming Plato's text Irigaray disrupts Platonic speculative conceptions of *presence* and self-boundary and importantly, that Irigaray renders an "outside" within Platonic discourse, as a point of reference from which to engage Platonic exclusionary views and evacuative representational economy. However, in doing so, Butler suggests, Irigaray also mimes Plato's strategy - the crisis of internal division and of erasure. In this Irigaray keeps the binary violent exclusionary arrangements of Platonic economy in tact.

Still, Butler thinks that Irigaray's performative practice is layered and complex, not simply identifiable with the philosophical father. Butler argues that in reading speculative philosophical texts Irigaray is motivated to take the "male" position because actually Irigaray feels excluded from it. Butler identifies Irigaray's authorial identity with *the erased-excluded feminine* of Platonic discourse and sees Irigaray as such deliberating the internal limits of philosophical texts, asking, *what is erased or excluded from that economy yet returns negatively as its self-constitutive condition?* Butler considers that Irigaray secludes *the feminine* as this erased constitutive condition and reads philosophical texts by occupying that secluded erased feminine (BTM, 37). As the returned secluded feminine Irigaray shows us that it is possible to take the dominant discursive position even while being erased from it and its binary proposition.

Butler considers the difficulty of reading from a position that is erased asking, *how is it possible to read a text from the perspective of what it lacks?* For Irigaray, she says, the feminine of Platonic economy disappears exactly when it appears in the binary male/female opposition; it disappears when it appears as the binary's

“unspeakable condition of figuration (BTM, 37.)” Isolating *the feminine* as an image of constitutive exclusion, and compelled to read philosophical texts via this image of refusal Butler says (BTM, 37), for Irigaray *the feminine* appears only catachrestically.

Catachresis is a rhetorical device of improper naming. As an example take the opening of “Plato’s Hystera”: “As the story goes, then, men - with no specification of sex - are living in one, same, place. A place shaped like a cave or a womb. (Irigaray, 1985a, 243.)” For Irigaray Plato’s cave allegory is a sexually implicit, homogeneous male-specific representational economy. She implodes this economy - mobilizes its collapse by feminizing the terms she assumes it lacks. Irigaray turns what she perceives as the erased feminine into a specific modality. By reifying the erased term via catachresis she creates a feminine presence in Plato’s metaphysical economy (BTM, 47). Butler suggests that in miming *the erased feminine* of Platonic discourse as she does Irigaray specifies it and makes it tangible and hence no longer under erasure. This is a problem for Butler. She objects to concretizing given notions of female specificity and of extra discursive materiality, sees these engendered by Irigaray’s mime and manner of attending exclusion in Plato (BTM, 47-48) only to mobilize further exclusions.

And yet, Butler admits to repeating Irigaray’s mimetic speculative excessiveness as a retort to prolonged injury (36-37). Like Irigaray Butler argues that Platonic discourse is founded in terms of what it erases and like Irigaray Butler reifies that erased possibility. Looking again at Plato’s *Timaeus*, Butler explains that Plato conceives Forms in hierarchical opposition to matter and as un-penetrable father figures (BTM, 50). Butler elaborates the crisis in Plato’s text in terms of misconduct, mimesis and bodily materiality (matter): matter for Plato “redoubles itself as proper and improper term, differentially sexed, [...] a site of ambivalence, as a body which is no body, in its masculine form, as a matter which is no body, in its feminine. (49.)” Butler suggests that the body’s materiality in general, male, female or otherwise, presents Plato with a threat. The body mobilizes sexual ambiguity when it redoubles, for example in mimetic activity or through its reproductive capacity. Harnessing Irigaray’s argument i.e. that sexual difference in Plato’s text proceeds in terms of a fear of and a prohibition against mimesis in feminine forms, and considering that

Plato's feminized receptacle is prohibited from assuming the form of the things entering "her," Butler says "What would happen if she began to resemble that which is said only and always to enter into her? Clearly, a set of positions is being secured here through the exclusive allocation of penetration to the form [...] (50.)" Plato's terms secure identity by specializing acts i.e. allowing only men to penetrate. For Butler, Irigaray redefines Platonic identity and metaphysical placing because she identifies herself as a woman who penetrates Plato's text when she mimes it.

Butler assumes (explicitly takes on) Irigaray's mimetic strategy when she enhances, deploys and questions (at once) the implicit continuity between acts and identity in Plato's text.

For he is the impenetrable penetrator, and she, the invariably penetrated. And "he" would not be differentiated from her were it not for this prohibition on resemblance which establishes their positions as mutually exclusive and yet complementary. In fact, if she were to penetrate in return, or penetrate elsewhere, it is unclear whether she could remain a "she" and whether "he" could preserve his own differentially established identity. For the logic of non-contradiction that conditions this distribution of pronouns is one which establishes the "he" through this exclusive position as penetrator and the "she" through this exclusive position as penetrated. As a consequence, then, without this heterosexual *matrix* [her italics], as it were, it appears that the stability of these gendered positions would be called into question.

One might read this prohibition that secures the impenetrability of the masculine as a kind of panic, a panic over what might happen if a masculine penetration of the masculine were authorized, or a feminine penetration of the feminine, or a feminine penetration of the masculine or a reversibility of those positions [continuous swapping] - not to mention a full-scale confusion over what qualifies as "penetration" anyway. Would the terms "masculine" and "feminine" still signify in stable ways, or would the relaxing of the taboos against stray penetration destabilize these gendered positions in serious ways,

if it were possible to have a relation of penetration between two ostensibly feminine gendered positions, would this be the kind of resemblance that must be prohibited in order for Western metaphysics to get going? And would that be considered something like a cooptation and displacement of phallic autonomy that would undermine the phallic assurance over its own exclusive rights?

Is this a reverse mime that Irigaray does not consider, but which is nevertheless compatible with her strategy of a critical mime? Can we read this taboo that mobilizes the speculative and phantasmatic beginnings of Western metaphysics in terms of the spectre of sexual exchange that it produces through its own prohibition, as a panic over the lesbian, or perhaps more specifically, over the phallicization of the lesbian? Or would this kind of resemblance so disturb the compulsory gendered matrix that supports the order of things that one could not claim that these sexual exchanges that occur outside or in the interstices of the phallic economy are simply “copies” of the heterosexual origin? (BTM, 50-51.)

Mimesis and penetration are linked and prohibited in Plato’s text, and they are established in terms of *male* and *female* role allocations, which are also linked, metaphysical and complementary, to secure power in *male* economic terms, as exclusive rights to penetrate *females*. *Maleness* or Forms are non-material extra-discursive metaphysical signifiers for Plato, bodiless beings presumably, which may never be penetrated and which signify (denote) Platonic metaphysics discourse; *mimetic acts in penetration*, Platonic metaphysics discourse’s immanent crisis and constitutive condition at once Butler suggests. She considers that the regulation of *mimetic acts in penetration* founds and implodes sexual distinctions in Plato’s text simultaneously, that the mutual determinacy between Platonic *males* and *females* and their mimetic-penetrative possibilities creates and destroys metaphysical positioning in Platonic Western metaphysics and in its contemporary versions.

Butler proposes that the Platonic text mobilizes the phallic lesbian possibility when it restricts mimesis-penetration to a sexually defined (metaphysical) position

deemed mimetically-penetrative-ly modifiable; that that mutual interdependence between *mimetic-penetrative activity* and *sexual metaphysical identity* in Plato's text establishes new sexual acts and identities, which exceed Plato's discourse however, which are foundational to it. Butler considers that the phallic lesbian emerges in the form of the prohibition against penetration and of mimesis alike in Plato's text, that Platonic penetration-panic informs and facilitates Platonic metaphysical-sexual economy. Platonic prohibition against phallic lesbianism, Butler argues, is essential to Plato's representational economy as both its cause and effect. Plato erases the phallic lesbianism because phallic lesbianism presents a threat to Plato's postulations and economy of terms. Hence phallic lesbianism exists prior to Platonic metaphysics economy. And considering that phallic lesbianism is prohibited in that economy, it is engendered there to multiply, because prohibitions always appear with their transgressions, which Butler's text gives us as evidence. Butler suggests that Platonic penetration panic mobilizes the erasure of phallic lesbianism and Butler isolates that erasure, makes the Platonic erased phallic lesbian a concrete presence and term in her own text as in Plato's and Irigaray's.

Butler suggests that while Plato secures the metaphysical system that he describes by exclusively associating the act of penetration with masculinity (Forms) he contradicts himself, re-allocates positioning (onto-metaphysical status) when he implies that being penetrated is feminizing-activity. Slippage between act and identity is destabilizing in a productive way. In "Reasoning about Sodomy: Act and Identity in and After Bowers V. Hardwick" Janet Halley considers the criminalization of sodomy in the United States. Sodomy statutes place homosexuals at risk while immunizing heterosexuals - she argues.

Sodomy statutes maintain themselves in part by their equivocal reference to identities *and/or* [her italics] acts. The duality of sodomy statutes - sometimes an index of identity, sometimes an index of acts - is a rhetorical mechanism in the subordination of homosexual identity and the superordination of heterosexual identity. [...] And heterosexual identity becomes superordinate

not because it is absolutely immune, but because it is *intermittently and provisionally* [her italics] immune from regulation under the sodomy statutes. This instability can be a source of rhetorical and political power. For the designation “heterosexual,” the instability of sodomy along the parallel registers of act and identity generates a form of self-interestedness that is also a fragile and fearfully-to-be-maintained identity.

Resisting power in this form provides gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and their allies with a political opportunity. We can form new alliances along the register of acts. From that vantage point the instability of heterosexual identity can be exploited, and indeed, undermined from within. To be sure, adopting this approach requires that lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals place their identities as such in abeyance at least from time to time. This is dangerous, but it may be the only way that lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals can gain some kind of rhetorical leverage in a rhetorical system whose instability normally places us in a double bind. (Halley, 1993, 1722-1723.)

Halley suggests that rhetorical slippage in the distinction between act and identity is generated in sodomy statutes to legally disadvantage homosexual, lesbian and bisexual people but that it (rhetorical slippage) may be used to subvert heterosexual supremacy in the discriminatory courtrooms of the USA to achieve legal equality instead. Halley promotes thinking in terms of acts as opposed to identity, and in terms of exploiting the anxiety mobilized by an act (sodomy) that so easily suspends heterosexual identity. Considering that the legal and judicial systems have been deploying rhetoric to qualify non-heterosexual practices as ambiguous, she appreciates that losing the sense of (sexual) identity is difficult but thinks it is necessary in order to form new bonds, to regroup in terms of acts instead of identity, which may accomplish rhetorical control in the court room; she promotes reciprocating ambiguity as a force in identity-loss to establish equal rights in/before the law.

(Still in the citation in *Bodies that Matter* on penetration panic,) Butler considers that Plato’s text destabilizes the identities it rhetorically prompts and that

the ambiguity generated by penetration acts, sodomy in addition to any non-heterosexual penetration may be used to elaborate the erased sexual possibilities of Plato's text, which for Butler is phallic lesbianism. Platonic economy is a prohibitive discourse wrongly construed as an origin, sexual or rhetorical - she says; "this legislation of a particular version of heterosexuality attests full well to its non-original status otherwise there would be no necessity to install a prohibition at the outset against rival possibilities of the organization of sexuality. (BTM, 51.)" Butler considers that heterosexual hegemony requires a prohibition against sexual practices alternative to heterosexuality in order to maintain heterosexuality's supremacy and status of originality while the existence of the prohibition implies that alternatives to heterosexuality have always existed along side heterosexuality annulling the heterosexual claim to an original sexual practice.

Butler considers that Platonic heterosexual economy requires a hierarchical relationship between *origin* and *copy* to maintain itself as origins discourse and as the original sexual possibility. Butler suggests that mimesis in origins discourse is hierarchical and implicated in heterosexual claims to originality; that any mimetic activity which bears a resemblance to Platonic sole beneficiation status in penetration deposes Platonic discourse of its *original-copy* distinction and originality status. Any non-heterosexual practice that successfully impostors a heterosexual practice will be the ruination of origins discourse. This fear of the phallic lesbian is embedded in heterosexual hegemony and prompts the annulment of the phallic lesbian as a copy at all - Butler suggests. Paradoxically, heterosexual hegemony asserts the phallic lesbian as a viable possibility in its origins discourse (in Butler's text). Mimetic activities that converge with, or modify identity positions confound the coherence of the origin-copy relationship, which is mimesis hinged to hierarchical binary "original" heterosexuality, to unhinge heterosexuality as such.

In explaining Irigaray's mimetic engagement in Plato Butler differentiates *taking* and *assuming* power: "This is a taking of his place [Plato's], not to assume it, but to show that it is *occupiable* [her italics], to raise the question of the cost and movement of that assumption. (BTM, 36.)" Butler suggests that while Irigaray does not

simply assume Platonic power i.e. conceive its transferability by using it as her own property - Irigaray occupies it, promotes power as property in a different way - as real estate or/and as sexual activity. Plato's text establishes a binary hierarchical form of power that Irigaray questions by miming. Yet in faithfully replicating Platonic male-centred strategy by occupying his text Irigaray generates further exclusions, other sexual *Others* the phallic lesbian - the price Irigaray pays for taking his place.

In conclusion to "Bodies That Matter," Butler embraces Irigaray's notion of erasure, the idea that discourse creates its outside within. Unlike Irigaray Butler sees numerous excluded positions engendered by erasure and conceives the outside-within as a marker of the limits of discourse. Butler argues for maintaining the excluded element to impede discourse from becoming a totalizing force. She says it enables a site of contest within discourse, from which to challenge exclusionary and violent mechanisms. Butler promotes thinking the outside-within as being under erasure, as foundational to discourse yet never in finite terms. To avoid further exclusions Butler proposes mobilizing *positions under erasure* to generate a multiplicity of discursive outsides within, disparate reverse-mimes emerging as re-signification-al practices that converge only in the effort to muddle hegemonic discourses: "every oppositional discourse will produce its outside, an outside that risks becoming installed as its non-signifying inscriptional space. (BTM, 52.)" The risk of disappearance (erasure and exclusion) must be preserved as a necessary violence and inherent limit in order for diversity to happen; representational failure must be preserved to hamper attempts to domesticate difference (BTM, 53,) "illuminating the violent and contingent boundaries of that normative regime precisely through the inability of that regime to represent that which might pose a fundamental threat to its continuity. (Ibid.)" Butler refutes the notion that exclusions are established as a founding violence or that they should be foundational to signification. She opposes all-inclusive discourses and in this respect understands exclusionary conventions as ongoing dynamic reference points from which exclusions proceed to discontinue. Violation in her conception is an impetus but not an end: "If there is a violence necessary to the language of politics, then the risk of that violation might well be followed by another in which we begin, without ending, without

mastering, to own - and yet never fully to own - the exclusions by which we proceed. (Ibid.)” The prospect of violence should be foundational but always circumvented - she suggests.

Irigaray’s mimetic practice, Butler argues, deploys excess - over-reading to subvert violent subordinating conventions. Irigaray’s citational engagement with her source text (Plato’s) deploys ambiguity, binary oppositional terms as the crisis and critical strategy, and as exceedance - a move that mimes Platonic erasures but which fails erasure when Irigaray reifies the erased Platonic feminine. Irigaray uses the momentum or strategy of erasure - the disappearance of a term from the binary in Plato’s text as a point of departure for hers. However, Butler thinks, Irigaray ends up with an alternative mastering system, which excludes the possibility of the phallic lesbian. In proffering the phallic lesbian as a modification to Plato’s hierarchical conception of mimesis - a sexual stasis (restrictions on sexual practices and identities) in both Plato’s and Irigaray’s text, Butler suggests that Irigaray’s mimetic reifying manoeuvre is nonetheless valid in providing her (Butler) with a point of reference in the promotion of alternative inclusive possibilities in disappearance. In the *Psychic Life of Power* (1997) Butler returns to and prioritizes the fundamentally contradictory structure of power that this operation (*the use of power*) involves; Butler argues that to assume power is a convoluted task that binds the contradictory terms of agency (PLP, 13 - cited above). In this argument Butler sees an irresolvable ambiguity emerging in the structure of power.

Power acts on the subject, an acting that is an enacting: an irresolvable ambiguity arises when one attempts to distinguish between the power that (transitively) enacts the subject, and the power enacted by the subject, that is, between the power that forms the subject and the subject’s “own” power. (PLP, 15.)

Irresolution in this understanding is around the possibility of distinguishing power’s varying elements in the effort to use power conclusively. It arises in the

attempt determine power's divide. The undetectable divide (that Butler nevertheless sees within power) is a feature in power and manifests a shift - transition from that element in power which forms the subject to the element that is the subject's fictional assumption (of usable property); ownership is in quotation marks to say there is no actual possibility of owning power, that the notion of it is a figure of speech or a tropological convention.

Butler is inconsistent in explaining power's divide. First she says that power does break down into its parts: "The power that initiates the subject fails to remain continuous with the power that is the subject's agency. (PLP, 12.)" And later: "Power rearticulated is "re"-articulated in the sense of already done and "re"-articulated in the sense of done over, done again, done anew. (PLP, 18.)" In the former statement the formative and useable features of power are distinct and discontinuous. In the latter, formative power "already done," which suggests the genealogy of power, that power always drags the past with it whenever it is redone, and that power is always redone - done anew - an alteration-in-repetition. In this Butler suggests that power's useable feature is its transitional aspect, that using power is a discriminating operation that alters power. Still this remains vague in her text. She refrains from severing power's features, the formative one from the useable one. She provides a way of thinking *the use of power*, which stresses the simultaneity of doing the same unaltered act and its variable at once, as the only possibility of using power, normative or not, intentional and not. Likewise the simultaneity of *identity* and *difference* in thinking repetition maintains an irresolvable ambiguity in her explanation. And still irresolution facilitates a useable platform (operating system) Butler suggests; redoing the norm is to practice the default ambiguity of its power, which always presents its subversive possibility (failure).

As a provisional answer to the problem of closed systems - inability to work inside a system from which you are excluded - Butler develops the possibility of moving beyond the paradox of power - power's irresolvable ambiguity - when she says that while tethered to the terms of power (the abjecting element in/of norms) the subject is more than those terms. "If the subject is *neither* [her italics] fully determined by

power *nor* [her italics] fully determining of power (but significantly and partially both), the subject exceeds the logic of noncontradiction, is an excrescence of logic, as it were. (PLP, 17)” Becoming and being a subject via regulative convention is never finally a complete process, which still does not mean that the subject may determine the terms of its regulation. Excrescence is an abnormal protrusion. Butler indicates that Lacan refers to the subject as excrescence (PLP, 203n-7). She continues:

To claim that the subject exceeds *either/or* [my italics] is not to claim that it lives in some free zone of its own making. Exceeding is not escaping, and the subject exceeds precisely that to which it is bound. In this sense, the subject cannot quell the ambivalence by which it is constituted. (PLP, 17-18.)

In other words, if the subject is neither completely formed by the norm nor able to choose how to be formed by it the subject is still not free. The subject is accomplished by exceeding the logic of non-contradiction, which still binds the subject to that logic. This is the logic of norms (hetero-normative convention). It is contradictory yet is impossible to contradict (ambiguous). Deploying Lacan’s view that the subject is excrescence Butler suggests that the subject exceeds the norm and is its failure because it is never unanimous with the demand or ideal in-of the norm. This is especially evident when the binding terms of power manifest demands that are impossible to fulfil. Like being demeaned by negative name-calling. It is possible to fail being demeaned; formative power - the subordinating power in and of norms conflicts with performative-power - the actualization of power in terms of the subject.

Derrida remarks that no performative can work without the force of iterability, that every appearance of a subject who works the performative is the effect of a “citation” that both offers the performative an accumulated force and belatedly positions “the subject” as the fictive and intentional originator of the speech act itself. [Butler refers to Jacques Derrida in “Signature, Event, Context”, *Limited Inc.*, 18.] (Butler, 1999b, 128n-30.)

Butler considers that because performativity always entails iterability it is the repetition of an act that involves the accumulation of its prior instances. She suggests that iterability is a kind of repetition that involves hindsight to establish a subject that exceeds the momentum of its inception. Iterability is based in a retrospective presupposition; repetition that somehow departs the temporal act of repeating, which deploys the force of accumulated previous repetitions and facilitates the supposition of a subject who, or a consciousness that, is in place prior to the temporal instance from which it observes the past. This is performative power.

Derrida explains iterability in "Signature, Event, Context." He says that identity is a function of a type of repetition he calls iterability, that "iter, [meaning] again, probably comes from itera, [which means] other in Sanskrit, and everything that follows can be read as the working out of the logic that ties repetition to alterity. [...] (Derrida, 1977, 180.)" Derrida suggests that iterability retains the word *again* and means *repetition repeated again*, that iterability is different from the kind of repetition in which the same thing is repeated over and again unchanged. Iterability differs from unchanging-repetition in that it connects variation, alterity and/or difference, to unchanging-repetition. Iterability binds the unchanging act of repeating the same action or word to its variation, which yields a divergence (from unchanging repetition). Iterability has ambiguity in its structure and binds alterity to identity - homogeneity or the subject understood as *self-same universal intelligible possibility*. Hence it partakes the ethical project.

(Reading Austin's *How to Do Things With Words*) Derrida uses iterability to explain context, to say that absolute presence like absolute context is impossible, that context rather is always infinite and always modifiable (Derrida, 1977, 177-178). Iterability implies death, death as radical absence, absenteeism (177) and the inevitable break in the concept of presence (in metaphysics theory), and death as the ever-present human condition. (Reconfiguring the psychoanalytic notion of a death-in-life deployed to erase sexual possibilities) Derrida's conception of iterability promotes this notion of death understood as radical absenteeism that engenders endless

possibilities of interpretation. If there is to be an absolute communication or intention for Derrida it proceeds in endless unknown possibilities of interpretation. The death of the author, the absence of her consciousnesses, desires, intended reader and original intentions assuming we know these, enables interpreting all these anew. Iterability is the text's inherent crises of *presence* and of *identity*, dissipating absolutisms and mobilizing the ghost-like remains of previous communications - the assumption of an intention or of a previous context and also inept readings in these, the crisis of infelicity he calls it:

[...] the value of risk or exposure to infelicity [inappropriateness...] is not interrogated as an essential predicate or as a *law* [his italics]. Austin does not ponder the consequences issuing from the fact that a possibility - a possible risk - is always possible, and is in some sense a necessary possibility. Nor whether - once such a necessary possibility of infelicity is recognized - infelicity still constitutes an accident. What is a success when the possibility of infelicity continues to constitute its structure? (Derrida, 1977, 189.)

Derrida thinks that iterability enables interpretations that are inappropriate (catachrestic) to a presumed original intention or context. Inept readings pronounce a success, an ever-present crisis that allows for variable contextual reconfigurations, modification in any text, in any convention, language or communication in general.

Butler conceives the performative power of language and the performative power of norms in these terms of iterability - as a confluence of abjection (deadly zones) and liveability (life affirming possibilities). The norm is founded on a limit condition zoned (as) uninhabitable and abject, she says (BTM, 1-3, 11-16). Iterability allows Butler to think identity in terms of its improper possibility, i.e., that deviations of identity are immanent to identity, and that performing the norm over and again is repeating the simultaneity of its ideal/failure. Iterability affords benevolent crises in failure, establishes that the norm is embedded with misconduct in idyllic agenda and promotes the prospect of linguistic, normative or performative unintelligibility.

Nevertheless the notion that language or discourse performs is itself tropological Butler says, because it is not certain that language is constituted by “acts.” To say that language is constituted in acts is a tropological presumption - a discursive convention that demonstrates (performativity enacts) the belief it promotes. The act that appears a singular episode “will turn out to refer to prior acts and to reiteration of “acts” that is perhaps more suitably described as a citational chain. (BTM, 281n4.)”

Butler considers Paul de Man’s concern with the rhetorical (tropological) aspect of language. De Man suggests that the notion that language is rhetorical - a linguistic or textual apparatus of persuasion - mobilizes a distinction between *constative* assertions - truth/falsity claims, and *performative* utterances - speech as action. Like De Man Butler thinks the distinction is “confounded by the fictional status of both (BTM, 281.)” The distinction between *constative* and *performative* utterances is fictional and itself rhetorical, like the notion that language can perform or that it can assert (BTM, 281; De Man, 1979, 129). Here is the problem: rhetoric understood as *persuasive language* assumes that language is performative and an embodied activity that enacts what it names, but rhetoric understood as *a system of tropes* “deconstructs its own performance (BTM, 282; De Man, 1979, 130-131.)” As a system of tropes - a discursive apparatus, language cannot be embodied activity nor performative, its transferability-power - the capacity to turn words into action questionable. And if *performativity* is itself rhetorical - a system of tropes and an instrument of discourse it is hardly occupiable. In other words, if *the turn* inaugurates the subject, the subject is rhetorical; the rhetoric of agency, a paradoxical notion based on a set of assumptions (belief). Still there is possibility here. First, if the norm or act is abjecting then to think it as rhetorical diminishes its power of abjection. Importantly, the subject is undeniable, however it may be defined. “Agency” is not a placeholder or empty sign. It is a nuanced operation involving choices and decision-making that are, importantly, prone to ineptitude, infelicity or contextual deviation. And, ambiguity may be thought in terms of a multiplicity, not just negation (contradiction), an eclipsing and layering of multifarious terms and the terms that exceed these, incomplete, erased or unnamed

futuristic unknowns. And, the division in power is finally not fixed. Power's division facilitates performative differentials - variation and exceedance in acts of repetition.

Butler promotes focusing on repetition and multiplicity, as features of the subject and of its performativity.

Performativity is thus not a singular "act," for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition. Moreover, this act is not primarily theatrical; indeed, its apparent theatricality is produced to the extent that its historicity remains dissimulated (and, conversely, its theatricality gains a certain inevitability given the impossibility of a full disclosure of its historicity). (BTM, 12-13.)

Considering that performativity conceals the layers of acts from which it derived through the perpetual repetition that amounts to it, Butler suggests that it is a theatrical production. And while performativity is not a theatrical production in the sense of donning a gown for the one evening it *is* theatrical in the sense of concealing any reference to authenticity or actual intentions (like given sexual identities). So if there is an original authentic account it will never be established a knowable object, its ongoing repetition changes it all the time.

Norms are disseminated via conventions partaken performatively - this is performativity, performativity is the norm, the layers of norms - zones designating inhabitability in terms of un-inhabitability. An accumulation of norms and a multiplicity of previous acts, performativity explains the present moment, lends it credence. Like the layers of norms of which it is an accumulation performativity conceals the conventions that promulgate norms (over time) to suggest that the norm actually does amount to the truth about life but only to the extent of hegemony in the present.

To the extent that a performative appears to "express" a prior intention, a doer *behind* [her italics] the deed, that prior agency is only legible *as the*

effect [her italics] of that utterance. For a performative to work, it must draw upon and recite a set of linguistic conventions which have traditionally worked to bind or engage certain kinds of effects. The force or effectivity of a performative will be derived from its capacity to draw on and reencode the historicity [authenticity] of those conventions in a present act. This power of recitation is not a function of an individual's *intention* [her italics], but is an effect of historically sedimented linguistic conventions. (Butler, 1995, 134.)

The authenticity of the performative - the extent to which it conveys a truth or an original, authentic intention - is only the effect of its ongoing recitation, the outcome of historical linguistic sediment. Recitation understood as performative power is the inadvertent consequence of a historically bound process in linguistic sediment i.e. pre-existing material (language), words and (synonymously) meanings transported through time and through varying contexts and deposited in alternative contexts. This is the force of a performative - performative power. Power as such Butler argues, belongs to performatives not to subjects. Performatives that appear in the present draw their power from the past, from previous performatives. This is a power of *encoding anew*, an operation of accommodation (re-contextualization) immanent to linguistic norms and conventions. It establishes correspondence between past and present performatives, or systems of performatives. It enables performatives to communicate with each other and fit in or be understood in their new contexts, be recognizable when contexts change over time or through the subject's usage. Performative power then, is this force in communicability and in alteration, a linguistic sediment effect of reflexive (independent of the subject) legibility (recognition) in recitation. The subject understood as the possibility of wielding this force is obsolete - Butler suggests here.

The tropological status of *agency*, while only the force of hegemonic linguistic convention, is still an important allusion (reference) to previous hegemonic performatives and to chains of performative acts.

[...] when words engage actions or constitute themselves [as] a kind of action, they do this not because they reflect the power of an individual's will or intention, but because they draw upon and reengage conventions which have gained their power precisely through *a sedimented iterability* [her italics]. The category of "intention," indeed, the notion of "the doer" will have its place, but this place will no longer be "behind" the deed as its enabling source. If the subject - a category within language and, hence, distinct from [...] a "self" - is performatively constituted, then it follows that this will be a constitution *in time* [her italics], and that the "I" and the "we" will be neither fully determined by language nor radically free to instrumentalize language as an external medium.

To be constituted by language is to be produced within a given network of power/discourse which is open to resignification, redeployment, subversive citation from within, and interruption and inadvertent convergences with other such networks. "Agency" is to be found precisely at such junctures where discourse is renewed. [...] If a subject were constituted once and for all, there would be no possibility of a reiteration of those constituting conventions or norms. That the subject is that which must be constituted again and again implies that it is open to formations that are not fully constrained in advance. [...] In this sense, discourse is the horizon of agency, but also, performativity is to be rethought as resignification. There is no "bidding farewell" to the doer, but only the *placement* [her italics] of that doer "beyond" *or* [her italics] "behind" the deed. For the deed will be itself [...] the legacy of conventions which it reengages, but also the future possibilities that it opens up; the "doer" will be the uncertain working of the discursive possibilities by which it itself is worked. This is doubtless related to Lacan's claim in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* that every act is a repetition. In this sense, the "doer" will be produced as the effect of the "deed," but it will also constitute the dynamic hiatus by which further performative effects are achieved. (Butler, 1995, 134-135.)

Language constitutes itself in a reflexive process, which is a function of sediment, linguistic sediment and iterability. Iterability establishes the temporal aspect of repetition and the aspect of alterity, a divergence from temporal and human specificity. Butler suggests that language has a life of its own. Affected by alterity language is discontinuous and desynchronised. It is comprised of diverging elements - elements that are of varying temporal or contextual specificity. Contexts overlap in a single term. A single term fits in varying conflicting contexts, is not absolutely tethered to one specific meaning, contextual position or temporal specificity. The constitution of the subject Butler says is an on going affair that happens repeatedly, in temporality and in language, in diverging reconfigurations. Linguistic constitution means being subject to hegemonic (linguistic) convention, which still leaves room for the notion of the subject to be reconceived but only and always in terms of hegemonic convention.

Butler promotes thinking *convergence* as the junction between disparate linguistic systems that engenders disjunction, discrepancies in and interruptions to hegemonic, unified views or conventions. Agency understood as the tropological presumption of the subject happens in the varying discrepant discursive networks that converge, advertently or not. The subject is constituted in terms of the unsynchronized convergence of varying discursive networks. Butler opens up the system of constraints to each other so they may challenge one another. This is performativity understood as resignification - the use and misuse of tropes and of recitation.

The “subject” signals an indeterminate re-usage in performatives, always unknown in advance and always tending to fail or exceed the bounds of usage - propriety as determined in hegemonic convention. “The deed” is the norm, a linguistic act and a contract. The subject and its relation to the deed has to be rethought in terms of the deed’s legacy (discursive genealogy) Butler says - *how the subject “does” the norm, how the subject acts in language, how it constitutes itself by reengaging convention*. The notion of standing behind the deed does not properly account for the subject’s tropological status, avoids attending the impossibility of controlling repetition in advance. Butler considers that this is the Lacanian notion of the formative

repetition-effect in or of the subject, which, she adds, is also the hiatus (breakdown or/and demise) that facilitates further constitution; repetition is not self-same she suggests. And though uncontrollable it may be directed.

The subject and its action are never fully free of each other and never fully accomplished. The “subject” is a trope constituted over and over again, “performativity,” still its renewal; working within the closed and circular system linguistic or any convention is nevertheless the prospect of “agency” but the only prospect. Butler discourages thinking in terms of departing the system but rather that various tropes including “performativity” mark the system’s closures - preordained resolution and impossibility of departure as much as the possibility of the system’s renewal. The “deed” and “performativity” in Butler’s conception mark *the action of the subject in the system that constrains it*, the context and legacy of received and foreclosing prior conventions. Doing the deed reactivates to open (release) the norm. It is promising.

The performative is not merely an act used by a pregiven subject, but is one of the powerful and insidious ways in which subjects are called into social being, inaugurated into sociality by a variety of diffuse and powerful interpellations. In this sense the social performative is a crucial part not only of subject *formation* [her italics], but of the ongoing political contestation and reformulation of the subject as well. In this sense, the performative is not only a ritual practice: it is one of the influential rituals by which subjects are formed and reformulated. (Butler, 1999b, 125.)

Butler promotes insidious dynamic ontology - an ongoing reformulation of the meaning of “subject” in acts of destroying the meaning of “subject.” The subject is implicated in the process of challenging its allocated definition, which enables it to become anew but the subject’s becoming is always partial and always tethered to the destructive power of dominant convention - she suggests. Performing the norm and normative convention is a social ritual that reiterates the simultaneity of destructive

and constructive forces, destruction and construction simultaneously inhere norms, doing the norm is always in terms of this contradictory form; you can't choose one or the other, be either destructed or constructed (empowered) in complying with normative injunction - Butler suggests. Explicitly offensive labels make it is easier to address the destructive abjecting power of norms. Normative conventions (norms) shroud the abjecting beliefs that they mobilize. Once revealed, these beliefs may be used to rework norms. The accumulated force of abjection like negative labels is the usable energy by which the revision of abjecting beliefs is facilitated. Consequently, political meanings of "subjects" and their zones of (unliveable) constitution may change - Butler suggests. This usage of norms is intentional indeed. Butler provides a way of thinking agency that may affect and modify cultural, social, and legal normative consensuses, not a full-proof theory nor practice. She calls for an operation beyond one individual's intentions. Resignification in tropes, she suggests, is a collective minority endeavour and yet she would think that collectives like discourse have to be self-divided, dis-unified by default.

In the absence of collectives, of the unified directionality of a mutual project, the absence of conscious decision and a pregiven subject, Butler suggests that temporality alone may facilitate repetition as modification. The identity of time is the assumption of disjunction between moments; we presume we know what the "moment" is. Presuming that each moment is different to a previous moment means that the practice of a norm, its repeated repetition, differs from the one that precedes it and differs from the one that ensues. Thus, with each repetition in time the norm varies, is inclined to evolve.

Crucially, then, construction is neither a single act nor a causal process initiated by a subject and culminating in a set of fixed effects. Construction not only takes place *in* [her italics] time, but is itself a temporal process which operates through the reiteration of norms; sex is both produced and destabilized in the course of this reiteration. (BTM, 9-10.)

Construction is *the staging of meaning* (signification and interpretation). Except for the temporal process that it partakes, construction never unanimously refers to a singular meaning - Butler suggests. Construction happens in time and is subject to iterability. Temporal specificity itself is a construction and like the notion of sex and of the sexual body it is generated and degenerates in temporality. Note 7 follows:

It is not a simple matter of construing performativity as a repetition of acts, as if “acts” remain intact and self-identical as they are repeated in time, and where “time” is understood as external to the “acts” themselves. On the contrary, an act is itself a repetition, a sedimentation, and congealment of the past which is precisely foreclosed in its act-like status. In this sense an “act” is always a provisional failure of memory. (BTM, 244n-7.)

Performativity is an act of repression that amounts to our sense of the present - Butler suggests. The act we perform in the present disguises memories of previous acts; eradicates memories and endows the act (disguise) with the status of an act (a singular event).

(I continue citing the passage on page 10 of *Bodies that Matter* following the footnote.)

As a sedimented effect [erosion by re-deposition] of a reiterative or ritual practice, sex acquires its naturalized effect, and, yet, it is also by virtue of this reiteration that gaps and fissures are opened up as the constitutive instabilities in such constructions, as that which escapes or exceeds the norm, as that which cannot be wholly defined or fixed by the repetitive labor of that norm. This instability is the *deconstituting* [her italics] possibility in the very process of repetition, the power that undoes the very effects by which “sex” is stabilized, the possibility to put the consolidation of the norms of “sex” into a potentially productive crisis. (BTM, 10.)

Sex is a ritual Butler says. Encarta dictionary defines *ritual* as an established prescribed pattern of observance and a stylized sequence of actions used to communicate information and reinforce social cohesion. Encarta gives religion and obsessive hand washing as examples. Butler considers that the ritual of sex becomes a fixed set over time. Repetition in that fixed set sex is labour that maintains to destabilize the fixed set sex, Butler says. Repetition of sex reinforces social cohesion and may destabilize social cohesion. Sex partakes the erosive process (linguistic sediment) of temporality, is redistributed in variable discursive contextual practices or conventions. Synthesized in a convergence of disparate discursive elements, sex and sexual norms only appear unified and cohesive, a process that may be undone, un-synthesized to reveal sex's variable components and possibilities. Butler suggests that the consolidating time-based capacity of the norm is its critical attribute; the manner by which a chain of performative-acts ultimately combine to present a false image of a unified whole in the present may be induced into a productive crisis - a dis-consolidation.

Note 8 follows:

[!]It is important to underscore the effect of *sedimentation* [her italics] that the effect of construction implies. Here what are called "moments" are not distinct and equivalent units of time, for the "past" will be the accumulation and congealing of such "moments" to the point of their indistinguishability. But it will also consist of that which is refused from construction, the domains of the repressed, forgotten, and the irrecoverably foreclosed. That which is not included - exteriorized by boundary - as a phenomenal constituent of the sedimented effect called "construction" will be as crucial to its definition as that which is included; this exteriority is not distinguishable as a "moment." Indeed, the notion of the "moment" may well be nothing other than a retrospective fantasy of mathematical mastery imposed upon the interrupted duration of the past. (BTM, 245n-8.)

Like the norm, like convention and like sex, which are formed in an accumulation of (their) precedents, the accumulation of moments render a solidification of sorts; *the moment* is set in linguistic sediment - the converged diverging links and systems of meaning. The meaning of *moment* is perpetually re-deposited at varying moments or various contexts. Re-deposited in temporality the final look (image) of the moment veils its accumulated precedents including the non-visible ones - erasures. This is construction; a false image of the diverging layers that amount to *the moment*, which excludes, eliminates difficult moments from memory as from discourse. In explaining *the moment* Butler converges phenomenology, the philosophical concern with temporality and with ethics (proximity), and the psychoanalytic *returned repressed* (Freud, 1978, 147, 154, 157) to suggest that excluded sexual possibilities return altered. I develop this in the next chapter 'Butler's Antigone' in section D about the Lacanian tropological production of death and in section E, which reveals how Butler *turns* the Lacanian symbolic.

The passage cited above goes on to criticize Foucault's emphasis on the notion of convergence in mapping power relations; Butler considers that Foucault's genealogical approach, the power of discourse understood as a process implies temporality without addressing it. She contrasts Foucault's view with Derrida's emphasis on iterability. In addressing the temporal dimension of *becoming* and *being* via iterability Derrida goes beyond a simple conception of repetition she says.

The "betweenness" that differentiates "moments" of time is not one that can, within Derridean terms, be spatialized or bounded as an identifiable object. It is the nonthematizable differance which erodes and contests any and all claims to discrete identity, including the discrete identity of the "moment." (BTM, 245n-8.)

The unknown - unidentifiable objects - are lodged interstitially, excluded from the domain of knowledge, that which is identifiable - *identity* - to challenge and undermine *identity*, the possibility of knowing is anyway a relative assumption Derrida

says Butler suggests. The difference between *identity* and *non-identity* like the notion of *the whole* is fantasy. We isolate variations of moments in time by attributing an identity to this variation and then conceiving this identity as a disconnection. *Disconnection* is really a supposition of disconnection, the notions of *difference*, *discrete identity*, *absolute identity*, *discontinuity* and *connectivity* - all suppositions, tropes. The notion that each moment differs from the next, a desire-based assumption, desire to master the merging of moments in memory, Butler says. Likewise she suggests that the notion that *identity* is a distinct and recognizable position is a fiction, and *identity* understood as self-same or as an unchanging repetition like the concept of difference, is fallacious. Still, Butler prefers to think that *identity* and *difference* are connected because this is a canonical convention that tenders ethical like modification-al possibility.

Throughout her work Butler engenders-deploys the Hegelian trope of dialectical becoming - (master/slave scenario in *Phenomenology of Spirit*) understood as absolute dependency between *identity* and *difference*.

The notion of “difference” is [...] misunderstood, I would suggest, when it is understood as contained within or by the subject: the Hegelian subject’s encounter with difference is not resolved into identity. Rather, the moment of its “resolution” is finally indistinguishable from the moment of its dispersion; the thinking of this cross-vectored temporality ushers in the Hegelian understanding of infinity and offers a notion of the subject that cannot remain bounded in the face of the world. Misrecognition does not arrive as a distinctively Lacanian corrective to the Hegelian subject, for it is precisely by misrecognition that the Hegelian subject repeatedly suffers its self-loss. This subject neither has nor suffers its desire, but is the very action of desire as it perpetually displaces the subject. Thus, it is neither precisely a new theory of the subject nor a definitive displacement of the subject that Hegel provides, but rather a definition in displacement, for which there is no final restoration. (Butler, 2004, 48.)

Butler considers that the Hegelian conception of difference has been misinterpreted. Difference (or alterity) has been misunderstood as a component of identity; the encounter between the subject (identity) and alterity (difference) wrongly understood as a process in which alterity is assimilated to the subject. Dispersion of identity and resolution of identity are opposites that are the same - hyperbological - she suggests. The dialectic promotes resolution in the image of dispersion she says. She calls it a "cross-vectored temporality" to suggest an existing thrust (momentum) always redirected. For Butler Hegelianism tends an infinite exchange between the distinct notions of *the subject* and *the other* (identity and difference). She sees the notion of misrecognition immanent to Hegel's conception. A painful self-loss defines and prompts the exchange between the subject and alterity she suggests, the subject is not a support for or a mediator of alterity, of difference or of desire. The subject is an action of desire continuously displaced. The subject is un-bounded by alterity - the unknown, in its desirous encounter with it.

Butler says that the Hegelian subject displays "a critical mobility," which she thinks is useful for appropriations further to her own in *Antigone's Claim* (Butler, 2004, 48). Butler is not fully Hegelian if Hegelianism determines a violent power-oriented desire trajectory as the subject's possibility. The referential paradox in the subject's possibility (its tropological status) is a struggle for recognition devoid of a subject and devoid of violence (Borgerson, 2005, 76). Butler proposes a theory based in the notion that the subject is absent prior to and also at the time of its theoretical discursive explanation, inauguration and displacement, absenteeism or disappearance to which real live subjects are nonetheless given - dependent upon for their *becoming*. Dependence between real subjects and their fictive counter parts *can* theoretically generate agency; it is possible to imagine a struggle for recognition between the fictive (absent) and the real subject but only in theory. It is not possible to implement a theory founded upon the paradox of reference, to practice agency where there is no subject and no agency. That theory may be implemented in practice like the notion that theory and practice are continuous or discontinuous - these are tropological

assumptions, accounts that generates their own supposition the basis of which Butler would reveal is defunct. So, how is it possible to use Butler's theory (ideas)?

My question pertains to the relationship between my visual practice and my writing (thesis). Critical theory may be used in an analogy (resemblance or mimesis), by converting theoretical terms to fit alternative conventions. Butler explains that performativity enacts subjects in terms of modification-al mimetic activity; performance redefines itself when it is repeated. Similarly visual art and conventions, and the ideologies these promulgate or conceal may be altered in the terms of their re-rendering. However, I suggest that the notion of a mimetic relation between theory and visual art like the notion of implementing critical theory in visual practice while used and useable (productive) is false. Visual art is theory, confluence of theory and practice. Derrida says that deconstruction is not an application but the inherent prospect of instability in any text (*Derrida, 2002*). Reiterating the Hegelian implosion of substance and process - a conception of *theory as practice* (or *practice as theory*) Derrida suggests that (his theoretical construct of) *deconstruction* is unlike an instrument, not *taken from outside a text into it* but is a wavering feature findable in the margins of any communicational convention. Butler promotes a similar idea via her understanding of tropes. As unstable (unverifiable) communicational conventions tropes link and unlink theory and practice - unfounded speculation and accepted versions of reality, fictive constructs (desires) and existing social norms. In visual terms, take sexually objectifying imagery for example. Visual conventions that mobilize definitive context recognizably tethered to exclusionary subordinating beliefs and practices render instabilities in the image; visual tropes of sexual objectification may immobilize definitive context like they mobilize it. In my final chapter I elaborate the tropes of my art practice in more detail.

Preamble to Chapter 3 - Butler's Deviation in Structuralism.

Butler is a radical structuralist who questions structuralism, or her post-structuralism is radically structuralist. She analyzes the underlying symbolic structure of kinship relations as fictional and impermanent. This is her post-structuralism. She also deviates from structuralism in contesting its misogynistic trends - the notion that women are objects of exchange and the structuralist implication that materiality may be evacuated via symbolic terms and functionality. Nevertheless, Butler elaborates a system given and taken in its entirety, comprised of people, tropological terms, symbols and linguistic signs that interact and are mutually and absolutely interconnected. Endowed with an absolute and totalizing deadly power over its components the symbolic system that she considers has prohibited incestuous desire underlying its structure as its condition of (symbolic) possibility and manner of exchange. Butler conceives incestuous desire punishable by death as the vital element mobilizing symbolic exchange, as the element that determines how things signify, what intelligibility is, which desires are prohibited and fatal, and which legitimate, meaningful enough to accomplish the status of a kinship bond worthy of social recognition, consensus and state institutionalization. Despite the fictional genealogy and status of incestuous desire in structuralist accounts, that Oedipus complex arrives from an artwork and that Lacan establishes it in terms of a universal theory of sadomasochism Butler upholds the status of incest as the seminal death driven passion underlying the structure of the symbolic exchange. And she conceives a permanent transportation of pre-existing meanings that, as Lacan thinks, maintains impermanent signification-al links, fully dynamic referential endowments. Yet Butler does so to reveal and contest the foreclosure of alternative desires - legal or law-like processes that remove rights from homosexuals and lesbians. Arguing that the symbolic exchange and norm is socially contingent, that kinship is social, and that intelligibility is malleable, Butler conceives the entirety and absolute power of the system as a function of the system's immanent mutability, very much unlike Lacan. Butler analyses the socio-political implications of the becoming of meaning - hegemony in signification-

al practices in the social ritual of sex happening in a diffuse process that imbricates material linguistic (discursive), social and psychic bonds, futuristic, unknown possibilities like demeaning exclusionary violations webbed genealogically and across time, and in the historicity (“authenticity”) of performatives - diverging discursive networks converged via ongoing linguistic re-sedimentation (pre-existing discourse always re-deposited), synchronized and desynchronized by the force of performativity. (I explained this in the previous chapter.) And though Butler does not conceive a finite context to the system of signs or to symbolic arrangement she sees its refused excessive elements as integral parts of the system, never disappearing always returning to exceed the system’s totalizing force. In *Antigone’s Claim* Butler implores using the incest taboo to gauge cultural coherence in its founding incestuous moment. If there is to be a singular (unique) ideal moment she suggests, this moment like the ideal is modifiable (Borgerson, 2005, 71).

Butler’s interest in Hegel’s interpretation of *Antigone* concerns how *Antigone* is “consistently misread by Hegel as with his provocative way of understanding her criminal act as an eruption of an alternate legality within the sphere of public law. (Butler, 1999a, xiv; Butler, 2004, 47.)” The eruption of alternate legality, its immanent link to criminality and sexual difference, to rights (discourse) and to temporality - its priority status rather, will likewise be the focus of my reading in Butler’s *Antigone’s Claim* in the following chapter.

Whether *Antigone* functions as a subject for Hegel remains a compelling question for me, and raises the question of the political limit of the subject, that is, both the limitations imposed upon subjecthood (who qualifies as one), and the limits of the subject as the point of departure for politics. (Butler, 1999a, xiv.)

I am also concerned with the question of the limits of subjecthood in my third chapter. *Antigone* fails to achieve the status of a subject in her Hegelian interpretations. Butler reveals that this is a socio-political limitation - a discriminatory flaw mobilized in the

referential operation featured in the Lacanian structuralist account of kinship as in its contemporary versions. I consider that Butler modifies the limiting terms of subjecthood - restrictions upon who is and is not allowed to be constituted in terms of a subject by asking, *where do the limits of representation point?*

Chapter 3 - Butler's Antigone.

(A) Mimesis and Sadomasochism: Introduction.

My reading in Butler's *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* begins by introducing the Lacanian connection between mimesis and sadomasochism because this connection is fundamental to Butler and to Lacan, to Butler's reading in Lacan but also to Butler's reading in Irigaray - to the "history" of Butler's critique of mimesis as sadomasochism in Irigaray's texts and to the development of this critique in respect to Lacan's understanding of subjecthood. In the following sections of my chapter, through my reading in Butler's text I will show that Lacan conceives mimesis and sadomasochism linked together and to Antigone in the becoming of the symbolic law and kinship possibilities - the establishment of viable sexual arrangements. Lacan thinks that Antigone is sadomasochistic and that mimesis is sadomasochism's evacuating function; that Antigone manifests a necessary perversion in the symbolic law of kinship, which must be evacuated to enable and found ethical order. Butler reiterates Lacan's mimesis-sadomasochism connection (in the constitution of ethical life and the kinship norm) to reveal that this is a dangerously reflexive perversion, that it brings Antigone back to Lacan contrary to Lacan's agenda. (We see this at the end of this chapter.) Mimesis, representation, and symbolic functionality proceed as synonymous conceptions in Lacan's texts and in Butler's reading in them.

I begin this section of my chapter by elaborating Butler's position on Antigone's representational status of deviation in the Hegelian tradition of interpreting (the image of) Antigone. I consider that Butler's position is itself a deviation from Hegelian tradition that is at once its endorsement, and admittedly so. Then I elaborate Butler's position on the representation problematic mobilized by Antigone, how it recalls a sadomasochism connection that refers us to Butler's earlier work, how it conveys the failed referential function of Lacanian symbolic law, and how Butler deploys this failed function (representational failure) as exceedance, as a drawback that refers beyond itself - points beyond the limits of representation. Following this I compare Hegelian philosophy and Lacanian structuralist psychoanalysis in respect to Butler's position on

how these tropologically evacuate Antigone from cultural viability, political and ethical membership; I explain how Lacan reproduces Hegel from Butler's perspective, and how Butler reproduces Lacan from mine.

In her act she transgresses both gender and kinship norms, and though the Hegelian tradition reads her fate as a sure sign that this transgression is necessarily failed and fatal, another reading is possible in which she exposes the socially contingent character of kinship, only to become the repeated occasion in the critical literature for a rewriting of that contingency as immutable necessity. (Butler, 2000a, 6.)

Butler considers that Antigone's act deviates in sexual and in familial norms. She suggests that in Hegelian interpretative tradition this deviation assumes the necessity of its own failure - an assumption this tradition makes to take as evidence that Antigone's death is her destiny. Butler proposes that Antigone's deviation assumes kinship's social contingency instead, that Antigone exposes the mutability of familial norms. Butler suggests that in this, she (Butler,) mimes the Hegelian critical tradition in a way that modifies its notion that contingency is un-modifiable.

Butler begins *Antigone's Claim* by considering that Antigone represents a problem of representation that questions the possibility of using Antigone as a representational figure in feminist politics. Recalling her critique of Irigaray's mime in Merleau-Ponty Butler says that Antigone represents the kind of feminism that is implicated in the power it opposes (2000a, 2).¹⁵ In this Butler stages (the concept of)

¹⁵ In the first chapter of my thesis 'The Speculative Modus Operandi: Judith Butler, Luce Irigaray, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, (A) Butler's Objection' I propose that by analyzing Irigaray's mimetic reading in Merleau-Ponty's "The Intertwining" in terms of *no thinking outside his terms that demands thinking against his terms* (Butler, 2001, 60) Butler deploys the Freudian mechanism of *turning* to rhetorically render Irigaray a sadomasochistic authorial identity. Butler is explicit about this a few years later when

representation - the possibility of *having or being a symbolic position* in terms of opposition, or opposition in terms of representation, to suggest that *Antigone represents what she opposes and opposes what she represents*, which is sadomasochism in the sense of the subject's turn against itself, in an opposition to its own agenda. Butler's reference to her earlier critique of mimesis in this discussion, (which is about Antigone's representational function in feminist politics) is not a critique of sadomasochistic trends in feminism but rather promotes to endorse sadomasochism as a representation's attribute, to mark the limits of representation and how these limits may be deployed as feminist agenda. This becomes evident throughout *Antigone's Claim*.

Still on the opening page of *Antigone's Claim*, Butler goes on to consider that Antigone's fictional status hampers her representational usability. As a fictive image Antigone cannot act on anyone's behalf.

Indeed, it is not just that, as a fiction, the mimetic or representative character of Antigone is already put in question but that, as a figure for politics she points somewhere else, not to politics as a question of representation but to that political possibility that emerges when the limits to representation and representability [the possibility of representation at all] are exposed. (Butler, 2000a, 2.)

In this Butler suggests that Antigone is still useable in representational terms, not *to represent*, but to facilitate political possibility where or when representation is impossible. The continuance of existence that "already" establishes in Butler's statement suggests that Antigone's representational worth and mimetic possibility is questionable in advance as in the past like always indicating a larger problematic here.

in an interview with Drucilla Cornell, Pheng Cheah, and Elizabeth Grosz she says that Irigaray mobilizes a sadomasochistic erotic engagement with the philosophers (Cheah and Grosz, 1998, 20).

Any representational, mimetic or symbolic convention, visual, discursive, political delegation and category (feminism), feigns a connection (between the thing being represented and what it represents - the sign) to sever that connection. Likewise mimetic activity questions continuity between itself and whatever it mimes.

Representation is a self-revealing falsification - Butler reiterates the Lacanian version of symbolic law of kinship as a failed referential function.

Considering the profuse deployment of Antigone as a representational-mimetic figure in the legacy of her critical interpretations, Butler suggests Antigone points not to politics as a question of representation but to the political possibilities yielded by the exposure of limits in any possibility of representation. Butler reveals those limits in the Hegelian interpretations of Antigone's representational status, which means Lacan's also; that Antigone emerges at and *as* the limits of representation in her Hegelian interpretations, interpretations mobilized in terms of the symbolic, social and sexual features of kinship. Butler deploys these limits - the necessarily failed and fatal terms of Antigone's transgression in symbolic intelligibility to stretch the limits of intelligibility in Hegel's and Lacan's death driven interpretations, to yield the alternative - the liveable possibility that Antigone establishes for Hegel and Lacan.

Butler's reading in the image of Antigone is tethered to the Hegelian legacy of Antigone's interpretations nevertheless endowing it with new meaning that is critical and political. For Butler this legacy establishes an essential relation between the institution/s of state and of kinship, by presuming a separation between the two to facilitate an exclusionary operation.

Antigone figures the threshold between kinship and the state, a transition in the *Phenomenology* that is not precisely an *Aufhebung*, for Antigone is surpassed without ever being preserved when ethical order emerges. (Butler, 2000a, 5.)

I elaborate *aufhebung* as *the Hegelian trope in confounding distinction* to consider the specifics of Antigone's oppositional symbolic status - her deviation in law - in

‘Confounding Distinctions,’ the third section of this chapter. Here my objective is to introduce Hegel’s *Antigone* to suggest that sadomasochism, which manifests Lacanian structuralist psychoanalysis, arrives from Hegel, a remnant of Hegel’s reading in Sade maybe: for Hegel *Antigone* represents a pre-political opposition to politics, is identified with an oppositional aspect of sorts wherein kinship is pitted against ethical order and state authority; *Antigone* is kinship and its dissolution at once (Butler, 2000a, 2-3). In this view *Antigone* is positioned ambiguously in relation to politics, to ethical *being* and to domesticity, an ambiguous depiction, in-between but in neither. State and kin are separate and nevertheless connected when *Antigone* has a sliding kind of representational function in or for them; she inaugurates state and political life by presenting its possibility from which she is precluded membership. Thus Hegel accounts for the production of kinship using *Antigone* as the limit of ethical order only to exclude her from participation in ethical order and from political life.

The depiction of kinship at the limit of ethical order and at the limit of *being* is the sphere of viable cultural norms in the structuralist psychoanalytical terminology that Butler deploys. Viable cultural norms and political membership ensue *Sittlichkeit*, the Hegelian term for ethical order that Butler deploys. *Sittlichkeit* is the sphere that legitimates the articulation of symbolic norms that regulate cultural coherence.¹⁶ In both Hegelian philosophy and structuralist psychoanalytic conception this is the sphere that determines political membership. The operation by which cultural norms become viable as rights, as laws and political entitlements, involves a tacit ethical order; the Hegelian legacy of interpreting *Antigone* generates tacit ethicality, tropological

¹⁶ Michael Inwood of *The Blackwell Philosopher Dictionaries: A Hegel Dictionary* says this: “The word *Sittlichkeit*, usually translated in Hegel’s words as ‘ethical life’, but occasionally as ‘(social or customary) morality’, [...] derives from *Sitte*, the native German for a ‘custom’, a mode of conduct habitually practiced by a social group such as a nation, a class or a family, and regarded as a norm of decent behaviour. (Inwood, 1992, 91.)” “[...] *Sittlichkeit* is the ethical norms embodied in the customs and institutions of one’s society. (92.)”

distinctions which create essential links to be suppressed. (I elaborate this in *Confounding Distinctions*).

Butler thinks that Lacan's interpretation of Antigone elaborated in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960 Book VII* partakes this Hegelian bequest (Butler, 2000a, 3). Lacan presumes a separation between social and symbolic orders that he conflates when he conceives Antigone inaugurating the symbolic and at once perched at its limits outside. Lacan conceives the sexual organization of kinship as universal and contingent, and as *referring to but being devoid of incestuous desire* - a limbo representational-symbolic structure, status and function that is its own limitation. For Butler, Antigone represents this Lacanian crisis (of representation) but also beyond it. Lacan deploys Antigone to exemplify a universal condition that features sadomasochism as life's foundation, a desire to live life from a position of death - at life's limits. In sadomasochism Lacan links Antigone, nature, criminal desire, symbolic law (of intelligibility) and mimesis (Butler, 2000a, 48-49) to evacuate Antigone's materiality (bodily life) and to render her desire in terms of a necessary failed and fatal unconscious reflexive passion. For Lacan sadomasochism facilitated by mimesis is a birthright tinged with sexual-criminal desire, a type of legality based in criminality and inscribed prior to any symbolic, social or cultural inscription, codification or convention (Butler, 2000a, 51). Butler facilitates modification to this conception, which she does in Lacan's own terms. "And this claim does not take place outside the symbolic or, indeed, outside the public sphere, but within its terms and as an unanticipated appropriation and perversion of its own mandate. (Butler, 2000a, 54.)" Butler's words here apply to the statement declaimed by Sophocles's Antigone (*I do not deny I did the deed*) but they also apply to Butler's own reading in the Lacanian symbolic, a manoeuvre in accordance with Lacan's conception of mimesis and the sadomasochism but which facilitates these alternatively, as new transmissions in the prospect of life (life-in-life). We will see this in the following sections of my chapter.

Chapter 3 - Butler's Antigone.

(B) The Claim and The Law.

In this section of my chapter my review of *Antigone's Claim* establishes the connection between Antigone's claim in language and Antigone's status in law. I begin with an extended examination of Antigone's claim in language and end with an introductory discussion of Antigone's status in law. In between I explain the connection, which is Butler's view that Antigone's claim in language establishes her status in law. I elaborate this regarding Butler's position on Hegelian interpretations of Antigone's symbolic function in kinship and in law. Considering that Antigone's claim in language is sexually perverse in more ways than one Butler refutes Antigone's symbolic kinship status in Hegelian interpretations. For the same reason - because of Antigone's deviations in kinship as also her deviations in language - Butler embraces Antigone's status in law in Hegelian interpretations. This is revealed in Antigone's speech, a soliloquy about Polyneices. I end by considering Antigone's soliloquy, by itemizing the legalist situation in the drama, as a preamble to my upcoming discussions on Antigone's unique status in law.

When she appears before Creon, she acts again, this time verbally, refusing to deny that it was she who did the deed. In effect, what she refuses is the linguistic possibility of severing herself from the deed, but she does not assert it in any unambiguously affirmative way: she does not simply say, "I did the deed."

In fact, the deed itself seems to wander throughout the play, threatening to become attached to some doers, owned by some who could not have done it, disowned by others who might have done it. The act is everywhere delivered through speech acts [...].

The only way that the doer is attached to the deed is through the linguistic assertion of the connection. [...] The first time the sentry reports to Creon, he claims, "I did not do the deed, nor did I see who did" (25), as if to

have seen it would have meant to have done it, or to have participated in its doing. He is aware that by reporting that he did see the deed, his very reporting will attach him to the deed, and he begs Creon to see the difference between the report of the deed and the deed itself. But the distinction is not only difficult for Creon to make, it survives as a fatal ambiguity in the text. The chorus speculates that “this action may have been prompted by the Gods” (29), apparently skeptical of its human authorship. And at the end of the play, Creon exclaims that the suicides of his wife and son are *his* [her italics] acts, at which point the question of what it means to author a deed becomes fully ambiguous. Everyone seems aware that the deed is transferable from the doer, and yet, in the midst of the rhetorical proliferation of denials, Antigone asserts that she cannot deny that the deed is hers. Good enough. But can she affirm it?

Through what language does Antigone assume authorship of her act or, rather, refuses to deny authorship? Antigone is introduced to us, you will remember, by the act by which she defies Creon’s sovereignty, contesting the power of his edict, which is delivered as an imperative, one that has the power to do what it says, explicitly forbidding anyone to bury that body. Antigone thus marks the illocutionary [performative] failure of Creon’s utterance, and her contestation takes the verbal form of a reassertion of sovereignty, refusing to dissociate the deed from her person: “I say that I did it and I do not deny it” (43)” [end of citation in the play.] [...]

[Butler suggests that by saying] “Yes, I confess it,” or “I say I did it” - thus she answers a question that is posed to her from another authority, and thus she concedes the authority that this other has over her. [However to say,] “I will not deny my deed” - “I do not deny,” [is to say] I will not be forced into a denial, I will refuse to be forced into a denial by the other’s language, and what I will not deny is my deed - a deed that becomes possessive, a grammatical possession that makes sense only within the context of the scene in which a forced confession is refused by her. In other words, to claim “I will not deny my deed” is to refuse to perform a denial, but it is not precisely to

claim the act [it is not exactly the same as saying only “yes I did it” and stopping there]. To say, “Yes, I did it,” is to claim the act, but it is also to commit another deed in the very claiming, the act of publishing one’s deed, a new criminal venture that redoubles and takes the place of the old [mimesis that does not preserve its object, a mimetic act that completely erases what it mimes].

Interestingly enough, both Antigone’s act of burial and her verbal defiance become the occasions on which she is called “manly” by the chorus, Creon, and the messengers. Indeed, Creon, scandalized by her defiance, resolves that while he lives “no woman shall rule” (51), suggesting that if she rules, he will die. And at one point he angrily speaks to Haemon [his son and Antigone’s fiancé] who has sided with Antigone and countered him: “Contemptible character, inferior to a woman!” (746). Earlier, he speaks his fear of becoming fully unmanned by her: if the powers that have done this deed go unpunished, “Now I am no man, but she the Man” (528). Antigone thus appears to assume the form of a certain masculine sovereignty, a manhood that cannot be shared, which requires that its other be both feminine and inferior. But there is a question that persists: has she truly assumed this manhood? Has she crossed over to the gender of sovereignty? (Butler, 2000a, 7-9.)

[...] she acts not in the name of the god of kinship but by transgressing the very mandates of those gods, a transgression that gives kinship its prohibitive and normative dimension but that also exposes its vulnerability. [...] In speaking to him [to Creon], she becomes manly; in being spoken to, he is unmanned, and so neither maintains their position within gender and the disturbance of kinship appears to destabilize gender throughout the play.

Antigone’s deed is, in fact, ambiguous from the start, not only the defiant act in which she buries her brother but the verbal act in which she answers Creon’s question; thus hers is an act in language. [In this Butler suggests that language is ambiguity by default.] To publish one’s act in

language is in some sense the completion of the act, the moment as well that implicates her in the masculine excess called hubris. And so, as she begins to act in language, she also departs from herself. Her act is never fully her act, and though she uses language to claim her deed, to assert a “manly” and defiant autonomy, she can perform that act only through embodying the norms of the power she opposes. Indeed, what gives these verbal acts their power is the normative operation of power that they embody without quite becoming.

Antigone comes, then, to act in ways that are called manly not only because she acts in defiance of the law but also because she assumes the voice of the law in committing the act against the law. She not only does the deed [burying Polyneices], refusing to obey the edict, but she also does it again by refusing to deny that she has done it, thus appropriating the rhetoric of agency from Creon himself. Her agency emerges precisely through her refusal to honor his command, and yet the language of this refusal assimilates the very terms of sovereignty that she refuses. He expects that his word will govern her deeds, and she speaks back to him, countering his sovereign speech act by asserting her own sovereignty. The claiming becomes an act that reiterates the act it affirms, extending the act of insubordination by performing its avowal in language. This avowal, paradoxically, requires a sacrifice of autonomy at the very moment in which it is performed: she asserts herself through appropriating the voice of the other, the one to whom she is opposed: thus her autonomy is gained through the appropriation of the authoritative voice of the one she resists, an appropriation that has within it traces of a simultaneous refusal and assimilation of that very authority.

In defying the state, she repeats as well the defiant act of her brother, thus offering a repetition of defiance that, in affirming her loyalty to her brother, situates her as the one who may substitute for him and, hence, replaces and territorializes him. She assumes manhood through vanquishing manhood, but she vanquishes it only by idealizing it. [All emphases mine.] (Butler, 2000a, 10-11.)

Butler endows Antigone's linguistic claim with an assortment of performatives to suggest Antigone rebels in foundational (given) authority and in sex. In my previous chapter - 'Butler's "Theory" of Performativity' I considered that for Butler language is a collectively constituting convention that forms and facilitates agency in ambiguity and regardless of intentions, that agency is a disrupted constitutive capacity that happens to people simply by virtue of being in language, and that being in language is using tropes (conventions), which entitles tropological power, a historical signification-al sediment effect that involves mimetic performative possibilities in which words turn into action, reverse, modify and recontextualize norms and meaning. In *Antigone's Claim* Butler provides a detailed example of thinking and using the power of language as such. As in all of her work here too Butler maintains that language is the action and the medium of (both) accomplishing and delimiting tasks in selfhood - agency understood as rhetoric i.e. a mutually implicating fictional and context based power of persuasion. Antigone's linguistic exchange with Creon is her agency in all its ambiguity yet in it mimesis is an eminent component. Honing mimesis in Butler's analysis of Antigone's language in the above citations and also looking in my own copy of Sophocles's *Antigone*, I explain (below) how Antigone's claim performs agency as an operation in mimetic diversification, that in miming negation the claim diversifies and expands the context of negation that enables it.

The drama develops in "rhetorical proliferation of denials (Butler, 2000a, 7.)" Denial, refusal and synonymously negation - the context in which dramatic action proceeds. Butler considers that all the characters in the drama recognize the troubling ambiguity of Antigone's illicit burial act, an ambiguity noted and exacerbated when it is linguistically relayed. From their various perspectives, claiming it in language is being associated with its occurrence. Wary of the ambiguity that linguistic reference creates - words turning into action (performative ambiguity), language representing acts and transferring ownership (copy rights and responsibilities) - the characters are prompted to rhetorically deny having done the deed (the act of burial) which only enhances the ambiguities spawned by the deed and its linguistic, rhetorical rendition.

Butler suggests that language precludes ownership of the criminal burial deed in unanimous terms before Antigone is suspected of it, when the guard worries that delivering the message incriminates him, as after Antigone claims it linguistically (Butler, 2000a, 7). When it is suggested to Creon that Antigone is responsible for the burial of Polyneices he summons her and wheeling upon her he asks, “Do you deny you did this, yes or no? (*Sophocles*, 81.)” Creon’s choice in vocabulary expresses his affinity to denial. Possibly his vocabulary mimes the negating terms of Antigone’s crime; in burying her brother Antigone negates his sovereign authority. Butler suggests that Creon’s language is intended to prompt Antigone to mime him; he hopes to extract a denial from her, to force her to negate the possibility she authored the deed (Butler, 2000a, 8) so he stages his question in terms of negation.

In my copy of the play Antigone’s reply appears like this: “I did it. I don’t deny a thing. (*Sophocles*, 81.)” Butler proposes two additional translations, “I say that I did it and I do not deny it” and “Yes, I confess: I will not deny my deed. (Butler, 2000a, 8.)” These variations amount to the same, a response that at first affirms responsibility for the deed only to immediately stir ambiguity regarding this affirmation, via a double negative. Butler suggests that in miming the terms of denial in Creon’s question Antigone refuses to sever herself from the (burial) deed and the ambiguity it stirs.

Denials continue after Antigone’s double negation. Antigone denies that Creon’s law is legally binding because it breaks divine law (*Sophocles*, 82) and then Creon acknowledges the twofold nature of Antigone’s crime, which he claims denies his sexuality: “But once she had done it - the insolence, twice over - the glory in it, laughing, mocking us to our face with what she’d done. I am not the man, not now: she the man if this victory goes to her and she goes free. (*Sophocles*, 83.)” From Creon’s perspective Antigone is insolent - showing an aggressive lack of respect in her speech. Her crime in his view is committed “twice over,” the second time around, in language, miming her physical illegality and signifying beyond it from Butler’s perspective. The exchange between Creon and Antigone establishes a belligerent and sexual correlation between them Butler argues. For Creon Antigone’s linguistic act manifests a manhood that cannot be shared with a woman (Butler, 2000a, 9). He believes Antigone’s speech

will destroy him and his manhood if she lives to gain her freedom and see her victory over him. So he punishes her with death but her death, which is a suicide, destroys him anyway. Creon feels dead at the end of the drama facing the deaths of his son and his wife who commit suicide in a chain reaction to Antigone's death (*Sophocles*, 127). Butler suggests that in taking responsibility for all of these deaths Creon exhibits the absolute linguistic bond that implicates all aspects of life, including death.

Butler conceives Creon and Antigone absolutely bound to each other through their linguistic exchange. Sexuality, kinship and hegemony overlap and underlie this exchange when Creon and Antigone assimilate one another's terms. They imply each in the other's performance of self-assertion to prevent the one like the other's self-determination in absolute terms; their mutual performative implication obfuscates proprietary distinctions in sexual identity, status, power, authorship (grammatical possession or copy right) and agency - Butler suggests; definitive positional allotment is hampered in the framework of their exchange.

Antigone's power, Butler says, is mobilized via Antigone's relation to Creon's sovereign power and in the terms of her relation to the law of kinship. Antigone cites the sexual-familial-sovereign norm as its vulnerability, embodies the incest taboo via its transgression, which establishes a form of power that destabilizes kinship and gender alike (Butler, 2000a, 10). Antigone's rule - authority, power and imperative - is the negation of the kinship norm; her autonomy gained by sharing and turning the sexual norm that she opposes, which in the drama is the authority, power and imperative of sovereign power-law and the kinship norm alike.

From Creon's perspective likewise, Butler notes, proprietary distinction is problematic as is the distinction between the burial act and its account; "But the distinction is not only difficult for Creon to make, it survives as a fatal ambiguity in the text. (Butler, 2000a, 7.)" Butler's notion of a distinction that endures as a lethal ambiguity presents a contradiction of terms; distinction kills (eradicates) ambiguity. Her point, language implicates all of its users and is absolutely inclusive in this sense; authorial authority - agency - is not a one-sided power, not the power of linguistic tasks to do what they say and to act on behalf of their speakers and thereby constitute

their agency in unanimous terms of identity. Agency and power transpire as a deadly site of ambiguity that Antigone and Creon must share (in order) to be individually enabled, if individuality is at all possible under their circumstances.

Antigone mimes (assimilates) Creon's assertion of authority, which Butler suggests is not truly authority but the rhetoric of it - "the rhetoric of agency (Butler, 2000a, 10.)" Rhetorical agency is an assumption in which opposing sides deploy fictional yet mutually implicating constitutive power against each other, an assumption endowed with the status of truth in the context of their exchange, a fiction that implicates each in the other's belief and sexuality. Each one's moment of power depends on the other's moment. Butler considers that Antigone destroys Creon's power and thereby also her own, a risky moment in Butler's text. It exposes her espousal of and reliance upon negativity. Antigone deploys Creon's words in giving her response to his question, which makes Antigone's assertion of linguistic autonomy somewhat Creon's, not strictly Antigone's - Butler suggests. Antigone's illegal burial activity and her linguistic negation in responding to Creon's question constitute disrespect for his law and his power even while using and depending upon these to constitute her own power. Butler considers that Antigone elevates Creon's power to sacrifice it when she uses it as her own; rescinding her just-acquired quasi-autonomy renders a paradoxical sacrificial moment, vanquishing manhood by idealizing it (11). The ambiguity and paradox of this, that refusal of agency generates agency. The rhetoric of agency then, is this manner of generating agency by refusing the other - the Hegelian trope of dialectical becoming in its violent development? I propose there is more to Antigone's claim than simply reversal of disavowal or of negation, that mimesis here is not destructive and that Butler herself suggests that Antigone expands the terms of negation to which she is tethered.

Yes, Antigone's agency emerges via her refusal to obey Creon's command (Butler, 2000a, 11). Creon negates divine command - equal justice for the dead in burial rights when he legislates a prohibition against burying Polyneices. Maybe Antigone mimes Creon's negation in divine law when she buries her brother. Antigone mimes-to-assimilate Creon's negating legislative power only to refuse and ruin it;

Butler says that Antigone's burial act negates Creon's sovereign legislative authority to expose his illocutionary failure (8) - the performative possibility of putting his words into action. Literally reasserting her self-delegated physical-material authority - disobedience in sovereign law - Antigone renders her own performative possibility instead. Linguistically she mimes and avows her own burial act, which is more than a disavowal or a negation of Creon's authority. It expands disobedience and self-delegated authority. Through her vocabulary in double negation Antigone negates negation, denies denial. In saying - *Yes I confess, I did the deed I don't deny it* - she deploys-to-refuse the negating terms of Creon's power. But does she proliferate refusal?

Antigone mimes to partake the negating state of affairs in her drama. She mimes Creon's power of negation and then she negates this power through her mime in his language, linguistically negating his words and negation itself, his sexuality, and his desire, which is for her to deny she contradicted his command. The words in Antigone's response are inextricably linked to the words in the question Creon puts to her; maintaining *denial* their mutual context, his words are intended to extricate a yes/no response - a forced confession (Butler, 2000a, 8), which she refuses, only by reiterating his terms of denial, which maintains their mutual context, forming her response by using his words in a negative rendition of them. Mimesis is definitely set in negation here, a negative and negating mimesis. Yet Antigone's claim also affirms Creon in many ways, a certain admittance of guilt and a tentative confession, which is not exactly consistent with the yes/no context of the question he puts to her but nor is it exactly a deviation from it. It is to use and refuse "the context of the scene of a forced confession (8,)" which is to ambiguously maintain it - an operation of power understood as ambiguity.

Butler considers that compulsory confession like ambiguous turnings form Antigone's and Creon's mutual context and is the only context in which Antigone's words make sense. Yet Antigone's words exceed this context. Her refusal is not absolute despite her grammatical negation and use of (the term) *denial*. Antigone does not negate the possibility she buried her brother nor does she fully embrace it; a

double negative is not an affirmation. In this sense Antigone exceeds the binary terms of negation, departs the negation-affirmation context. She affirms she did the deed as she presents alternative possibilities to negation. Denying denial opens endless alternatives to the one of denial. Antigone's linguistic claim maintains ambiguity not by generating more negation - simultaneous and contradictory meanings - but by multiplying referential possibilities and contextual directions.

Antigone's claim transpires in the context of incest from the start. Characters in the drama associate Antigone with her father. The chorus leader says, "Like father like daughter, passionate, wild...she hasn't learned to bend before adversity. (*Sophocles*, 82.)" Antigone's linguistic claim suggests ambiguous relations with Polyneices but it generates additional sexually criminal contexts Butler explains. The claim engenders two central condemning criminal activities, one in terms of insubordination to dominion, the second, in terms of appropriating dominion itself. The first crime, of insubordination, is in the context of Antigone's inclination to aberrant desire, the father's curse that she bears or embodies further to carrying her love for her brother too far (Butler, 2000a, 53). The criminality of the second crime is in her linguistic act, which is also desire-based but in sexually ambiguous additional ways. The confluence of affirmation and double negative (in Antigone's linguistic claim) avoids accommodating the terms of the first crime - insubordination to dominion - by expanding the yes/no context. Yet insubordination (burying Polyneices against the king's law) is anyway more than simply an action that counters Creon's sovereignty. It is an act of miming the crime for which Polyneices is responsible. Polyneices was punished for his belligerence and infidelity. In burying him Antigone claims these properties as her own. This is mimesis understood as identification and appropriation. Antigone mimes to appropriate Polyneices's qualities - the consequence of which, Butler argues, gender-bends the entire cast in the play. The claim in language deflects from the first crime of insurrectionary burial and its aberrant desire trajectory only to present sexual criminality of another sort - transposition from what is presumed womanly to manly behaviour; Antigone is punished for demolishing sexual order.

Sexuality is death-bent when Creon insists on his own death as a condition of Antigone's hypothetical rule (he says "victory"). For Butler this is a mutually implicating fatal sexual dialectic set in antagonistic *turns*. It turns Antigone into a man and Creon into a woman. Creon's feminization is in his view his death that depends upon Antigone's man-ing. Antigone performs her manhood by negating the power of his words, which turns Creon's desire in the direction of death; he needs Antigone to be dead in order to return his lost manhood to himself. Butler sees these sexual *turnings* linked to kinship. Antigone's claim mimes her brother's defiant act in a strange (unconventional) association with him. Polyneices went to war against his own brother and contrary to Creon's explicit command. In being defiant Antigone mimes to become Polyneices Butler suggests; constituted in terms of her brother Antigone has an ambiguous manner of being.

However, Antigone refuses to perform a denial in language, which is also to avoid her brother's identity in absolute terms. Polyneices was absolutely defiant in his relation to Creon (in going to war against his command). And nor is Antigone's denial exactly to claim Polyneices's burial Butler says (Butler, 2000a, 8). Butler considers that if Antigone had responded, "Yes, I did it," she would have simply affirmed Creon's question. In that case, Butler says, Antigone would have produced an additional criminal venture - publishing her crime to redouble and replace it (8). This would have been to mime the burial-deed in a way that modifies it to the extent it would be unrecognizable as an extension of her brother, a mimetic activity that would have drawn attention to itself by detracting attention from Polyneices's unruly conduct, obviating him, the significance of his death and of the burial of his body. This would publicly scandalize Antigone and her criminality instead of Polyneices and his criminality. Rather than replacing the one criminal venture by another Antigone multiplies criminal ventures. As her burial-deed enacts (performs) denial in Creon's founding authority (Creon makes his own rules), her linguistic deed re-enacts the burial and its self-delegated authority, re-rendering founding power. Or so it seems.

The reflexivity of Antigone's claim suggests she is endowed with the capacity to create her own power - self-delegated authority. *I say that I did it and I do not deny it*

- words that are self-referential as they also reference her insubordination to dominion and the distinction/ambiguity in sex and in property claims. Both acts - the physical burial and its linguistic transmission generate ambiguities in power and in sex but they are distinct Butler suggests. The material act (the burial deed) may be identified with normative power - Creon's legislative authority that negates divine law. The verbal act completes the material act of negation by making it publicly known yet without turning into sovereign power; Antigone's language deploys normative discourse (Creon's language and rule) without becoming normative discourse (Butler, 2000a, 10). Antigone wavers in normative power-discourse. Her language refers to but is not founding law but nor is her refusal in it absolute. In this she represents the kind of thinking (feminism) that is implicated in the power it opposes (2).

Antigone's claim is self-repetitive and multi-referential in its grammatical structure. It refers back to the burial deed but repeats it ambiguously. It is speculative activity in the sense that it accounts for the consequences of a previous action from which it departs. For Butler Antigone's claim creates a specular-dialectical correspondence between Antigone and Creon.

Although Hegel claims that her deed is opposed to Creon's, *the two acts mirror rather than oppose one another* [her italics], suggesting that if the one represents kinship and the other the state, they can perform this representation only by each becoming implicated in the idiom [trope] of the other (Butler, 2000a, 10.)

Butler counters Hegel: for Hegel Antigone's burial deed represents an opposition to Creon's state law, for Butler it reflects Creon's state law because Butler suggests, Hegelian conception of *opposition* (*aufhebung*) conveys mutual implications. The deed and state law are mutually implicated one in the other. The symbolic possibility of the one depends on the symbolic possibility of the other. To be considered illegal, to stand apart from the law, the burial of Polyneices requires Creon's status as sovereign. Likewise in order to be enacted as sovereign penal power Creon's symbolic standing in

law demands that Antigone's burial act stand for illegal activity. To be enabled the sovereign requires being opposed - Butler suggests. Likewise, the crime and the law, and the state and kinship, are mutually implicated in a dialectical dynamic. Normative discourse cannot do without its deviation Butler suggests here. In the next section of this chapter - 'Confounding Distinctions' I return to this point in terms of the state/kinship confluence distinction regarding the opposition for which Antigone stands in the Hegelian interpretations of her symbolic function in kinship (i.e. deviation) to refute Hegel and Lacan's evacuation of Antigone. In the sections following that, I elaborate the mutual implication and confounding distinction between the crime and the law regarding Antigone's status in both Hegel and Lacan's symbolic accounts.

But in miming his question as she does in her response to it Antigone does more than to simply mirror Creon's power. Creon is the king, his authority absolute and foundational. Antigone's language mimes Creon's sovereign authority to modify the arrangement of his words and the authority that they perform or convey. Antigone's mime is speculative activity. Through it Antigone speculates upon the presumption of Creon's authority, questions it as a given form of power. She doesn't respond in direct affirmation but rather mimics Creon's words in a gesture that warps them. Butler suggests that Antigone's participation in his idiom of power - in the rhetoric of his agency legislates his agency, gives credence to the idiom of his power. Antigone participates in the presumption of his authority to interrogate it at once. Her linguistic claim is more than to simply affirm, negate, appropriate or generate founding power. It is a discriminating reflection in power and in legislative possibility - speculative activity that exposes the tautological basis of normative power. Butler considers that Antigone's language is the language of refusal and that outside refusal it makes no sense. This language requires the force exerted upon Antigone by Creon for its existence Butler says (Butler, 2000a, 8). Butler reiterates Antigone's claim thus - "I will not be forced into a denial, I will refuse to be forced into a denial by the other's language (8)" - Butler's wording is itself mimetic. Considering that denial translates to refusal this is like saying *I refuse to be forced into a refusal, I refuse to refuse* - childlike obstinacy. Butler suggests that the language and notions of forcibility and

refusal is the only context that gives both Antigone's and Creon's words meaning and power. Mutual dependency and interactivity among Antigone and Creon's words is their mutual idiom (trope) of agency and it implicates them in a childish quest for power. Implicitly she solicits obviating agency in these terms of refusal, that while mutual implication is the only possibility of agency and *being* sometimes it is necessary to disqualify a mutual term.

The mutual dependency between state power, sovereign law and the power of kinship bonds is idiomatic of power in this drama, but it is used rhetorically in Hegel and Lacan's interpretations - to falsely endow Antigone with representational status in terms of the sanctity of kinship. The citational basis of Antigone's claim supplements disobedience and sexual transgression with a certain speculative action. Double negation, reflexivity - self-reference and self-repetition, the critique of normative power and its rhetoric, specular interactivity (mirroring action) and the discriminating critique of absolute power may well be alternate contextual possibilities to negation, refusal and denial but, nevertheless, Antigone's desire, cursed as it is by the infamous sexual crime of her father, is still the "impossible and death-bent incestuous love of her brother (Butler, 2000a, 6.)" Moreover, Antigone's linguistic act is an appropriation of authority loaded with ambiguous sexual pertinence - the seizure and turning of "male"-sexual possibility, gender bending the crew animates Antigone's sexually death-bent genealogical associations with more sex. In view of this prolific sexuality and deviance the question arises, how does Antigone acquire representational status in terms of the purity of kinship and its gods in the Hegelian legacy of her accounts? Butler suggests that the question of Antigone's man-ing (turning into or becoming Creon and/or Polyneices) - "has she truly assumed this manhood? Has she crossed over to the gender of sovereignty [male-power]? (9)" - persists Antigone's sexual representational status to conflict with her relegation to the status of familial divinity in her discursive legacy (genealogy of interpretation).

For Hegel Antigone is surpassed in the becoming of ethical order - a constitutive trope (of identity in violent overcoming, refusal and expulsion) that Butler rejects. She says that Antigone responds to a question put to her "from another

authority, and thus she concedes the authority that this other has over her. (Butler, 2000a, 8.)” The notion of another authority prevails the Hegelian tradition of interpreting Antigone’s burial act and her death and is used by Hegel and Lacan alike to preclude Antigone from having a subject position and to evacuate her from public discourse, and from political, ethical and legal becoming and participation. Butler refers to and mimes this tradition to establish that while Antigone answers from that alternative authority she implies that authority in her response. Agency may be defined as a legal relationship in which one person acts for another. Antigone’s mime in Creon’s language performs her agency through a limited substitution of Creon and of his legislative authority. The mimetic feature in their exchange endows each with the other’s legal representational aspect, constituting hers/delimiting his. The mutual implication in the mutual idiom of power in Butler’s text rewrites the Hegelian trope of the dialectical becoming of identity understood as violent refusal of difference (alterity). I develop this in ‘Confounding Distinctions’ (section C of my third chapter) while here my point is that the relevance of Antigone’s status in alternate authority extends beyond this trope.

Butler considers that Antigone obeys the gods for a while, which prompts Hegel to insist she represents domesticity. Antigone opposes Creon’s authority with Zeus’s to declare her loyalty to Zeus to challenge Creon’s authority. And yet Butler adds, Antigone wavers in her loyalty to Zeus as she does in her loyalty to Creon when she declares that other than Polyneices no member of her family would have received such treatment from her in their deaths. Butler cites Antigone; in that soliloquy Antigone says that had she been married and her husband had died she could have married another, and that had they had children and if her children had died she could have had other children. But a brother is irreplaceable, she says, and adds that for this she must act as she does and be left unwed and childless (Butler, 2000a, 9). Considering Antigone’s relation to her brother Butler refutes Hegel’s notion that Antigone may represent kinship in any unadulterated way. However she maintains the legalistic orientation of this relationship.

Antigone here hardly represents the sanctity of kinship, for it is for her brother or, at least, in his name, that she is willing to defy the law, although not for every kin. And though she claims to act in the name of a law that from Creon's perspective can appear only as a sanction for criminality, her law appears to have but one instance of application. Her brother is, in her view, not reproducible, but this means that the conditions under which the law becomes applicable are not reproducible. This is a law of the instant and, hence, a law with no generality and no transposability, one mired in the very circumstances to which it is applied, a law formulated precisely through the singular instance of its application and, therefore, no law at all in any ordinary, generalizable sense. (Butler, 2000a, 9-10.)

Antigone may not represent the decency of family life or institution first because her act is explicitly illegal and imbued with sexual deviance. Further, in her own words Antigone deviates from the law of kinship when she abides divine law specifically and only for her brother. She would never have committed a crime against the king's law for any other family member. Her brotherly love does not apply to the whole family, which questions the validity and propriety of her conduct in normative familial terms as in divine law. Divine law requires equal applicability, that Antigone bury all her family members in their deaths regardless of state law.

From Creon's perspective Antigone acts in the name of a law that endorses criminality. Creon alters divine law and thus marks Antigone's criminality. Antigone is criminal to the extent he establishes the meaning of criminality. Mutual implications constitute the legal and criminal terms of their exchange, as criminality and legality are also mutually implicated one in the other.

From Antigone's perspective, the law that motivates her action is unique like her brother. The uniqueness and irreproducibility of her brother annuls the simple endorsement of criminality and its generalization. Uniqueness sanctions illegal activity in but one instance of illegality - the singular un-repeatable instance of Polyneices. She would not do it for anyone else nor would the same circumstances ever recur

considering Polyneices is not only unique but is dead. This makes her crime unique - not reproducible. Butler considers that because the circumstances in which Antigone acts are not reproducible they suspend the repeatability in the law that motivates Antigone. Antigone's law is instantaneous, passed in and for a singular usage Butler says, and so it cannot be repeated. Un-repeatability of a law annuls its validity as law. To operate indiscriminatingly and be repeatable laws must be generalize-able and apply to everyone, which questions Antigone's legal activity in terms of the definition of law.

To summarize the legal situation in the drama, two unique laws conflict, Antigone's law that motivates her to bury Polyneices, and Creon's law that forbids it. Both are ambiguous and non-generalize-able; Creon's law conflicts with divine law. In abiding divine law Antigone's act conflicts with Creon's law. Creon's law is both unique and not. It is unique in that it is passed for the specific occasion of Polyneices's death, which makes it non-generalize-able, discriminating and hence invalid as law. From divine perspective it is criminal for annulling equal justice for the dead in burial rights. From human perspective it is legitimate considering that Creon is the sovereign.

There are four kinds of criminal acts in the drama. First Creon breaks divine law, second is Antigone's transgression in Creon's law. The third criminality is Antigone's favouritism and finally there is Antigone's crime in language, which involves various sexual criminalities. All these crimes are ambiguous, conflict with each other and overlap law.

Chapter 3 - Butler's Antigone.

(C) Confounding Distinctions.

In this section of my chapter my reading in *Antigone's Claim* jumps back and forth between its first and second chapters following the dialectic of incestuous desire in Hegelian interpretations of Antigone's symbolic status. Through Butler I consider how Hegel and Lacan's accounts of Antigone's wavering status in laws (kinship and state) suppress incestuous desire to institute the taboo in a partial legal dialectic, in order to elide the laws' ineptitude; how their deployment of the dialectic confounds the distinctions between sexual and platonic desire, like between state (or social) and kinship laws (or power) to eliminate what escapes the law (or desire) when in fact laws depend upon what escapes them i.e. deviations.

I begin in the first chapter of *Antigone's Claim*, resuming where I left off and reaching the introduction of incest as cultural intelligibility's fundamental, as understood by Claude Levi-Strauss to fundamentally impress Lacan (Butler, 2000a, 11-17). I skip to the end of the first chapter of *Antigone's Claim* to consider how Antigone may institute fundamental incest anew (Butler, 2000a, 24-25). Antigone's wavering tropological status enables this, which I consider through my interpretation of Butler's conception - as the limit-subject of kinship that advocates social transformation, and then through Butler's interpretation of Hegel and Lacan's kinship-idealizations - as un-survivable political power and residence in kinship, which is in the second chapter of *Antigone's Claim* (Butler, 2000a, 28-29). This leads me back to the first chapter of *Antigone's Claim* to consider how Hegel and Lacan evacuate Antigone to tropologically produce fundamental incest-prohibited (Butler, 2000a, 13-15), which brings me to Butler's second chapter again, to thoroughly criticize the Lacanian psychoanalytic conception of symbolic implications and to reveal how Butler modifies these in Lacan's as in Hegel's conception of Antigone's status in law (Butler, 2000a, 29-30).

My effort throughout this section of my (third) chapter is to present the Hegelian dialectic (*aufhebung*) as a trope in confounding distinctions. The trope generates a distinction that maintains essential links between the elements generated

as distinct. And vice versa, the trope generates essential links to render distinction. Hegel and Lacan account for Antigone's symbolic status via this trope to promote imperatives that exclude Antigone. Antigone *is* the essential but refused relation between ethical-subjectivity and state power, a limit and transition that is not quite an *Aufhebung* Butler says (Butler, 2000a, 5). Lacan reiterates this tropological operation in his own text by mobilizing Antigone to facilitate the terms of symbolic-cultural intelligibility that refuse her every possibility but desire of death. Considering that Hegel establishes *aufhebung* in two modes that slide, one preservative and constructive, the other an evacuative and destructive operation, I show how Butler uses it to modify Lacan's conception of Antigone's fatal fate and symbolic status in law, and Hegel's too.

Before I start I provide a brief review set in terms of confounding-distinctions: Antigone's words mime both her burial act and Creon's words - his demand to know she denies her deed, a linguistic mime that scrambles Creon's words to confound his demand and refuse him a straightforward answer. This exacerbates the ambiguity that Butler sees defaulted by language - the connection between Antigone's act of putting Polyneices in his grave, its verbal deliverance and its linguistic transferability that render a form of power (agency) that from Creon's perspective demands *and* confounds a question around proprietary distinction, his own. Seeking to own Antigone's deed Creon asks her if she denies doing it only to prompt a response that escalates the negated state of his sense of distinctions, which results in copious death for which he feels liable, again confounding the distinctions he seeks - in sovereignty, sexuality, property, and life and death. We see this at the end of the drama when feeling dead Creon takes responsibility for the deaths prompted by Antigone's actions which are clearly also his own. Antigone and Creon are mutually implicated in language, sex and power, which tropologically precludes the absolute distinction between them, marking the fatal ambiguity that survives as a distinction in Sophocles's text (Butler, 2000a, 7). The final distinction establishes who lives and who dies. Though he feels dead Creon survives; Butler suggests we should learn from this for our present terms of enablement - that mutually ambiguous terms of enablement should instead enable a mutual life. In

what follows I elaborate how Butler rewrites Antigone's fatality in Lacan's conception by revealing the tropological link between kinship and social (or state) orders in Antigone's Hegelian and Lacanian interpretations, that the kinship-sociality link is suppressed in those accounts to mobilize intelligibility - socio-cultural conventions of kinship in terms of the deadly prohibition, the incest taboo. Reiterating Antigone's confounding distinction in kinship idealism/deviation and considering that heterosexual mutual-sexing is antagonistic and immanent to Antigone's exchange with the men in her drama, Butler provides an alternative reading in Antigone's fate, one in which Antigone's death is escapable indeed.

I resume my reading on page 11 of *Antigone's Claim*. Butler considers that Antigone acts in the name of her brother and via Creon's words to idealize, assume and vanquish his manhood (Butler, 2000a, 11). Considering Polyneices's manhood, Butler says that just as Antigone's act seems to institute sexual dialectical overcoming, Antigone asks, and Butler cites her, "And yet how could I have gained greater glory than by placing my brother in his grave? (11.)" Using Creon's language ("victory"), Antigone establishes her relationship with her brother which in Butler's conception of sexual difference is a rivalry understood as desire, Antigone's desire to vanquish his manhood, a destructive force that turns into love, understood as desire to be the same, which is resolved in death - the final separation in which Antigone honours her rival Polyneices by burying him - a Girardian *mimetic desire* of sorts. From Antigone's perspective burying a loved one is the greatest glory of all. "Glory" the language of victory in war implicates her in state military apparatus, conflates her identity as an individual in that of the state. And yet, her conviction is posed as a question, casting doubt on glorification in state instituted violence to suggest that her insurrectionary burial and its participation in Creon's violent legislature actually fails to finalize that sexual dispute for her; sexual dialectic continues. Following, Butler writes this:

Not only does the state presuppose kinship and kinship presuppose the state but "acts" performed in the name of the one principle take place in the idiom of the other, confounding the distinction between the two at a rhetorical level

and thus bringing into crisis the stability of the conceptual distinction between them (Butler, 2000a, 11-12.)

Expanding the discussion from dialectical becoming in language (rhetorical and mutually implicating agency and a variety of ambiguities) Butler reveals that the conceptual distinction between the principles of state and of kinship in the Hegelian reading of the drama is also rhetorical in dialectical terms i.e. it involves the trope in confounding distinctions. There is no actual distinction she argues. The stability of a distinction is maintained as a perpetual crisis to facilitate continuity between the distinguished terms when it is necessary to promote ideology. The state mobilizes identification between itself and kinship to shift familial loyalty to its military apparatus. Sophocles's drama exemplifies this tropological operation that happens in contemporary states likewise. Antigone confounds the distinction between state and kinship when her words merge her brother's identity with her own (in the sense of the significance of losing him) and with warfare in communal identity (nationalism). Antigone affirms the problematic nature of that trope when she questions the kin-state connection in the notion of an ultimate glory in death.

Butler says that in both Hegelian and Lacanian accounts, kinship and social orders are inversely articulated; each one articulates the other (Butler, 2000a, 12). Hegel speaks of the state, which in Lacan appears in terms of a social order; Butler says that Lacan does not directly refer to the state, that for him "A social order is based, rather, on a structure of communicability and intelligibility understood as symbolic. (12.)" Using Levi-Strauss's initial analysis of cultural organization, and foregrounding intelligibility - clarity, recognition and the notion of a transparency to communication - Lacan theorizes an underlying structure to the symbolic order understood as intelligibility itself, which he confounds with and distinguishes from social and kinship orders at once. The same happens in Lacanian and Hegelian conceptions of Antigone's representational status in kinship regulation (order or synonymously law); deviation from and conformity with kinship are distinguished-to-be-confounded in and via the image of Antigone for Lacan and for Hegel. Butler says that for both Hegel and Lacan

Antigone “represents [...] kinship’s fatal aberration (15)” as, nevertheless, they think Antigone defends kinship. Kinship in their understanding is distinctly not social but is still set in terms of abiding the rules that constitute the condition of social intelligibility (15).

Butler considers Levi-Strauss’s influence on Lacan. For both Levi-Strauss and Lacan the symbolic is not hard wired but “nevertheless institutes the structure of kinship in ways that are not precisely malleable. (Butler, 2000a, 12.)” She explains that for Levi-Strauss the incest prohibition is neither a natural nor a cultural element but is the link between the two (16).

And so it seems that his [Levi-Strauss’s] text [the chapter titled “The Problem of Incest” in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*] vacillates between these various positions, understanding the rule as partially composed of nature and culture, but not exclusively, understanding it as exclusive of both categories, understanding it as the transition, sometimes understood as causal, or the link, sometimes understood as structural, between nature and culture. (Butler, 2000a, 16.)

Levi-Strauss’s *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, Butler says, published in 1947 was disseminated by Lacan six years later as the rules enabling cultural intelligibility, rules posted as the threshold of the social-cultural domain in a methodical description of kinship (Butler, 2000a, 16). Butler questions the Lacanian description in which the rules of intelligibility are never fully reducible to social-cultural rules, nor permanently distinct from them (17). Considering that for Lacan the wavering rules in the structure of kinship that establish symbolic intelligibility are informed by that final link-like fatal interdiction - the incest taboo, Butler suggests instead, that the rules of intelligibility produce a spectre of their own malfunction (transgression) (17). She says this in the middle of the first chapter of *Antigone’s Claim*. We leave it there momentarily, going to the end of that chapter.

At the end of her first chapter Butler returns to the tacit ethical imperative that establishes cultural intelligibility in terms of kinship norms (Hegel's *sittlichkeit*).

Antigone represents not kinship in its ideal form but its deformation and displacement, one that puts the reigning regimes of representation into crisis and raises the question of what the conditions of intelligibility could have been that would have made her life possible, indeed, what sustaining web of relations makes our lives possible, those of us who confound kinship in the rearticulation of its terms? (Butler, 2000a, 24.)

For Butler like for Hegel and for Lacan, Antigone fails to represent kinship in its ideal form. Antigone represents the distortion and disarticulation of kinship. Imploring a contemporary discussion of kinship that allows for kinship arrangements that deviate from traditional terms of sexual or marital norms Butler considers that precisely because Antigone is kinship's deviation she marks its limit, questions "cultural intelligibility" as it is staged in dominant kinship conventions in our day as in hers. Considering the turn trope discussed in *The Psychic Life of Power*, Butler's Antigone emerges as the limit-subject of kinship, the subject who brings kinship to its ultimate crisis. Antigone is the tropological presumption of the critical subject of kinship. She is ontologically uncertain. The taboo prohibits surviving that crisis. Antigone survives it nevertheless though as its foreclosed possibility. As a fictional possibility intrinsic to the norm and as a paradoxical reference to what isn't allowed to be, Antigone may generate new possibilities in the accepted versions of her kinship reality - Butler suggests. Deviations confound normative kinship convention by exceeding the norm's possibility. This exceedance may be used to rearticulate the features of normative intelligibility, to extend the norm and innovate custom for everyone. Antigone can be thought of as a naturalized deviation to update kinship representational conventions. Butler suggests that the conditions that made Antigone's life impossible would have been different had the terms of intelligibility in her environment been different. She

promotes modifying the meaning of “intelligibility” to make life possible for people who deviate from and challenge antiquated norms.

The passage in *Antigone’s Claim* cited above ends Butler’s first chapter like this:

What new schemes of intelligibility make our loves legitimate and recognizable, our losses true losses? This question reopens the relation between kinship and reigning epistemes of cultural intelligibility, and both of these to the possibility of social transformation. And this question, which seems so hard to ask when it comes to kinship, is so quickly suppressed by those who seek to make normative versions of kinship essential to the working of culture and the logic of things, a question too often foreclosed by those who, from terror, savor the final authority of those taboos that stabilize social structure as timeless truth, without then ever asking, what happened to the heirs of Oedipus? (Butler, 2000a, 24-25.)

Butler suggests that dominant epistemes (psychological, philosophical discursive knowledge-structures) establish the meaning of intelligibility to bar minority kinship arrangements - homosexual and lesbian partnerships. Religious oriented views deployed as timeless manifestations link kinship to *cultural coherence* - the norm and intelligibility. To extend the limits of *cultural coherence* - the limitations set upon kinship intelligibility and its sexual possibilities - Butler petitions occasionally unlinking kinship from the kinship-norm, distinguishing to confound kinship and its symbolic status, function and possibility anew. Kinship systems may be modified precisely in terms of cultural intelligibility - the norms and received notions that establish what a legitimate loss is, she suggests. Considering that Antigone’s fate resounds with the static socially restricted structure of the truth of the fate of her father, Butler promotes reviewing Antigone’s fate. In “Unwritten Laws, Aberrant Transmissions” - the second chapter of *Antigone’s Claim*, Butler considers that the ambiguity mobilized by the image of Antigone may be used to modify rigid conceptions of kinship, kinship

conceived in terms of a natural, cultural or symbolic law, precisely because Antigone resides at the limit that separates kinship and state institutions and not properly in either:

Although her defiance is heard, the price of her speech is death. Her language is not that of a survivable political agency. Her words, understood as deeds, are chiasmically [*intersecting or fused diverging elements*] related to the vernacular of sovereign power, speaking in and against it, delivering and defying imperatives at the same time, inhabiting the language of sovereignty at the very moment in which she opposes sovereign power and is excluded from its terms. What this suggests is that she cannot make her claim outside the language of the state, but neither can the claim she wants to make be fully assimilated by the state. (Butler, 2000a, 28.)

Antigone and Creon are bound to each other through their mutual claims in state power. This means neither one may simply walk away with this power. If state power is a shared indivisible domain, fully ambiguous territory, it delivers equal opportunity and limitations; the power of the state over its subjects is limited, and the state distributes its power equally among its subjects, enabling and limiting its usage equally among its subject - wishful thinking on Butler's part if indeed she suggests this as I think. Antigone's claim though established in terms of state power exceeds the terms of the state and hence may not be subordinated nor assimilated by the state Butler says; despite being secure in this respect, Antigone's power fails to survive in *her* day. She is devoid of entitlement in state apparatus, is barred from political membership and possibility.

Butler considers that the political un-survivability of Antigone's power corresponds to its problematic residence in the realm of kinship (Butler, 2000a, 28). Being a product of incest Antigone poses a challenge to kinship, her very existence a threat to institutionalization of kinship. Rather than clinging to the challenge presented to kinship by Antigone, Butler says, critics of the play scrutinized her image and

idealized kinship: “As if troubled by the very deformation of kinship that she performs and portends [signifies negatively], critics of the play have responded with an idealization of kinship that denies the challenge that is being made against it. (28.)” Butler suggests that the problem is with the institutionalization of kinship by the state and not with Antigone, and that while neither kinship nor Antigone should in effect be idealized, Antigone’s deviation in kinship is an opportunity to question the problems that kinship idealizations present in the terms of the state i.e. when kinship’s institutionalization is unstoppable.

Butler considers two types of kinship idealizations, both instances sustained by the presumption that Antigone comprises representational worth and is thus devoid of the substance or material content to which she refers. The presumption upholding the first idealization is that Antigone somehow represents the terms (or law) of kinship. The second idealization of kinship is supported by the notion that Antigone represents the limit to kinship. Butler indicates that Hegel renders the first kind of idealization.

For Hegel Antigone represents the laws of kinship and of domestic deities. This, Butler says, results in two bizarre consequences: Hegel insists that Antigone insists on representing the laws of kinship and of domestic divinities. Antigone’s insistence that Hegel deduces is precisely the element that incriminates her in the presumably distinct and public domain of the law, Butler says (Butler, 2000a, 29). The second anomaly that Butler sees in Hegel’s reading of Antigone (in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*) is that he annuls the very representation that he sees in Antigone. For Butler this happens when Hegel erases Antigone’s name from his text. If naming is enacting in effect Hegel enacts the erasure of Antigone as he deploys her representation-ally, Butler suggests.

The second idealization of kinship to which Butler refers is Lacan’s, which is what I focus on in my own text (although I address Hegel’s too). Butler explains that for Lacan Antigone represents the limit of the symbolic, which for Lacan is a linguistic index that installs and preserves kinship relations. Further, she says Lacan “understands her death as precipitated precisely by the symbolic insupportability of her desire. (Butler, 2000a, 29.)” Lacan’s symbolic does not tolerate the desire that Lacan attributes to Antigone and therefore it reads her death as unstoppable.

Butler says she tries to reformulate elements of these accounts by explicating the following questions: Is Antigone's death an essential warning seminar about the limits of cultural truth, the limits of kinship's coherence, one that returns us to our right (she says "proper") notion of limit and restriction? Does Antigone's death gesture state defeat over the institution of kinship, kinship as a necessary subsidiary position which blood relations occasion vis-à-vis federally instituted law? Or is her death correctly understood as a limit that must be interpreted as the political prowess of the symbolic norm, that operation of foreclosure (the Lacanian term for repression,) that simultaneously facilitates and impedes the forms of kinship that are to be considered intelligible and the kinds of lives that are approved as liveable and as not (Butler, 2000a, 29)?

Methodologically, Butler does more than to simply question the assumptions laid down by Hegel and Lacan. She deems certain assumptions to be the result of the questions she sees mobilized by the idealizing accounts of kinship. Butler suggests that she departs from these idealizing accounts (Butler, 2000a, 29), a participatory departure I suggest considering that Butler assumes what questions these accounts mobilize, which in turn enables her to furnish the questions presumably put forth by the accounts with answers that shift those accounts.

In Hegel, kinship is rigorously distinguished from the sphere of the state, though kinship is a precondition for the emergence and reproduction of the state apparatus. In Lacan, kinship, as a function of the symbolic, becomes rigorously dissociated from the sphere of the social, and yet it constitutes the structural field of intelligibility within which the social emerges. My reading of Antigone, in brief, will attempt to compel these distinctions into productive crisis. Antigone represents neither kinship nor its radical outside but becomes the occasion for a reading of a structurally constrained notion of kinship in terms of its social iterability, the aberrant temporality of the norm. (Butler, 2000a, 29.)

Butler says that her reading of Antigone is intended to prompt the foundations of Hegelian and Lacanian readings of Antigone into a crisis. Those readings are founded in confounding distinctions - a rigorous dissociation which is the precondition for interdependence between the rigorously dissociated elements: Hegel's reading is set in a distinction between kin and state but the emergence of the one depends upon the emergence of the other. With Lacan things get more complicated: kinship requires the symbolic, is dissociated from the social, and constitutes the underlying symbolic structure that the social requires in order to emerge, which means that for Lacan the symbolic underlying structure is prior to, during and after - separate and in connection with the social. Butler sees a critical moment articulated in these accounts, which she reads in terms of social iterability: Butler considers that Antigone is neither inside nor outside kinship in Lacan's account but is its constitutive possibility in social normative iterability. For Butler because Antigone may not represent either kinship or the state (in Lacan's account) Antigone enables a reading that may transform the socially contingent features of kinship where they are constructed as immutable. Kinship's limit like its deviation is immanent to kinship - she suggests. Butler installs social iterability into Lacan's reading. She thereby implies that social convention, the norm, alterity (deviation from the norm), temporality and alteration-in-repetition (iterability) are operative in Lacan's account. This will enable Lacanian theory to evolve.

In reading the temporality of the norm into Lacanian discourse Butler prompts its revision, she revises Lacan's understanding of the norm as a permanent structure. Norms are formed in social conventions not in some underlying immutable structures she entertains. Iterability alters the kind of repetition that (in structuralist accounts) stages social norms in the fixed terms of an incestuous foundational context. This corresponds with Lacan's view that the normalizing effect of the prohibition is anyway inclined to fail. In Butler's account failure is deployed in terms of the temporal process of the norm's repeated repetitions. Iterability is not simply dynamism or motility in significance and signification; it has unpredictable results. Antigone is an instance of iterability when she exposes the contingency of the norm as a social and temporal

arrangement that fails. Failure prompts rethinking the norm, not punishing Antigone or conceiving her as an emblem of some specific failed repetition fated die.

The image of Antigone manifests the norm and its aberration at once. Butler suggests that the source of Antigone's power is this double, conflicting expression yet that this is a form of power only to the extent that the norm is understood in terms of iterability in social convention. Antigone's deviation may be understood as iterability only if it articulates modification to affect modification in the norm. The norm, staged in terms of its aberration is malleable, doable erroneously, which is what Antigone does in her linguistic claim. The norm (understood) as the incest taboo has not been transformed since Antigone's day - Butler implies.

The incest taboo, a norm staged via the prohibition of a crime generated-to-be-impeded, proceeds in terms of distinguishing the crime and its prohibition, a distinction confounded by the mutual implication between the crime and its prohibition. Butler suggests that in Hegelian and Lacanian accounts Antigone is fatally punished for transgressing the taboo. (In the first chapter of *Antigone's Claim* titled "Antigone's Claim") she explains that in idealizing kinship both Hegel and Lacan mobilize an incestuous possibility between Polyneices and Antigone in order to preclude it in their texts. When Hegel and Lacan idealize kinship they distinguish sexual and platonic desire, which they confound in terms of the incest prohibition. For Hegel, Antigone's desire for her brother is platonic because it is sibling-based - an assumption that presumes the taboo is already in place.

Thus Antigone does not desire her brother, according to Hegel, and so the *Phenomenology* becomes the textual instrument of the prohibition against incest, effecting what it cannot name, what it subsequently misnames through the figure of blood. (Butler, 2000a, 13.)

Butler invalidates Hegel's deployment of blood relations to preclude sexual desire between Antigone and her brother. It is impossible that their relationship is devoid of sexual passion for Hegel Butler suggests considering that in an earlier portion of

Phenomenology of Spirit in the section titled “Lordship and Bondage”¹⁷ desire is the basis of recognition,

a desire that seeks its reflection in the Other, a desire that seeks to negate the alterity of the Other, a desire that finds itself in the bind of requiring the Other whom one fears to be and to be captured by; indeed, without this constituting passionate bind, there would be no recognition. (Butler, 2000a, 13.)

“[T]he drama of reciprocal recognition” Butler says, “begins when one consciousness finds that it is lost, lost in the Other, that it has come outside itself, that it finds itself as the Other or, indeed, in the Other. (Butler, 2000a, 13-14.)”

Thus recognition begins with the insight that one is lost in the Other, appropriated in and by an alterity that is and is not oneself, and recognition is motivated by the desire to find oneself reflected there, where the reflection is not a final expropriation. Indeed, consciousness seeks a retrieval of itself, only to recognize that there is no return from alterity to a former self but only a transfiguration [a dramatic change in appearance] premised on the impossibility of return.

Thus in “Lordship and Bondage” recognition is motivated by the desire for recognition, and recognition is itself a cultivated form of desire, no longer the simple consumption or negation of alterity but the uneasy dynamic in which one seeks to find oneself in the Other only to find that this reflection is the sign of one’s expropriation and self-loss. Thus in the earlier section, for the subject of the *Phenomenology*, there is no recognition without desire, and yet, for Antigone, according to Hegel, there can be no recognition with desire. Indeed, there is for her recognition only within the sphere of kinship, and with her brother, on the condition that there is no desire. (Butler, 2000a, 14.)

¹⁷ “Lordship and Bondage,” is on pages 111-119 of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

Butler suggests that the tropological production-suppression of incest in Hegel's text contradicts Hegel's own account of desire. For Hegel desire is always implicated in interpersonal relations (recognition) and is always passionately binding. The subject and alterity, mutually confounded in their mutual desirous unbinding manner of becoming, are bound together forever in this account. It is impossible to expel one or the other, certainly not their desire from the scene of recognition. Hegel's text on Antigone must likewise confound the distinctions between Antigone and her brother by mutually binding-unbinding them in and through their desire, which Butler implies is a sexual desire from Hegel's perspective. She returns incestuous desire to its rightful place - to Hegelian accounts that generates desire as such and as the fundamental component of recognition.

Similarly Lacan's conception of Antigone mobilizes the incest taboo by idealizing Antigone's relationship with her brother i.e. evacuating the sexual possibility between the two. For Lacan Antigone facilitates kinship understood as symbolic interrelations devoid of material content and physical attributes (Butler, 2000a, 14). Lacan claims that Antigone loves the pure being of her brother to establish her love for him as sexless. The Lacanian symbolic, Butler says, is symbolic precisely by vacating living matter (the sexual body) and living beings through an idealizing operation. It creates symbolic positions devoid of and separate from material *being* (14). Butler says that via this evacuating operation the Lacanian symbolic falsely engenders two disparate domains, one symbolic the other not.

Thus Lacan presupposes that the brother exists at a symbolic level and that this symbolic brother is the one whom Antigone loves. Lacanians tend to sever the symbolic account of kinship from the social, thus freezing the social arrangements of kinship as something intact and intractable [...]. Such views sever the social and the symbolic only to retain an invariant sense of kinship in the latter. The symbolic, which gives us kinship as a function of language, is separated from the social arrangements of kinship, presupposing that (a)

kinship is instituted at the moment that the child accedes to language, (b) kinship is a function of language rather than any socially alterable institution, and (c) language and kinship are not socially alterable institution - at least, not easily alterable. (Butler, 2000a, 14-15.)

Contrary to the view held by Lacanians Butler suggests, (a) kinship is not distinct from its symbolic status; one is born into kinship and immediately partakes its material configuration in legal, linguistic and social imperatives and institutions, and its contingent symbolic or representational significance and functions in those same imperatives - legal, linguistic, social. (b) Butler thinks that kinship is not a function of language alone, it is more readily a function of socially flexible institutions, and that (c) both language and kinship are very much modifiable social-cultural institutions.

Back in the second chapter of *Antigone's Claim*, in proposing to compel the Hegelian and Lacanian rigorous dissociation-conflation in kinship and social spheres into a productive crisis via social iterability, Butler says this:

To recast positions of kinship as “symbolic” is precisely to posit them as preconditions of linguistic communicability and to suggest that these “positions” bear an intractability [difficult to control or to cast] that does not apply to contingent social norms. It is, however, not enough to trace the effects of social norms on the thinking of kinship, a move that would return the discourse on kinship to a sociologism devoid of psychic significance. Norms do not unilaterally act upon the psyche; rather, they become condensed as the figure of the law to which the psyche returns. The psychic relation to social norms can, under certain conditions, posit those norms as intractable, punitive, and eternal, but that figuration of norms already takes place within what Freud called “the culture of the death drive.” In other words, the very description of the symbolic as intractable law takes place within a fantasy of law as insurpassable authority. In my view, Lacan at once analyzes and symptomizes this fantasy. I hope to suggest that the notion of the symbolic is limited by the

description of its own transcendentalizing function, that it can acknowledge the contingency of its own structure only by disavowing any substantial alteration in its field of operation. My suggestion will be that the relation between symbolic position and social norm needs to be rethought, and in my final chapter, I hope to show how one might reapproach the kinship-founding function of the incest taboo within psychoanalysis with a conception of a contingent social norm at work. Here I am less interested in what the taboo constrains than the forms of kinship to which it gives rise and how their legitimacy is established precisely as the normalized solutions to the oedipal crisis. The point, then, is not to unleash incest from its constraints but to ask what forms of normative kinship are understood to proceed as structural necessities from the taboo. (Butler, 2000a, 29-30.)

Butler suggests that Lacanians claim to cast kinship positions anew as symbolic which is tautological because symbolic kinship positions are anyway symbolic and anyway preconditions to the possibility of communication. Further, and considering that for Lacan the symbolic is rigorously dissociated from the social sphere (Butler, 2000a, 29), Butler suggests that these presumably recast positions are falsely established as inflexible to generate an essential conception of kinship, kinship as biology when in fact symbolic positions are socially instigated and norm-based. Butler suggests that the very idea of *symbolic meaning* implies determined substitutions, interchangeable positions and linguistic preconditions, which are, like kinship, anyway malleable, contingent and set in social norms. Butler considers that *recasting symbolic positions* demands more than mapping social norms and their effects onto a discourse in kinship, which she suggests is what Lacanians do, which is to treat this discourse as if psychic life was not already mobilizing discourse and norms. Considering that norms are intrinsic to psychic life, Butler says that certain psychic trends are posited as inflexible, penalizing and finitely normative, condensed into a figurative notion of the law to which the psyche is compelled, emblemized in the psychic discord to which Freud referred as culture of death drive. Lacan is afflicted as such she suggests, driven by his

own disposition to death and to deadly desire in theorizing a symbolic in his rigidly incestuous terms of foreclosure. In Butler's view Lacan's conception of the symbolic is limited by its own invention as such; Lacan fantasizes the kind of authority it is impossible to surpass, and as such his view of authority is intractable. Butler thinks that the insurmountable authority of the death fantasy in the Lacanian version of the symbolic is both explained and substantiated in that theory; the Lacanian symbolic is tropological in the sense of demonstrating the symptoms that it elaborates. Butler attributes this to what she suggests is an inadequate portrayal of that theory's transcendentalizing function and considers that this very theory theorizes its own contingency. Lacanian theorists must recognize that this contingency - a dependence on Lacanian theory itself for its own claim to transcendental authority - may stay only if the Lacanian symbolic presumption of modification (alteration) goes, she suggests. Otherwise they must renounce their claims to working within a symbolic system because symbolic systems are modifiable. Dropping the notion of timelessness (transcendentalism) enables modification to the Lacanian symbolic, like introducing iterability into the Lacanian symbolic.

(Still transcribing the citation above,) Butler encourages us to rethink the relation between social norms and symbolic positioning. She considers that the incest taboo as the founding function of kinship in Lacanian psychoanalysis is constraining not in sexual terms alone but in terms of dislocating kinship from (contingent) social norms, a questionable notion because the taboo operates in the social as well. Butler says that in her third chapter "Promiscuous Obedience" she proposes a new psychoanalytic approach stressing the connection between the incest taboo, social norms and symbolic possibility while in her second chapter "Unwritten Laws, Aberrant Transmission" she says she is more interested in the kinship forms that the taboo generates - how these forms are paradoxically established as the singular valid kinship possibility. We are focusing on this.

Often lesbian and homosexual relations are taboo in popular opinion simply because they deviate from the heterosexual norm. This links them to incest and its taboo. Butler suggests (still in the above citation,) that deviant forms of kinship even

though they are not incestuous may still become the founding basis of a new ethical ordering. Butler is not interested in promoting incest she says but rather in the process that establishes the normalizing oedipal crisis in terms of legality. The taboo produces and validates certain kinship configurations, its limits - where it fails to enact prohibition, is abjecting to alternative forms of kinship. Butler is interested in the abjected forms that are not incestuous she says, to consider how these may be naturalized (a normalizing resolution to the oedipal crisis).

Antigone is only partially outside the law, and so one might conclude that neither the law of kinship nor the law of the state works effectively to order the individuals who are subject to these laws. But if her deviance is used to illustrate the inexorability of the law and its dialectical opposition, then her opposition works in the service of the law, shoring up its inevitability. (Butler, 2000a, 30.)

Hegel and Lacan situate Antigone in between kinship and state laws to preclude her possibility in either. This is *aufhebung* in its violent mode, which reveals a problem with both state and kinship laws, which is that these laws fail to regulate the subjects subjected to them - Butler suggests. These accounts further Butler says, promote Antigone's deviation as a declaration of the law's unstoppable force; in both Hegelian and Lacanian accounts Antigone is endowed with a symbolic status of deviation, which is an opposition to both kinship and state laws and which facilitates "the law and its dialectical opposition." Antigone *is* the law for Hegel and for Lacan but they elide this; as law Antigone deploys and upholds the law's magnitude and hence she cannot be evacuated as Hegel and Lacan would have it. The law staged as a dialectical opposition in Hegel's as in Lacan's account implicates Antigone, renders Antigone in a tropological function in Hegel and Lacan's texts, a textual apparatus upon which their conceptions depend. Like Hegel Lacan stages the symbolic law in terms of dialectical oppositional capacity, which is *aufhebung* in both modes, as an oppositional alternation in destructive *and* constructive positions - hyperbolic as understood by Lacoue-

Labarthe. (This will become evident by the end of my chapter, when the Lacanian symbolic law and criminal sadomasochistic desire emerge in complementarily, in mutual determination of symbolic foundation.) Hegel and Lacan erroneously isolate one facet of *aufhebung* in their interpretation of Antigone's position in law when they conceive it as evacuative activity - as merely the destructive facet of *aufhebung* or of the norm.

Butler continues this portion of her text by proposing to explore two textual instances in which Antigone is positioned prior to the law and prior to kinship (the symbolic), Hegel's and Lacan's accounts she says. Her purpose she adds, is "to determine where she [Antigone] stands, how she acts, and in the name of what. (Butler, 2000a, 31.)" Butler's aim in other words, to determine the strategic possibility that may be gleaned from being prior to and consistent with the law. We explore this in the next section of my chapter.

Chapter 3 - Butler's Antigone.

(D) The Lacanian symbolic is a Death Trope.

This section of my chapter elaborates the tropological production of death in the Lacanian theory of the symbolic. My reading pertains to the second chapter of *Antigone's Claim*, which involves Butler's reading in Lacan's *Seminar II*, which demands my own reading in *Seminar II* and a brief look in Lacan's *The Ethics*. I begin by explaining Butler's position on Hegel's interpretation of Antigone's representational worth. Butler reveals that for Hegel Antigone represents alternative legality understood as the unconscious of proper law. Following Butler's text I explain how this Hegelian conception forms the basis of Lacan's idealization of the symbolic function. I elaborate it as a referential operation directed at an unconscious desire that is forever hampered - a failed referential operation. This leads me to Butler's conception of the Lacanian symbolic function; Butler thinks that in elaborating the regulation of desire in terms of a failed referential operation the Lacanian symbolic function assumes a fatal interdiction. The Lacanian symbolic exemplifies the fatal interdiction that it describes; it is a death trope. I end this section of my chapter by proposing a correspondence between Butler's conception of Antigone claim in language and Butler's conception of the Lacanian symbolic understood as a reflexive claim to a failed referential function.

Looking at Hegel's understanding of Antigone in *The Philosophy of Right* Butler says that Hegel associates Antigone "with a set of laws that are finally not compatible with public law. (Butler, 2000a, 38.)"

Hegel has clearly identified the law for which Antigone speaks as the unwritten law of the ancient gods, one that appears only by way of an active trace. Indeed, what kind of law would it be? A law for which no origin can be found, a law whose trace can take no form, whose authority is not directly communicable through written language. If it is communicable, this law would emerge through speech, but a speech that cannot be spoken from script and, so, certainly not the speech of a play, unless the play calls upon a legality, as it

were, prior to its own scene of enunciation, unless the play commits a crime against this legality precisely by speaking it. Thus the figure of this other law calls into question the literalism of the play, Antigone: no words in this play will give us this law, no words in this play will recite the strictures of this law. How, then, will it be discerned? (Butler, 2000a, 38.)

Hegel identifies an unidentifiable law in the drama. Un-represent-able legality, legality without an origin sourced in unwritten divine laws yet distinct from divine laws. It presents itself by its force of suggestion. Though Hegel thinks it is impossible to name this legality Butler explains, he names it in "Antigone." Butler considers that unwritten legality precedes its own possibility of articulation, that it is chronologically prior to drama and that in referring to it the drama establishes this. Butler sees two possibilities in this referential operation: either the Sophoclean text promotes a futuristic legal possibility or it exposes a legality that must remain unknown. We will return to the former referential possibility later while in the latter - in describing the indescribable, the Sophoclean text commits a crime against unnameable legality; naming the unnameable destroys un-name-ability. Butler suggests that Hegel rigidly adheres to the notion of alternate-unnameable legality proposed in the play; she says he literalizes it in terms of Antigone, a figuration that questions his interpretation or any possibility of naming the nameless.

This law, we are told, is in opposition to public law; as the unconscious of public law, it is that which public law cannot do without, which it must, in fact, oppose and retain with a certain necessary hostility. Thus Hegel cites Antigone's word, a citation that contains and expels her at once, in which she refers to the unwritten and unfailing status of these laws. The laws of which she speaks are, strictly speaking, before writing, not yet registered or registerable at the level of writing. They are not fully knowable, but the state knows enough about them to oppose them violently. Although these laws are unwritten, she nevertheless speaks in their name, and so they emerge only in

the form of catachresis [incorrect or improper naming - misnaming] that serves as the prior condition and limit to written codification. They are not radically autonomous, for they are already taken up by the written and public law as that which must be contained, subordinated, and opposed. And yet, this will be nearly impossible, if only because the catachrestic reference to the unwritten and unwritable law in the form of dramatic speech and, indeed, in the Sophoclean script attest to this non-codifiable and excessive condition of public law. The public law, however, as much as it opposes the nonpublic or nonpublishable condition of its own emergence, reproduces the very excess it seeks to contain. (Butler, 2000a, 38-39.)

Hegel conceives two legal categories, separate yet connected in a dialectical opposition to each other Butler says. The first is the proper account of the law that stands for public life, the second its unconscious for which Antigone stands in his view. According to Hegel, Butler explains, this dialectical relationship retains Antigone as proper law's necessary violent adversary; Hegel cites Antigone, refers to and names a time-honoured unshakable eminence in alternate legality, in Antigone's name, only to expel her from the public scene - Butler objects. Butler embraces Antigone's representational status in Hegel's unnameable legality though, conceives it in terms of a legal precedent to public law, as immanent to the historical inscription of proper public law and legal discourse. However Butler modifies Hegel's notion of unnameable legality when she calls it a catachresis. She elaborates Jane Gallop's understanding of Irigaray's strategic deployment of mimesis in terms of catachresis in "Bodies That Matter" (BTM, 38). When Butler considers that Antigone's language and status in alternate legality are catachrestic in *Antigone's Claim* Butler is establishing Antigone in the kind of mimesis that she (Butler) attributes to Irigaray.

Proper law emerges in terms of alternate legality Butler explains. Alternate legality is the improper element that chronologically precedes proper law - the unknowable source of public law Butler iterates Hegel. Alternate legality is catachrestic and is proper law's limit and condition of possibility - the foundational part of the

process by which written codification happens. Public proper laws are written in the effort to redress, regulate and/or modify their catachrestic precedents she explains. Yet the effort to contradict catachrestic-unwritten law almost always fails because proper law is endowed with the improper excessive elements it seeks to regulate, in its foundation. Contradiction only engenders more impropriety and excessiveness, the Sophoclean text declares to validate this in performing a catachrestic reference - an alternate legality in the form of Antigone's speech Butler says: Creon's word represents the proper-public account of the law. Antigone denies his word/s - his legal authority. She is motivated by a legality that precedes Creon's, which according to Hegel is distinct from divine law. Antigone's denial in Creon's law is a catachrestic legality, based in the improper account of the proper law that precedes proper law. And for this, for her catachrestically motivated acts, Antigone prompts Creon's words in terms of denial, explains Creon's affinity to denial, which is a remnant of Antigone's law. Citing her law Creon means to contain her, to contradict her act and its force, which only prompts more impropriety when in responding to him by citing him back Antigone jumbles his vocabulary (denial) and exceeds his objectives (the terms of denial). But make no mistake Creon likewise is motivated by catachrestic legality - the unknown unnameable source of the written version of the law when he negates divine law. We will return to this.

Hegel attends to Antigone's act, but not to her speech, perhaps because that speech would be impossible were she to represent the unrepresentable law. If what she represents is precisely what remains unconscious within public law, then she exists for Hegel at the limit of the publicly knowable and codifiable. Although this is sometimes marked by Hegel as precisely *another* [her italics] law, it is also acknowledged as a law that leaves only an incommunicable trace, an enigma of another possible order. If she "is" anything, she is the unconscious of the law, that which is presupposed by public reality but that cannot appear within its terms. (Butler, 2000a, 39.)

Antigone does not represent un-represent-able law - Butler contradicts Hegel, if she did her speech would be ineffective. Hegel avoids the speech to avoid its affect. Butler considers that in seeing only a burial act Hegel implies that Antigone's linguistic act is unconscious and not public, prompting a false distinction between psychic and public life. Hegel suppresses Antigone's speech in his text, elides that her language is formed in terms of her engagement with Creon, relegates her to the edge of collective recognition, to the unconscious understood as un-represent-able invisible and distinctly inaccessible - Butler says. If Antigone resides outside or at the limits of the publicly knowable codify-able then her speech would not have enraged Creon as it did. Hegel fails to recognize that it is Antigone's speech that presents Creon with a death threat. Still, Hegel recognizes that Antigone manifests "another" law - the indescribable mark of an alternative regulatory scheme that presents an enigma Butler says - a question that may perforate proper legislative authority. Butler holds on to the latter but criticizes Hegel for rescinding Antigone's terms of existence, for allowing Antigone to exist only as a supposition that defines public law but that cannot manifest its terms; Antigone manifests these terms (denial) as she alters them.

Butler counteracts the Hegelian exclusion of Antigone. She reiterates Hegel's views to establish that as the unconscious of public legality Antigone's word is a catachrestic referential operation that is inherent to normative law and to the discourse about it, that it informs proper legality to innovate it when it appears as a citation in Creon's vocabulary.

Hegel not only accepts her fatal disappearance from the public stage but helps to usher her off that stage and into her living tomb. He does not, for instance, account for how it is that she *does* [her italics] appear, through what misappropriation of the public discourse her act becomes recognized as a public act. Does the unwritten law have the power to rewrite public law; is it the not yet written, or is it the never to be written that constitutes an invariable incommensurability between the two spheres? (Butler, 2000a, 39.)

Here Butler develops the futuristic possibility of the reference to unnamable legality in Hegel's interpretation of Sophocles's text. She criticizes Hegel for leading Antigone to her death by omitting the publicly recognizable manifestation of her speech. Antigone's speech, she suggests, presents public activity - public legislature and public discourse and as such this speech may address existing laws to update them and to found their futuristic alternatives. Butler considers that Hegel creates an unalterable divide between the two laws and that he does this to say that *that* which has not yet become may never be allowed to become. For Butler the unwritten marks the *not yet written*, an unknown future and discourse, a futuristic discourse in law.

Just as what appears criminal from the sovereign perspective of Creon and, indeed, from the universal perspective of Hegel can contain within it an unconscious demand, one that marks the limits of both sovereign and universal authority, so one might reapproach Antigone's "fatality" with the question of whether the limit for which she stands, a limit for which no standing, no translatable representation is possible, is not precisely the trace of an alternate legality that haunts the conscious, public sphere as its scandalous future. (Butler, 2000a, 40.)

Butler equates Creon's and Hegel's perspectives of Antigone's position in respect to each one's conception of the law. Creon's legislative authority is absolutely recognizable and still from his perspective Antigone marks its limits in refusing to abide his law. Butler says that even Hegel's universal perspective - the dialectic understood as a solution to the problem of recognition - recognizes *un-recognize-ability*, concedes *unconscious demand*; Antigone is the limit of recognition for Hegel when Hegel conceives her as an unconscious (inaccessible) law. Butler recommends rethinking Antigone's death likewise, as a limit, where *limit* signifies *un-recognize-ability* - the unknown not as a death threat but as an open-ended possibility. If we are bound to the terms of death in our interpretation of Antigone's drama - Butler seems to say, then

this death might represent an end to thinking Antigone's death as the final end. Instead her death might proceed as a promising amendment to the legal status quo.

One might expect that the turn to Lacan would usher in a more nuanced and promising consideration of the unconscious, but I would like to suggest that his reading also relocates Antigone's fatality in terms of the necessary limits of kinship. The law that mandates her unlivability is not one that might profitably be broken. And if Hegel comes to stand for the law of the state, Lacan deploys Antigone's apparent perversion to confirm an intractable law of kinship.

(Butler, 2000a, 40.)

Butler compares Lacan's conception of Antigone's status in alternate legality with Creon's and Hegel's. She suggests that Lacan's account is disappointing because like Hegel's it establishes Antigone's symbolic status in terms of kinship. Taking Hegel's conception of Antigone's death as a death preordained Lacan deploys it to limit kinship possibilities. If Hegel symbolizes the law of the state Lacan symbolizes the rigid kinship law - Butler says. Both accounts establish the terms of proper kinship in the terms of Antigone's death while for Lacan Butler suggests, there would be something lost if Antigone's life was spared. Lacan demands Antigone's death in order for it to yield beyond simply a confirmation of Antigone's evident deviation Butler says. Lacan focuses "on the internal conflict of a desire that can meet its limit only in death. (Butler, 2000a, 40.)" This suggests that if Antigone lives Lacan loses something to do with desire; that the Lacanian symbolic mandates death to facilitate the terms of desire that it upholds. (I elaborate the specifics of this in the next section of my chapter.)

Butler explains that for Lacan Antigone inaugurates the symbolic and is located at its threshold yet is blocked from entering it. Butler queries the significance of the threshold of the Lacanian symbolic that presumably manifests the outside of the symbolic, the entrance to it and its limit at once. Butler suggests that for Lacan the symbolic cannot be thought without this threshold and yet it remains unthinkable - un-

represent-able in Lacan's view, like the law for which Antigone stands in the Hegelian account (Butler, 2000a, 40).

Following this, Butler says that for Hegel Antigone refers to unwritten unailing laws understood as "the law of the feminine (Butler, 2000a, 40.)" Butler considers that the Hegelian unailing-feminine laws are distinct from the Lacanian symbolic, which she distinguishes from public law. However she then deliberates a comparison between Hegelian, Lacanian and Irigarayan conceptions of symbolic law:

Are these laws with no clear origin and of uncertain authorization something like a symbolic order, an alternate symbolic or imaginary in the Irigarayan sense, one that constitutes the unconscious of public law, the unknowing feminine condition of its possibility?

Before I consider Lacan's answer to this question [...]. (Butler, 2000a, 40-41.)

In this Butler presents Lacan with a question that compares his conception of the symbolic law - regulation in desire, imagery (morpho-referential markers) and scenography (representational objects) with Irigaray's alternative to it, a comparison that equates the two in terms of Antigone's status in alternate legality. I will return to it later.

Butler goes on to review the Lacanian version of the symbolic (Butler, 2000a, 41): reading his *Seminar II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-1955* she explains Lacan's conception of it as a regulative, organizing force. She looks at a conversation between Jean Hyppolite and Octave Mannone under the section titled "The Symbolic Universe," about the distinction between natural and symbol orders in Levi-Strauss's conception. Butler considers that in this section of his text Lacan accounts for symbolic order by pronouncing his debt to Levi-Strauss. The conversation, she says, begins with Lacan rehearsing Levi-Strauss's perspective; Butler says that Lacan considers that for Levi-Strauss kinship and family are not and cannot be derived from "any naturalistic cause, and even the incest taboo

is not biologically motivated. (Butler, 2000a, 41.)” The incest taboo is of a cultural order (category) for both Levi-Strauss and Lacan Butler suggests. Considering that kinship and its regulative norms are devoid of naturalistic origin, Butler says, Lacan queries the emergence of the elementary structures of kinship.

Butler explains that *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* closes with the description of the exchange of women understood “as a trafficking of a sign, the linguistic currency that facilitates a symbolic and communicative bond among men. (Butler, 2000a, 41.)” The passage continues:

The exchange of women is likened to the exchange of words, and this particular linguistic circuitry becomes the basis for rethinking kinship on the basis of linguistic structures, the totality of which is called the symbolic. Within that structuralist understanding of the symbolic, every sign invokes the totality of the symbolic order in which it functions. Kinship ceases to be thought in terms of blood relations or naturalized social arrangement but becomes the effect of a linguistic set of relations in which each term signifies only and always in relation to other terms. (Butler, 2000a, 41.)

Butler considers the presumption of biology in Lacan’s Levi-Straussian structuralist notion of the symbolic understood as the link between kinship and linguistic exchange. According to this view kinship relations happen in terms of a totalizing mutual linguistic exchange and bond, which interconnects everyone and is devoid of material (bodily) life yet which has women as currency exchanged to inaugurate kinship. While symbolic linguistic exchange promotes homo-social bonds - men bonding to men - Lacan denies that sexual materiality is a part of the exchange. Presumably rarefied of its naturalistic orientation, distinct from and purged of blood and genetic materiality this symbolic is said to diverge from the Hegelian conception of kinship as blood relations she says, and it diverges still less from the Hegelian trope in confounding distinctions. In the process of distinguishing nature and culture the

Lacanian Levi-Straussian symbolic establishes and denies essential (material) links among nature and culture.

The structuralist symbolic generates metonymic relations - Butler suggests: one word stands for the whole structure of kinship arrangement and associations. The signs, forever and never more than the sum of the linguistic communal relation are formed in relation to each other in a system devoid materiality, a salient moment for Lacan Butler says, bringing him to stress the non-naturalistic, non-biological function of kinship (Butler, 2000a, 41). She continues to cite Lacan:

In the human order, we are dealing with the complete emergence of a new function, encompassing the whole order in its entirety (Butler, 2000a, 41; *Seminar II*, 29.)

Butler says that despite the admitted newness (originality) of the Levi-Straussian project it naturalizes the symbolic function; “the symbolic function is always already there [...] to establish itself *sub specie aeternitatis* [as an essential-universal form or nature]. (Butler, 2000a, 42.)”

Citing in Lacan’s text Butler considers the *becoming* of the symbolic regulative operation as Lacan sees it:

The symbolic function is not new as a function, it has its beginnings elsewhere than in the human order, but they are only beginnings. The human order is characterized by the fact that the symbolic function intervenes at every moment and at every state of its existence (Butler, 2000a, 42; *Seminar II*, 29.)

This is a typical example of Lacan’s manner of argumentation. Lacan establishes the eminence of the symbolic function in terms of its origin - the notion it precedes humanity - but then he demotes the significance of the origin by saying “but they are only beginnings” while still maintaining the eminence of origin, by arguing that the symbolic function is at every stage of existence i.e. before, during and after humanity,

which is to reiterate the eminence of origin. In this way Lacan establishes the eminence of the symbolic function based on its originality-status as he elides his reliance on origins discourse in the process of making his point, or rather he attempts but fails to elide it.

Like Antigone's unwritten laws, the ones that, according to Hegel, appear as divine and subjective, governing the feminine structure of the family, these [Lacanian] laws are not codifiable but are understood fundamentally as [and she cites Lacan] 'tied to a circular process of the exchange of speech.' (Butler, 2000a, 42; *Seminar II*, 98.)

Citing Lacan's conception of language Butler equates it with Hegel's naturalistic conception of Antigone's symbolic status. Butler suggests that in explaining the symbolic function Lacan cites Hegel's notion of Antigone in alternate legality. Hegel links Antigone to alternate legality, to the feminine and to family life Butler says, and Lacan links all these to language, to the linguistic exchange which establishes his theory of the symbolic regulatory function and order. This passage further, reveals that Butler's interpretation of Antigone's linguistic claim is formulated in Lacanian terms of the symbolic function, that in conceiving Antigone's exchange with Creon as improper usage in proper law - catachrestic legality - Butler is tethered to the Lacanian importation of Hegel into the Levi-Straussian structuralist idea of the symbolic understood as the kinship-language-expurgated feminine link.

A brief overview: Butler links Lacan to Hegel via Hegel's dialectical conception of law, suggestively comparing Hegel's view of Antigone's representational status in alternate legality, which is set in a naturalistic feminine familial structure, with Irigaray's alternative-feminine symbolic, and then Butler compares these with Lacan's conception of the symbolic function. This function, understood as a system and an exchange in linguistic inter-referential links intervenes in every aspect of human life yet is beyond human life for Lacan - Butler explains. Lacan's notion of *the unconscious right* understood as an original, precedental reference to criminal desire will later

enable Butler's shift in Lacan's conception of symbolic (kinship) intelligibility. We will see this in the final section of my chapter as the demise of the Lacanian symbolic and because the notion of alternate legality is so important to mobilize that demise, I look momentarily at Lacan's *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960 Book VII* to confirm Lacan speaks of it. Lacan says this:

Moreover, the limit in question is one on which she [Antigone] establishes herself, a place where she feels herself to be unassailable, a place where it is impossible for a mortal being [...] to go beyond [...]. These are no longer laws [...] but a certain legality which is a consequence of the laws of the gods that are said to be [...] "unwritten," because that is in effect what it means. Involved here is an invocation of something that is, in effect, of the order of law, but which is not developed in any signifying chain or in anything else. (*The Ethics*, 278.)

The passage confirms that Lacan reiterates the Hegelian citation in Antigone - reference to alternate legality sourced in yet distinguished from divine law and also from any other law or known symbolic order. For Lacan Antigone's status in unwritten legality renders the limit to human intelligibility - identity and the possibility of being recognizable. I will return to this.

Back in Butler's text, Butler goes on to cite Lacan. Lacan says:

There is, a symbolic circuit external to the subject, tied to a certain group of supports, of human agents, in which the subject, the small circle which is called his destiny, is indeterminately included (Butler, 2000a, 42; *Seminar II*, 98.)

In other words, Lacan thinks that the subject is tethered to the symbolic circuitry that is external to the subject and is the subject's destiny even as, Lacan suggests, the symbolic status of destiny is a sphere that indeterminately includes the subject. This

means that for Lacan, while the symbolic is destiny, it does and also does not determine and contain the subject.

Considering the above citation in Lacan Butler explains the workings of the symbolic circuitry in relation to the subject. “These signs travel their circuitry, are spoken by subjects, but are not originated by the subject who speaks them. (Butler, 2000a, 42.)” Signs are delivered by the subject’s speech yet they don’t belong to the subject. *Destiny* is deprivation in proprietary rights, claims (rights) to language or linguistic signs. The signs arrive she says again citing Lacan, “[as the] discourse of the other [which] is the discourse of the circuit in which I am integrated (Butler, 2000a, 42; *Seminar II*, 89.)” Again citing Lacan in this same essay (titled “The Circuit”) Butler reveals that this *other* is the father:

I am one of its links. It is the discourse of my father, for instance, in so far as my father made mistakes which I am absolutely condemned to reproduce - that’s what we call *the super-ego* [Lacan’s italics] (Butler, 2000a, 42; *Seminar II*, 89.)

Lacan says he inherits the symbolic exchange from his father as a curse that requires him to keep on repeating it. Irigaray might reappear right here recalling Butler’s earlier question. The question was - *does the Irigarayan alternative symbolic reiterate the Hegelian symbolic that Lacan reiterates and in which Antigone appears catachrestically?* Butler posed the question for Lacan to answer (Butler, 2000a, 40-41) producing a certain confrontation between Lacan and Irigaray, a confrontation mediated by Hegel.¹⁸ Butler’s question compares the Lacanian and Irigarayan symbolic orders in terms of Antigone understood as the figuration of alternative legality that both facilitates and is evacuated by the normative regulatory scheme (Hegel’s, Lacan’s and Creon’s). Although Irigaray does not reference Lacan in “The Power of Discourse

¹⁸ I don’t address Irigaray’s views on Hegel’s conception of Antigone. These views appear in *Speculum of the Other Woman* and in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*.

and the Subordination of the Feminine” (Irigaray, 1985b, 68-85) in this text she counters his notion that the symbolic function originates in an *elsewhere*. The Lacanian notion of an *elsewhere* assumes the discourse of *the other*, who for Lacan is the father (Butler, 2000a, 42; *Seminar II*, 29). For Irigaray the father-discourse is a regulatory economy that erases *the other* who is *the feminine* for Irigaray. In “The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine,” in the passage that begins with “That “elsewhere” of female pleasure [...] (Irigaray, 1985b, 77,)” Irigaray establishes the notion of *inarticulate language* as a feminist alternative to Lacan’s *elsewhere*. Irigaray seeks enabling feminist symbolic system or terms. She proposes deriving pleasure from purposely failing phallic discourse, to present an alternative viable symbolic order (representational convention) and discourse to the one that centres on men and male-morphology. Irigaray is also recalling the Lacanian symbolic dysfunction here. (I elaborate this momentarily as Lacan’s notion of a referential operation directed at the chain of symbolic links, which always fails to contain the referenced object - incest.) Butler criticizes Irigaray’s *feminine elsewhere* for maintaining extra-discursive materiality (BTM, 47) yet she embraces Irigaray’s rhetorical deployment of the Lacanian symbolic dysfunction and of rhetorical misnaming. I explained this earlier as catachresis (in this chapter reading *Antigone’s Claim* and in my previous chapter - ‘Butler’s “Theory” of Performativity,’ regarding “Bodies that Matter.”) Butler thinks that like in Hegel’s and in Lacan’s notion of alternate legality in which Antigone is the unfailing-feminine law, the Irigarayan *feminine* assumes a regulatory function. (We saw this in my previous chapter when Irigaray’s *feminine* masters Platonic exclusion only to spawn further exclusions.) Butler’s reference to the Irigarayan feminist symbolic unites and divides - Irigaray, Hegel and Lacan, but finally it suggests that for Butler Irigaray fails to sufficiently disrupt the Hegelian and Lacanian evacuative symbolic. This is, of course arguable considering the reference to Irigarayan symbolic is there in Butler’s text to develop Butler’s arguments.

Back with the notion of the symbolic exchange as the father discourse, Butler says this:

Thus the circuitry of the symbolic is identified with the father's word echoing in the subject, dividing its temporality between an irrecoverable elsewhere and the time of its present utterance. (Butler, 2000a, 42.)

Butler suggests that in Lacan's conception, symbolic bonds or possibilities happen in the gap which Lacan imagines between a lost elsewhere and the present; Lacan, beset with nostalgia for a moment of absolute presence that never took place - the legacy and curse of the father that echoes to regenerate a sexualized divided sense of being, theorizes a male sexed subject whose connectedness to the world (time and space) is always in question. This is obliging indeed:

It is precisely my duty to transmit [the chain of discourse] in aberrant form to someone else (Butler, 2000a, 42-43; *Seminar II*, 89.)

Lacan conceives the symbolic function - the regulation of symbolic bonds and possibilities in terms of perversion. He thinks it is his duty and doom to repeat that perversion which is his father's mistakes, that each repetition of perversion is the same as the one preceding it.

Butler considers Lacan's understanding of symbolic positioning - the subject's location in *the Lacanian symbolic*. It is meaningful, she suggests, that Lacan does not fully identify the subject with that symbolic and that that symbolic engulfs the subject nonetheless (Butler, 2000a, 43). Butler notes Hyppolite's response to Lacan's notion of delivering the aberrant father-form (curse); Hyppolite complains about the inescapability of the Lacanian symbolic. He says this:

The symbolic function is for you, if I understand it correctly, a transcendental function, in the sense that, quite simultaneously, we can neither remain in it, nor can we get out of it, and yet we cannot inhabit it either (Butler, 2000a, 43; *Seminar II*, 31.)

Hyppolite suggests that for Lacan the symbolic (regulative) function is beyond the subject's reach (is transcendental); the subject cannot reside in the symbolic because the symbolic function exceeds (transcends) the subject. Lacan responds to Hyppolite in this:

If the symbolic function functions, we are inside it. And I would even say - we are so far into it that we can't get out of it (Butler, 2000a, 43; *Seminar II*, 31.)

Lacan says, in other words, *when the symbolic function functions it functions*, a tautological description that takes functionality as evidence of functionality. Lacan thinks that the symbolic function works successfully when the subject resides in it, which may indicate that it fails when the subject resides outside it, which, Lacan suggests, never happens because, he says further, we are so into it - we love it so much that we cannot leave it. For Butler Lacan's response affirms what Lacan said before, which she says, displays "the repetitive function of the law (Butler, 2000a, 43.)" Considering that the law is a function of repetition in Butler's view as in Lacan's, in repeating himself Lacan presents his theory of the symbolic function as the law - Butler suggests.

And yet it will not be right to say that we are either fully "in" or "outside" this symbolic law: for Lacan [and Butler cites Lacan,] 'the symbolic order is what is most elevated in man and what isn't in man, but elsewhere' (Butler, 2000a, 43; *Seminar II*, 116.)

Citing Lacan Butler questions the containment-expulsion terms of the discussion between Hyppolite and Lacan. The Lacanian symbolic is neither a place nor an object; it is a lofty rigid untouchable sexed *elsewhere*.

(Earlier) Butler says that Lacan departs Hegel radically in conceiving the regulatory (symbolic) function as not divine, that for Hegel alternative legality is obtained in terms of an oppositional relation between divine and human law (Butler,

2000a, 40). Yet immediately following this Butler says that Lacan understands the regulatory function as unthinkable and everywhere at once, suggesting that Lacan conceives a symbolic regulation that is quasi-divine, partly but not absolutely divine. (Three pages later,) Butler explains the ambiguous terms from which the (Lacanian) symbolic arrives:

An elsewhere to the human order, the symbolic is not, therefore, precisely divine. But let us consider as a qualification to this last disavowal Levi-Strauss's own fear, reported by Lacan, that he might be ushering God out one door only to usher God in through another. Lacan emphasizes instead that the symbolic is universal and contingent at once, enforcing an appearance of its universality but having no mandate outside itself that might serve as a transcendental ground for its own functioning. Its function is to transcendentalize its claims, but this is not the same as saying that it has or maintains a transcendental ground. The effect of transcendentality is an effect of the claim itself. (Butler, 2000a, 43.)

Butler suggests that conceiving a simultaneously universal and contingent symbolic enables Lacan to avoid explaining the symbolic function (regulative operation) in unilaterally divine terms. The notion of a unilaterally divine regulatory function maintains a transcendental ground i.e. that the Lacanian symbolic is obtained from and subject to something beyond it, which is not what Lacan wants Butler suggests. The Lacanian symbolic function is universal and yet, its appearance all over the world is not formulated or founded in terms that arrive from beyond it - Lacan says, Butler explains. The Lacanian symbolic function arrives from itself. Though the claim to a *universal-contingent* appearance refers beyond itself, to that *elsewhere*, the claim is self-referential (reflexive); the validity of the claim - the argument to *universality-contingency* is established by the claim to being *universal-contingent*. Butler considers that this transcendentalizes the symbolic function in Lacan's description - establishes that it is beyond reach i.e. ungraspable hence un-modifiable. Butler distinguishes this

referential operation from a referential operation that transcends the limits of its own possibility like the futuristic legal possibility proposed in Sophocles's play via Antigone's claim.

Lacan writes, [and Butler cites Lacan,] 'This order constitutes a totality...[t]he symbolic order from the first takes on its universal character' [end of citation in *Seminar II*, 29.] And later [she says citing Lacan]: 'As soon as the symbol arrives, there is a universe of symbols' [end of citation in *Seminar II*, 29.] This is not to say that the symbolic is universal in the sense of being universally valid for all time, but only that, every time it appears, it appears as a universalizing function; it refers to the chain of signs through which it derives its own signifying power. Lacan remarks that the symbolic agencies crosscut differences among societies as the structure of an unconscious radically irreducible to social life. [Note 15 follows.] (Butler, 2000a, 44.)

The Lacanian symbolic order fills the world with symbols, it is fundamental, absolute and universal and still is not universal - Butler explains. Universality is absolute only whenever Lacanian symbolic order is apparent and it is not always apparent but when it *is* it promotes a specific (single) referential operation, one fixed on and directed at the sequence of terms (the chain of signs) that define it. Lacan thinks, Butler explains, that the power of signification (symbolic agencies) mixes and merges (she says "crosscut") diverging social groups in a way that compares with the unifying work of the unconscious, which Butler adds, Lacan dissociates from social life. Dissociating the unconscious from social life endorses the concept of *difference*, that different social groups have different symbolic orders, which enables Lacan to establish a universality-contingency symbolic order, to render contingency of sorts or conversely to promote restricted universality. Note 15 follows and in it Butler cites Lacan:

This is nothing more nor less than what is presupposed by the unconscious such as we discover and manipulate it in analysis (Butler, 2000a, 91n-15; *Seminar II*, 30.)

The symbolic function, be it a singular self-referential operation, a universal-contingent power of signification, a regulative sequence of symbolic elements, a representational discursive convention or all of these, is the unconscious itself Lacan argues. Butler elaborates Lacan's overlap between the unconscious and symbolic regulation: "Here is not simply that the symbolic functions *like* [her italics] the unconscious but that the symbolic is precisely what the unconscious presupposes. (Butler, 2000a, 91n-15.)" The symbolic function is the unconscious and more than the unconscious; it knows and presupposes the unconscious, is its premise.

Similarly, Lacan will say that the Oedipus complex, a structure of the symbolic, is both universal and contingent precisely [and she cites Lacan] 'because it is uniquely and purely symbolic': [end of citation in Lacan, *Seminar II*, 33] it represents what cannot be, strictly speaking, what has been alleviated from being in its status as a linguistic substitution for the ontologically given. It does not capture or display its object. This furtive and missing object nevertheless only becomes intelligible by appearing, displaced, within the substitutions that constitute symbolic terms. The symbolic might be understood as a certain kind of tomb that does not precisely extinguish that which nevertheless remains living and trapped within its terms, a site where Antigone, already half-dead within the intelligible, is bound not to survive. On this reading, the symbolic thus captures Antigone, and though she commits suicide in that tomb, there remains a question of whether or not she might signify in a way that exceeds the reach of the symbolic. (Butler, 2000a, 44.)

Lacan thinks that because incestuous desire (oedipus complex) has a symbolic structure it is universal and contingent at once Butler says. Citing Lacan Butler says

that incestuous desire is uniquely and purely symbolic for Lacan. She sees this prompting the notion that the symbolic operation evacuates content; that by conceiving incestuous desire as purely symbolic Lacan suggests that incest never manifests (takes bodily form) and that intelligibility manifests in similar disappearing terms for Lacan, as always inchoate. Incest is the disappearing object of desire Butler explains Lacan's view, always and never present, presenting itself only in terms of an evacuated sign (symbolic substitution). The Lacanian symbolic removes whatever it symbolizes from (the possibility of) *being*, a deadening effect that leaves Antigone or the symbolic function that she enacts for Lacan no option but limbo-death - Butler suggests. Incest's onto-metaphysical limbo status - being/not-being a realizable possibility like the unconscious desire to which symbolic regulation refers - universal/contingent emergence of symbolic order in the regulation of incest, signals the arrival of death Butler says, is a death trope, which retains Antigone in a state of death-in-life - that wavering uncertainty with which tropes are endowed. Butler considers that while Lacan expels Antigone via this discursive operation in which she vacillates between life and death, it is precisely this *between life and death vacillation operation* of the Lacanian symbolic that facilitates Antigone's exceedance of the Lacanian symbolic, and of Lacan's depiction and evacuation of her; she returns to question *being* as Lacan would have it i.e. symbolic order understood as a tomb, as we shall see at the end of the next section of my chapter.

Although Lacan's theorization of the symbolic is meant to take the place of those accounts of kinship grounded in nature or theology, it continues to wield the force of universality. Its "contingency" describes the way in which it remains incommensurable with any subject who inhabits its terms, and the lack of any final transcendental ground for its operation. In no way, however, is the universalizing effect of its own operation called into question by the assertion of contingency here. Thus structures of kinship cast as symbolic continue to produce a universalizing effect. How, under these conditions, does the very

effect of universality become rendered as contingent, much less undermined, rewritten, and subject to transformation? (Butler, 2000a, 44-45.)

Butler thinks that Lacan intended to replace theological naturalistic accounts of kinship but ended up reiterating those accounts by prompting a universal theory of symbolic order. Butler suggests that *contingency* as Lacan defines it renders a universalizing effect. In distinguishing the symbolic from the subjects who live in its terms Lacan presents a false notion of contingency. He understands *contingency* as the disparity between the symbolic set of rules and what they symbolize, that *contingency* is attained via *lacking a basis for the symbolic operation*, i.e. *the always already failed referential function*. The Lacanian symbolic is constituted by an-always-already-failed referential operation, which produces the missing, forever unattainable incestuous desire. Butler suggests that the Lacanian symbolic marks the inexistence of incestuous desire and that hence, *the non-emergence-of-incest* cannot question the Lacanian symbolic's universal status. Butler thinks that by instating this failure in referentiality Lacan prompts the universalizing effect unquestioned. She implores a modification to the universalizing function of the Lacanian symbolic and elaborates the problem of this.

For the Oedipus complex to be universal by virtue of being symbolic, for Lacan, does *not* [her italics] mean that the Oedipus complex has to be globally evidenced for it to be regarded as universal. (Butler, 2000a, 45.)

In other words, while Lacan attributes universality to incestuous desire incestuous desire does not need to happen all over the world to be universal in his view.

The problem is not that the symbolic represents a false universal. Rather, where and when the Oedipus complex appears, it exercises the function of universalization: it *appears* [her italics] as that which is everywhere true. In this sense, it is not a universal concretely realized or realizable; its failure at realization is precisely what sustains its status as a universal possibility. No

exception can call this universality into question precisely because it does not rely on empirical instantiation to support its universalizing function (that function is radically unsupported and, hence, contingent in that restricted sense). Indeed, its particularization would be its ruination. (Butler, 2000a, 45.)

Distinguishing the fact and the fiction of the universality of the Lacanian theory of symbolic order is useless because this theory is set in a conception of *appearance* (or emergence) that renders universality; the appearance of incestuous desire establishes that incestuous desire is universal only when it appears. When incestuous desire appears it is universally true but this does not mean it manifests universally because it does not always appear, which, according to this theory, proves it fails manifesting universally and hence that the Lacanian symbolic function is not a universal function or theory. That the existence of incestuous desire as a universal phenomenon does not depend upon personal experience to be known or to be proved makes incestuous desire contingent - not dependent from Lacan's perspective and hence not universal Butler suggests. Failing to manifest always and for everybody, and always failing in this same way establishes that incestuous desire universally fails, which generalizes the Lacanian symbolic to impart its law-like quality; particularity invalidates the necessarily indiscriminateness of laws - Butler says.

But does this understanding of universalization work to usher in God (or the gods) through another door? If the Oedipus complex is not universal in one way, but remains universal in another, does it finally matter which way it is universal if the effect is the same? Note that the sense in which the incest taboo is "contingent" is precisely that of "ungrounded"; but what follows from this ungroundedness? It does not follow that the taboo itself might appear as radically alterable or, indeed, eliminable; rather, to the extent that it does appear, it appears in a universal form. Thus this contingency, an ungroundedness that becomes the condition of a universalizing appearance, is

radically distinct from a contingency that establishes the variability and limited cultural operation of any such rule or norm. (Butler, 2000a, 45.)

This concludes Butler's close reading in Lacan's *Seminar II*. She considers finally, that the Lacanian symbolic is religiosity oriented. Universality's source, whether incestuous desire is a universal complex because it is obtained from god/s or from *elsewhere* is irrelevant she says. Butler refutes the possibility of varying types of universality because the contingency of incest prohibition in Lacan's theory is founded in *un-founded-ness* that renders a universally fixed form, not contingency at all in her conception, clearly distinct from *contingency* in her understanding, which establishes alterable and restricted norms.

For Lacan the symbolic law proceeds by negating criminal unconscious desire while criminal desire proceeds un-negated in the unconscious of the male subject; criminality and legality are binding and mutually implicating imperatives in Lacanian theory. The crime refers to the law and the law refers to the crime but the crime-law - incest and its prohibition - is referentially inoperative from Lacan's perspective, is missing from the symbolic; the Lacanian symbolic may be defined as a specific referential operation failed. In the next section of my chapter the crime/law simultaneity, its incommensurability with any object, its citational status and manifestation in death (the tropological production of death and turn trope) will prove fundamental beyond Lacan's program - the specifics of his referential failure. Antigone's claim - Butler's interpretation of Sophocles's text and of Lacan's conception of symbolic organization will mobilize this conclusion. So before I proceed and in conclusion to this section of my chapter I compare the claims - Antigone's claim to *not denying denial* and Lacan's claim to the symbolic order and dysfunction in the discussion above, to show that Butler's interpretations of both claims is set in the same terms, that Antigone's claim and the Lacanian symbolic as Butler understands them both render an argument and a right to deviant desire and foundational signification-al power - the power to produce meaning and symbols anew.

Repetition, reflexivity, negation and criminality engender, found and facilitate both claims yet with different effects. And, both claims constitute a linguistic referential function that fails containing that to which it refers. The Lacanian symbolic refers to the repetition of paternal authority to sustain that authority in terms of negation, to establish and uphold a self-powered claim, a claim that takes itself as evidence of its claim to a culturally instigated sexual deviation that is always already negated. Antigone's claim, similarly self-powered, is an authority that takes its power from itself and from its own references (citation); it refers to itself in terms of its grammatical structure, to Antigone's self-delegated previous illicit acts - her burial deed and incestuous desire and birthright, and to the words of another - the king. And similarly Antigone's claim is devoid of the power to which it refers when it fails pronouncing the *forced confession* - that sovereign power that enables it, when it fails becoming the normative discourse and authority to which it refers and that it negates. And while the Lacanian symbolic simply negates incestuous desire Antigone's claim alters normative discourse and its terms - *negation, denial and refusal* by pronouncing a new context to that of denial, by referring beyond negation through a double negative, by exceeding sexual incestuous deviancy in trans-sexualizing the crew. The father's sexual mistake implicates both claims knowingly; deviation may initially be a mistake from Lacan's perspective but the continuity of symbolic signification-al exchange depends in his view upon the knowing disregard for and repetition of negated sexual deviation. From Antigone's perspective on the other hand, continuity ends with her knowing deviation. Nevertheless the two claims establish love in similar terms of uniqueness that renders legality of sorts, and both claims proceed "knowing" full well in advance that their application as law will fail precisely for the uniqueness of the love that each pronounces. Incestuous desire is the only kind of desire that merits the symbolic status of law in Lacan's conception, its uniqueness, which revokes its status in law, renders contingency of sorts, a *not-universal* element from Lacan's perspective, which enables the Lacanian symbolic to sling a deadly prohibition almost uncontested.

Chapter 3 - Butler's Antigone.

(E) Demise of the Lacanian Symbolic.

Butler cites Lacan:

How is it that at the moment that everything is organized around the power to do good, something completely enigmatic proposes itself to us and returns to us ceaselessly from our own action as its unknown consequence? (Butler, 2000a, 45-46; *The Ethics*, 275.)

In this section of my chapter I reveal how Butler impels the Lacanian symbolic to its inevitable death. Lacan's words (above) will return to turn against Lacan, to become *the unknown consequence of his own action* (theoretical practice) and *propose an enigma*, a question concerning the Lacanian symbolic continuity (staying the same throughout without interruption). I review Butler's reading in Lacan's *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960 Book VII* in the second chapter of *Antigone's Claim* - "Unwritten Laws, Aberrant Transmissions." I also read in Lacan's *The Ethics* directly. The Lacanian tropological production of death and his *Seminar II* return in this section of my chapter, as does also *the turn*, while the very idea of *a return* forms the basis of my reading in Butler's text as it forms the basis of Butler's reading in Lacan's texts. *The return* emerges in Butler's reading in *Seminar II* as the aberrant transmission of the father's discourse in intelligibility's symbolic foundation (Butler, 2000a, 52; *Seminar II*, 89). Reading *The Ethics* Butler reveals that *the return* emerges as the destructive feature in Antigone's citational activities (Butler, 2000a, 50-51; *The Ethics*, 276). Both these readings question Lacan's elimination of Antigone's act in language and Lacan's conception of Antigone's desire of death.

Butler elaborates Lacan's conception of desire, how Antigone's desire comes to stand for unethical-desire that is at once an ethical imperative and symbolic law, how Antigone's desire and status in alternate law are mutually determined in terms of citation for Lacan, and how citation *enables and also destroys* the symbolic terms of

desire as Lacan conceives them yet contrary to Lacan's intention; Lacan intends for Antigone to be destroyed by her desire, Butler reveals how Lacan *turns* - that Antigone returns to destroy his conception of her. In my understanding, *citation that enables and returns to destroy its enabling conditions* is mimesis. And mimesis as such emerges as Butler's deviation *in* Lacan's symbolic law (regulation) - as *the return turned*.

Butler's deviation in Lacan is also an embrace of Lacan's terms. Lacan thinks in terms of *turning* and *returning* (irresolute alternation), conceives Antigone returning from the dead, turning between life and death - the *second death* as death-in-life. He conceives *turnings* in ethical desire - as derailed ethical-desire, in catharsis - as disharmonious catharsis, in sexual desire - as negated-desire and sadomasochism - a universal constitutive precondition for life, to which the subject turns and returns in the production/reproduction of his symbolic forms in his hour of desirous ethical darkness. I show how this becomes Butler's possibility; how Lacan establishes Antigone's symbolic status in ethics, how Antigone comes to stand for the sadomasochistic mechanism of mimetic turning in Lacan's effort to explain survival - the possibility of overcoming intolerable psychological and physical strain, how Antigone wavers between life and death in Lacan's effort to evacuate her from life, from ethicality, from intelligibility (signification), from subjecthood, from history, from the symbolic itself, and how Butler mimes Lacan to return Antigone to the scene of her evacuation i.e. Lacan's context, to destroy to renew it; how Butler's citations in Lacan *returns to turn* Lacan.

Butler explains the Lacanian conception of Antigone's function in ethical organization:

In a sense, Lacan's concern with the play is precisely with this rushing by one's self to one's own destruction, that fatal action of Creon and Antigone alike. Thus Lacan resituates the problematic of *Antigone* [the drama] as an internal difficulty of 'the desire to do good,' the desire to live in conformity with an ethical norm. Something invariably [always the same] emerges in the very trajectory of desire that appears enigmatic or mysterious from the conscious

point of view that is oriented toward the pursuit of the good: [citing Lacan Butler says] ‘In the irreducible margin as well as at the limit of his own good, the subject reveals himself to the never entirely resolved mystery of the nature of his desire’ [*The Ethics*, 237. End of citation in Lacan.] Lacan refers Antigone [the character] to the notion of the beautiful, suggesting that the beautiful is not always compatible with the desire for the good, suggesting as well that it lures and fascinates us because of its enigmatic character. Antigone will emerge, then, for Lacan as a problem of beauty, fascination, and death as precisely what intervenes between the desire for the good, the desire to conform to the ethical norm, and thereby derails it, enigmatically, from its path. This is, then, not an opposition between one discourse or principle and another, between the family and community but a conflict internal to and constitutive of the operation of desire and, in particular, ethical desire. (Butler, 2000a, 46-47.)”

Butler says that Lacan’s concern with Antigone is around ethical possibility. Lacan conceives Antigone in terms of an ethical question that he articulates as a botched desire to do good; an ethical performativity interrupted by its own contradictory elements. Butler considers that this problematic (she says “internal difficulty”) is immanent to desire in Lacan’s understanding. Butler suggests that for her, for Butler, the problematic is different. As we saw, she thinks it concerns the assimilation and refusal of *the other’s* language i.e. rhetorical agency understood as a context-based linguistic exchange - substitutions in the performative features of symbolic (representational) power (sovereignty). Butler says that Lacan resituates this problematic - positions it again or anew, to suggest that she thinks Lacan recognizes the problematic in the drama as one which concerns rhetorical agency and performative linguistic substitutions in power yet that instead Lacan theorizes the difficulty posed by Antigone in terms of an internal conflict in the identity of desire, as a wish for doing good and conforming to the ethical norm on the one hand, which on

the other he sees betrayed by an erratic feature in desire that leads to a self-impelled self-destruction.

Butler suggests that Lacan defines the identity of the ethical possibility in respect to his definition of the identity of desire; that for him *desire to be ethical* presumes the nature of desire in general, a conception of consciousness in which the pursuit of ethical *being* is disrupted by (the subject's) discordant desire trajectory. In citing Lacan Butler reveals that for him the ethically tested subject (Lacan says "the limit of his own good") who is always a man is particularly inclined to the irresolution of his desire (Lacan says - "never entirely resolved [element...] of his desire"). Butler considers that to proffer his notion of the ethically tested male subject Lacan reduces Antigone to an aesthetic difficulty. Lacan thinks that Antigone is beautiful but that beauty is not always consistent with ethical desire in man. He links the beauty he sees in Antigone with the bewildering-enigmatic feature that he sees in desire, and he uses this link to explain his conception of Antigone's power of seduction. From Lacan's perspective Antigone's beauty contradicts any desire to do good. Antigone emerges as a single problematic that converges beguiling beauty, deviant desire and a fascination with death, a convergence that Lacan sees derailing the anyway doomed-to-derail deviant ethical desire.

Butler compares Lacan's position on *Antigone* with Hegel's. She distinguishes their views in terms of irresolvable ambiguity.

Lacan objects to Hegel's insistence that the play moves toward a "reconciliation" of two principles [Butler indicates she cites this in *The Ethics*, 249]. Hegel thus reads the death drive out of desire. Lacan repeatedly makes the case that [and Butler cites in Lacan] 'it isn't simply the defense of the sacred rights of the dead and of the family,' [end citation in Lacan] but it *is* [her italics] about the trajectory of passion that winds its way toward self-destruction. But here he suggests that the thinking of fatal passion is finally separable from the constraints imposed by kinship. Is this separation possible, considering the specter of incestuous passion, and is any theorization of the

symbolic or its inauguration finally separable from the question of kinship and the family? (Butler, 2000a, 47.)

Butler cites Lacan. Lacan says that Antigone is fatally passionate about guarding her brother's burial rights. Butler uses this citation in her own claim, which is this: though Lacan knows that Antigone's desire and the restrictions that regulate it are irresolutely ambiguous he isolates Antigone's fatal passion from her kinship constraints. Lacan does not explicitly separate the inauguration of symbolic kinship relations (order) from fatal-passion Butler suggests, he implies it when he objects to Hegel's reading in *Antigone*. The importance of Lacan's objection concerns the question of what reconciliation does to the death drive in desire: reconciliation kills the death drive in desire. Lacan objects to this when he questions Hegel's idea that Antigone's drama proceeds in varying discursive possibilities that at first conflict only to be reconciled by the end of the drama (*The Ethics*, 249).

Butler puts reconciliation in quotation marks in referring to Lacan's objection to it in Hegel's reading of *Antigone*. This suggests that her understanding of Hegelian reconciliation diverges from Lacan's. In Butler's conception Hegelian reconciliation is the same as its dispersion; the dialectical exchange between any two varying terms is finally never finite because dispersion and reconciliation are interchangeable.¹⁹ Butler distinguishes Lacan's conception of discordant desire from the family-community opposition in Hegel's conception of Antigone's drama. Butler thinks that Hegel poses the two oppositional terms in an infinite exchange: In conceiving reconciliation in the final phase of the dialectically opposed discourses of family (kinship) and community

¹⁹ Reconciliation, unification, resolution, final-restoration and dispersion are synonymous for Butler. For the dialectic as an infinite exchange in oppositional terms - resolution in the image of dispersion, see the end of my second chapter 'Butler's "Theory" of Performativity.' Butler's discussion on desire and recognition in "Lordship and Bondage" appears in *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* p. 14 and in *The Judith Butler Reader* p. 48.

(or state institution) Hegel promotes an exchange in which one discourse, term or principle does not absolutely overcome to erase the other but rather the one becomes the other which interrupts the regulatory scheme in each. Butler sees Hegel's conception of reconciliation in terms of his conception of desire. Reading "Lordship and Bondage" Butler sees desire as a function of recognition; desire is for recognition (Butler, 2000a, 14) and is an infinite displacement "for which there is no final restoration (Butler, 2004, 48.)" For Butler, Hegelian reconciliation is an ongoing affair; it perpetually unbinds the subject. The Hegelian subject that Butler conceives constantly loses its own (sense of) self via (its experience of) desire in the process of recognizing alterity (Butler, 2000a, 14). The Lacanian subject that Butler reads in *The Ethics* does not require alterity or the mutually implicating process of recognition-in-desire to be interrupted and displaced; it is displaced anyway and always by default, by the irreconcilably ambiguous components of its desire. From Hegel's perspective Antigone has no desire - no ambiguous, conflicting nor incestuous desire, a notion that Butler refutes (Butler, 2000a, 13). And while Lacan sees Antigone's desire in terms of its ambiguous, contradictory, components he understands it as *desire to die*.

In *desire* Lacan sees a single discourse, a general all-encompassing discursive principle formed in contradictory principles never to be finally resolved, internally disrupted, internal to the male subject and mobilizing the ruination of male ethical possibility. If the opposing components of desire are finally unified as Hegel has it Lacan's theory fails to explain the subject's ethical ineptitude. Lacan endows Antigone with this manly self-destructive ethical desire at first only to resolve it in terms of sadomasochism, as we shall see momentarily, and though Hegel does not speak of unification in desire's oppositional principles regarding Antigone, Hegel questions Lacan's death-driven Antigone when he prompts dialectical reconciliation in the diverging discourses of family and state. In this Hegel refutes the possibility that Antigone's desire is for self-destruction.

Lacan requires the death drive in desire to uphold his notion that the male subject is ethically-desirously tested. Fatal passion - the death drive in desire has to be singled out for his conception of Antigone's drama to make sense. Without a distinction

between fatal passion and kinship constraints Antigone's death may be conceived to result from a confluence in these, not from fatal passion alone. If Antigone fails ethical desire for any reason but a passionate attachment to the notion of her own death, if her fatal passion is not isolated from kinship and its constraints then her death is not inevitable, is contingent - a consequence of varying factors that inter-depend, and, she may even achieve the status of an ethical subject. For Lacan this possibility is bewildering indeed; after objecting to Hegel's reconciliation in the discursive principles Lacan says, "Further it is not without some astonishment that one learns that, in addition, this reconciliation is said to be subjective. (*The Ethics*, 249-250.)" Lacan suggests that reconciliation in the disparate discursive principles engenders a personal possibility - a subject position. This, as Antigone's possibility is intolerable in his view.

Lacan's understanding of reconciliation is equivalent to Butler's understanding of it, as a displacement and an absolute bond, however, in one instance only, in the oppositional terms of desire alone, and this, to sustain a death driven Antigone. Reconciliation in any other two conflicting discursive principles contradicts Lacanian theory of ethical desire. For Butler this is a limited kind of reconciliation hence her quotation marks around it in reference to Lacan's conception of it.

Lacan's implicit distinction between fatal passion and kinship constraints is impossible because Antigone's fatal passion is her brother, a passion constrained and fatefully sealed by state law (when Creon prohibits Polyneices's burial rights). For Butler Lacan's implicit distinction between fatal passion and kinship constraints implies beyond Antigone's drama. It falsely establishes that constraints do not cause fatality. Butler suggests that fatal passion needs to be thought of as a reconciliation and convergence in diverging discursive conventions to question absolutisms, that to think fatal passion as an inevitable consequence of a death drive in desire is reductive indeed. Reconciliation in diverging discourses means thinking them in comparison - together and apart, to use one to question and reformulate the other. It enables modification in regulative regimes. In citing Lacan Butler shows that even he understands that Antigone does not simply and purely defend kinship or a generalized notion of it. He clearly perceives the impossibility of ever finally severing *fatality in*

passion from a theory of kinship and symbolic regulations but that regardless, he conceives Antigone engendering a sadomasochistic problematic - suicidal desire, pleasure sought in and derived from her own misery:

Nevertheless, Antigone is approached by Lacan first as a fascinating image and then in relation to the problem of the death drive in masochism. In relation to this last, however, Lacan suggests that the unwritten and unfailing laws prior to all codification are those that mark the far side of a symbolic limit beyond which humans may not cross. Antigone appears at this limit or, indeed, as this limit, and most of Lacan's subsequent discussion focuses on the term *Ate*, understood as the limit of human existence that can be crossed only briefly within life. (Butler, 2000a, 47.)

Butler considers that Lacan begins his interrogation of Antigone's drama by conceiving Antigone as an aesthetic problematic and that he ends by using her to explain the sadomasochism problematic. For Lacan, Butler suggests, sadomasochism is a primal manifestation of *desire to die* inscribed in the unwritten unfailing law that chronologically precedes all written legal codification (symbolic systems and norms), a type of legality that heralds written-coded legality in all its forms - norms, regulative conventions and symbolic orders - and which marks the symbolic limit, its "far side" Butler says, to suggest that Lacan establishes the future of his own conception of the symbolic law through what he imagines as excessive to it, which he calls *Ate* and identifies with Antigone. For Lacan, Butler says, Antigone is this symbolic limit and its excessive element at once. Butler suggests that Lacan implies that fatal passion is separable from kinship constraints only to subsequently link death, desire and kinship constraints in terms of *Ate*, which is more than simply the symbolic-limit's far side or future, it is the brief possibility of crossing the symbolic limit, an inhuman transgression that signifies death-in-life for Lacan Butler says.

Antigone [according to Lacan] is already in the service of death, dead while living, and so she appears to have crossed over in some way to a death that remains to be understood. Lacan takes her obstinacy to be a manifestation of this death drive, joining with the chorus in calling her “inhuman” [Butler indicates she cites this in *The Ethics*, 263] in relation to Ismene [Antigone’s sister], and she is clearly not the only one to be “of” this prior and unwritten realm: Creon wants to promote the good of all as the law without limits [Butler indicates she cites this in *The Ethics*, 259] but in the process of applying the law, [Creon] exceeds the law, basing his authority as well in unwritten laws that seem to propel his own actions toward self-destruction. (Butler, 2000a, 47-48.)

Lacan understands Antigone’s choice to die in defence of her brother’s death rights as an indication that Antigone is more than simply suicidal. For Lacan, Butler explains, Antigone’s life is in the service of death. Lacan acknowledges that Antigone is not the only character in the play to make that crossing yet nevertheless he selects and isolates Antigone as the only one in the service of death, to query that service as an unknown crossing into death, Butler says. Creon transgresses normative discourse - divine law - when he decrees the prohibition against burying Polyneices, Creon’s legality is catachrestic like Antigone’s - excessive and inappropriate to the terms of the norm in his day. Lacan acknowledges that Creon crosses into another sphere that is of unwritten legality and unknown consequences but Creon innocently exceeds the law in the process of promoting it he says (*The Ethics*, 259). And there are others who make that crossing but Lacan seems to ignore this:

His [Teiresias’s] authority also appears to come from some other place than the human. His speaking of the divine words establishes him as one for whom mimesis entails a splitting and a loss of autonomy; it [mimesis as doubling] links him to the kind of speaking that Creon performs in asserting his authority beyond its codifiable bounds. Not only does his speech come from a place other

than human life, it also portends or produces - or, rather, relays a return to - another death, the second death that Lacan identifies as the cessation of all transformations, natural or historical. (Butler, 2000a, 48.)

Teiresias is the blind prophet who cautions Creon against conflicting with Antigone. Participating in Lacan's conception of alternate legality as sadomasochism Butler considers that Teiresias, Creon and Antigone alike are mimetically split and self-destructive because each one of them speaks in (terms of a) reference to beyond the limit of human possibility, citing this reference to assert an authority that exceeds any and all (known) regulative conventions. Butler considers that for Lacan this kind of speaking signifies negatively ("portends") because it conveys a return from what Lacan understands as a second death. Butler explains that Lacan's notion of a second death conveys the absolute end to all transformations, natural and historical (Butler, 2000a, 48). In Lacan's words, "the second death [is the one] imagined by Sade's heroes - death insofar as it is regarded as the point at which the very cycles of the transformations of nature are annihilated (*The Ethics*, 248.)" But the Lacanian second death *is and is not* final; it remains indefinite in Lacan's definition, as we shall momentarily see.

Lacan clearly links Antigone to Sacher-Masoch and to Sade in this portion of the seminar [she cites Lacan]: 'Analysis shows clearly that the subject separates out a double of himself who is made inaccessible to destruction, so as to make it support what, borrowing a term from the realm of aesthetics, one cannot help calling the play of pain.' [End of citation in *The Ethics*, 261.] Torture establishes indestructibility for both Antigone and Sade. The indestructible support becomes the occasion for the production of forms, and so the condition of aesthetics itself. In Lacan's terms, [again she cites Lacan] 'The object (in the sadean fantasm) is no more than the power to support a form of suffering' [end of citation in *The Ethics*, 261] and thus becomes a form of persistence that survives efforts at its destruction. This persistence appears linked with what Lacan [...] calls pure Being. (Butler, 2000a, 48.)

Butler considers that for Lacan there is only one character in the drama that supports indestructibility in the face of agony - Antigone. Lacan says that Antigone fits the sadomasochistic profile with which he is familiar from his work as a therapist. He explains the troubled lives of his patients in terms of Sadean descriptions of violent cruelty. He suggests that the sadomasochistic profile has a mimetic feature, that sadomasochism is a desirable, pleasurable self-impelled pain facilitated by mimesis; that surrendering to and surviving tormenting abuse is enabled by the doubling function that he conceives as mimesis: the subject takes the pain as its double overcomes it. Butler considers that Lacan deploys the notion of “the play of pain (Butler, 2000a, 48; *The Ethics*, 261)” to articulate his fascination with the problem of beauty and the sublime - aesthetics in the philosophical sense, as the rules of art understood as subject/object relations - the object of the gaze in visual art or the object of torture in the Sadean text. Lacan’s deployment of “the play of pain” refers to S&M - fantasy-based power exchange in recreational sex (Winks and Semans, 1997, 210-227) in my view. S&M sex, negated, deadly and/or turning desire, Sadean discourse and cruelty, Sacher-Masochian obsession, psychic dispositions tormented by the reality of symbolic life, the Freudian mechanism (trope) of turning in sexual development, in social and moral terms and in the norm - are these identical for Lacan? To deploy them interchangeably, which is what Lacan does, is unfair to his patients and to victims of exclusionary conventions and crimes. It suggests that these people enjoy suffering, derive sexual gratification from it. Butler suggests that Lacan’s convergence of discourses (his interpretation of Sadean literature, of Sophoclean tragic art and of psychoanalytic practice) promotes Lacan’s notion of *being*. His convergence would more properly be conceived as an art project in my opinion. It is definitely questionable as therapy and even more so as the default human condition (*being*).

Lacan’s conception of gratification in torture renders a fantastical notion of absolute freedom - a dream of bodily constraints removed. Lacan deploys this Sadean possibility as a foundation for his theory of symbolic intelligibility, which goes beyond an explanation for how suffering makes sense. Mimesis, representation or symbolic

functionality makes the subject “inaccessible to destruction” (*The Ethics*, 261.)” Lacan promotes a symbolic catharsis - the evacuation of matter from being. This is a conception of symbolic order (constraints) in which a death-driving function renders pure *being*, *being* that is devoid of bodily life, of materiality. Via citation in Lacan’s text Butler reveals that for Lacan the Sadean object of torture accomplishes its power in the act of objectification that it suffers, a power that Lacan only tentatively attributes to Antigone.

Following her review of Lacan’s Antigone-Sade-Masoch link, Butler considers that Lacan develops his discussion in *The Ethics* metonymically, which happens first in terms of Aristotle’s theory of catharsis of which Lacan proposes a rewriting and then in terms of the second death. Lacan proposes that Antigone features a turning mechanism that installs a catharsis of irresolution, normalization understood as a purifying discordance - the absence of harmony and a negative catharsis (Butler, 2000a, 49; *The Ethics*, 248). Lacan uses the turning mechanism that he sees Antigone embodying to lead into his second metonymical consideration, his notion of the second death - the whole for which Antigone stands in his view, which Butler explains as the erasure of the first death - the life-death cycle (Butler, 2000a, 49). Butler says that the Lacanian second death is without redemption (Ibid.) to suggest that in Lacan’s text it signifies the unforgiving punishment of finalizing Antigone’s end. Momentarily Butler will revert this, turn it around in accordance with Lacan’s conception of the second death. (This is important to establish the possibility of returning from death that Butler deploys in her closing statement at the end of her second chapter.) Butler refutes Lacan’s notion that this redemption-less death is unique to Antigone. Judging by Antigone’s soliloquy in Sophocles’s text Butler argues that from Antigone’s perspective all of her family members die this second death (Ibid.). To verify this I look in the Sophoclean text:

O tomb, my bridal-bed - my house, my prison
cut in the hollow rock, my everlasting watch!
I’ll soon be there, soon embrace my own,
the great growing family of our dead

Persephone has received among her ghosts. I,
the last of them all, the most reviled [abused] by far,
go down before my destined time's run out.
But still I go, cherishing one good hope:
my arrival may be dear to father,
dear to you, my mother,
dear to you, my loving brother, Eteocles (*Sophocles*, 105.)

Antigone sees herself joining her family - a reunion in the same (kind of) death.

Butler considers that regardless of this Lacan isolates Antigone's death and identifies it as that second death, which, Butler explains, is the condition of *being* that Antigone marks for Lacan in the image of irresolution (Butler, 2000a, 49). Lacan links Antigone to "tragic action (Butler, 2000a, 49; *The Ethics*, 248,)" which he explains as the turning feature of irresolution that he conceives articulating *being* as its site and limit too:

Significantly, this limit is also described in terms of a constitutive irresolution, namely, [Butler cites Lacan] 'being buried alive in a tomb.' Later, he gives us other language with which to understand this irresolved image, that of motionless moving [she indicates this is cited in *The Ethics*, 252.] This image is also said to 'fascinate' and to exercise an effect on desire - an image that will turn out, at the end of "The Splendor of Antigone," to be constitutive of desire itself. [...]. (Butler, 2000a, 49.)

For Lacan Antigone is a constitutive condition of sadomasochism, redemption-less death - hell, irresolution in life and in *being* and the discordance of *being*, which in his view amounts to desire itself.

It seems that the irresolvable coincidence of life and death in the image, the image that Antigone exemplifies without exhausting, is also what is meant by

the 'limit' and the 'position of Being.' This is a limit that is not precisely thinkable within life but that acts in life as the boundary over which the living cannot cross, a limit that constitutes and negates life simultaneously. (Butler, 2000a, 49.)

Lacan endows Antigone with an unthinkable power of turning, the negation of life within life, a turning between life and death that is inconceivable in life but that Antigone exemplifies for him nonetheless as the *simultaneity in life and death within life* that Lacan also understands as *being*.

When Lacan claims that Antigone fascinates as an image, and that she is 'beautiful' [Butler indicates this is cited in *The Ethics*, 260], he is calling attention to this simultaneous and irresolvable coincidence of life and death that she brings into relief for her audience. She is dying, but alive, and so signifies the limit that (final) death is. Lacan turns to Sade in this discussion in order to make clear that the null point, the 'start[ing] again from zero,' is what occasions the production and reproduction of forms; it is [and she cites Lacan] 'a substratum [foundation] that makes suffering bearable...the double of oneself' [end citation in *The Ethics*, 261] that provides the support for pain. (Butler, 2000a, 49-50.)

Butler interprets the "starting from zero (*The Ethics*, 260)" in Lacan's text in terms of *null point*. She suggests Lacan invokes a null point that he identifies with Sadean discourse and with Antigone - a place without legal validity (codification) which is, nonetheless, a point of reference that for Lacan marks a particular legal precedent characterized by death and utter emptiness. The null point as such is the male subject's production/reproduction, a constitutive site to do with desire, sexual perversion and ethical norms, his birth place to which he always returns, to which he turns in his hour of pain to enable overcoming it, a life-death cycle of sorts - the irresolute image of the connection-separation that marks the limit between death and

life that Antigone supports for Lacan. Lacan's fascination with Antigone is with the desire to live on the edge (of life), a desire Lacan falsely attributes to Antigone as irresolution, personification of death, that null point and an inevitable return to death and a turning in life and death (production/reproduction) understood as absolute nothingness and a complete cessation of all transformation.

Thus, [in taking Sadean discourse as substratum,] Lacan attempts to show that Antigone cannot finally be understood in light of the historical legacies from which she emerges but, rather, as asserting [and she cites Lacan] 'a right that emerges in the ineffaceable character of what is' [end of citation in *The Ethics*, 279]. And this leads him to the controversial conclusion that 'that separation of being from the characteristics of the historical drama he [Polyneices] has lived through, is precisely the limit or the *ex nihilo* [the nothingness, her italics] to which Antigone is attached' (Butler, 2000a, 50; *The Ethics*, 279.)

Butler suggests that by linking Antigone to Sadean discourse as he does in the null point Lacan erases the specifics of her historical situation, annuls any validity that the legacy of her interpretations reveal. And while Lacan cannot fathom Antigone in historical terms he clearly sees Polyneices as a subject set in historical context. Antigone is beyond historical specification and reach for Lacan. She is the limit that separates Polyneices from his *being* - the inerascable character of *being* in the broadest possible sense. Not the life or death of the individual but pure *being*, absolute presence in its theoretical possibility - the philosophical sense of the word *ontology*. Antigone for Lacan is an enduring philosophical possibility (conception) devoid of materiality, not anything that may hinder or prompt *being* per se. Antigone affirms this possibility as a right in a symbolic sense in Lacan's view. In citing Lacan (above) Butler reveals that for him Antigone is attached to the limit that separates history and *being*, that in this Lacan detaches Antigone from both history and *being* to affirm her as the turning mechanism in sadomasochistic desire.

And Lacan reaffirms Antigone's effacement and any significance that she may have as a material possibility when he says, "It is nothing more than the break that the very presence of language inaugurates in the life of man. (*The Ethics*, 279.)" Even as a linguistic symbolic feature Antigone is only the possibility of manhood for Lacan, which for Butler is a controversial conclusion.

Here, again, one might well ask how the historical drama she has lived through returns her not only to this persistent ineffaceability of what is but [to] the certain prospect of effaceability. (Butler, 2000a, 50.)

Butler questions Lacan's use of Antigone's historical specificity to prove her ineffaceable erasure. Lacan dislocates Antigone from her historical drama to render a universal symbolic figure devoid of material content and devoid of historical links and yet Lacan deploys Antigone's historical specificity to establish her erasure; Lacan considers that Antigone is inerasable-erase-ability - the enduring prospect of erasure, a point he makes by erasing Antigone.

By separating the historical drama she lives through from the metaphysical truth she exemplifies for us, Lacan fails to ask how certain kinds of lives, precisely by virtue of the historical drama that is theirs, are relegated to the limits of the ineffaceable. (Butler, 2000a, 50.)

Some people live at the limits of liveability - zones of abjection. Their situation at the limits is inerasable no matter how hard they want or try to erase it. It is this specific drama that they are compelled to own and which relegates them to those limits. The assumed separation between metaphysical truth and the characteristics of historical drama is not only bogus but it avoids asking how relegation occurs in the first place, and it takes relegation as a metaphysical truth.

For Lacan all Sophoclean characters like those in *Antigone* are "at the limit that is not accounted for by their solitude relative to others (*The Ethics*, 272; Butler,

2000a, 50.)” Butler considers that for Lacan these characters are not simply separated from each other and living at the limits but “separated from one another through reference to the singularizing effect of finitude. (Butler, 2000a, 50.)” Lacan attaches the force of death’s finitude to a notion of ontological solitude understood as a limit condition that he attributes to Sophoclean characters. These characters are, Butler says using citation in Lacan’s text, “right away in a limit zone, find themselves between life and death” (Butler, 2000a, 50; *The Ethics*, 272.)” Eliding that tragic literary convention binds Sophoclean characters Lacan sees their specificity and connection in the inevitable fact of dying.

Butler distinguishes Lacan from Hegel in respect to each one’s understanding of Antigone’s act in language:

Unlike Hegel, Lacan understands that the mandate under which Antigone acts is importantly ambiguous, producing a claim whose status is not in any clear opposition to Creon’s. She is, first of all, appealing to *both* [her italics] the laws of the earth and the commandment of the gods [Butler indicates she cites this in *The Ethics*, 276], and her discourse, accordingly, vacillates between them. [...] (Butler, 2000a, 50-51.)

Lacan considers that Antigone’s act of burying her brother is prompted by symbolic ambiguity, a confluence of laws, divine and earthly. This would suggest that for Lacan Antigone’s words are implicated in Creon’s and hence it is questionable that Lacan does not stress that Antigone recites Creon.

For Lacan, to seek recourse to the gods is precisely to seek recourse beyond human life, to seek recourse to death and to instate that death within life; this **recourse to what is beyond or before the symbolic** [my emphasis] leads to a self-destruction that literalizes the importation of death into life. It is as if the very invocation of that elsewhere precipitates desire in the direction of death, a second death, one that signifies the foreclosure of any further

transformation. Antigone, in particular, [Butler cites in Lacan] ‘violates the limits of Ate through her desire’ [Butler indicates this is cited in *The Ethics*, 277]. If this is a limit that humans can cross only briefly or, more aptly, cannot cross for long, it is one she has not only crossed but beyond which she has remained far too long. [Butler indicates that her understanding of Ate as a *brief crossing* is taken from her own translation in the French version of *Seminar II* - Butler, 2000a, 91n-17.] She [Antigone] has crossed the line, defying public law, citing a law from elsewhere, but this elsewhere is a death that is also solicited by that very citation. She acts, but acts according to a command of death, one that returns to her by destroying the continuing condition of possibility for her very act, her finally insupportable [unbearable *and* impossible to justify] act. (Butler, 2000a, 51.)

Butler suggests that citation is both the condition enabling and destructing Antigone’s insupportable act, which is a citation. Her burial deed is a citation considering she mimes Creon’s power of negation in divine law or if not, then she acts in terms of her unique bond with her brother - a legality of sorts that uniquely diverges from normative discourse. Her linguistic defiance is a citation considering she mimes Creon’s words. Citations enable both of her acts, are the conditions of her performative possibility and they return to destroy her, her acts and her performative possibility; she is self-destructive only to the extent that the words that she cites are self-destructive. These words, which are citations in death-commandment destroy her, begging a question that pertains to the limits of her possibility - *does she simply choose to cite these words or are the words that she cites the best possibility under the circumstances i.e. considering that the words that she cites render the only context in which she can make sense - be intelligible (recognizable)?* And while Lacan thinks that Antigone ambiguously conflates laws of varying denominations, that she cites divine law with which she may not finally be identified, Lacan does not consider the citational element of Antigone’s act. Lacan sees her destruction as self-impelled or impelled only by her and her passion.

Butler argues that Lacan's recourse to divine ordination, to a time and a place that is *beyond and before the symbolic* mobilizes a literal translation of death that brings death into life. *Hell* symbolizes death-in-life; like the religious notion of hell Lacan implies a *pre-symbolic* symbolic that signifies death for the living, a figure that literalizes final cessation as fitting punishment for the kind of desire he attributes to Antigone - an inappropriate attribution. (Earlier) Butler explains Hegel's literalism in unnameable legality as self-contradictory; that in using "Antigone" to name unnameable legality Hegel refutes his own notion of an unnameable possibility (Butler, 2000a, 38). Similarly Butler points to a paradox in Lacan's literalism in religiosity: if Antigone cites the inhuman "elsewhere" or *Ate* that is prior to Antigone and to all signification then it is possible that *Ate* destroys Antigone and not her desire as Lacan would have it.

Lacan writes: [and Butler cites Lacan,] 'The limit in question is one on which she [Antigone] establishes herself, a place where she feels unassailable, a place where it is impossible for a mortal being to go beyond the laws. These are no longer laws but a certain legality which is a consequence of the laws of the gods that are said to be...unwritten...an invocation of something that is, in effect, of the order of law, but which is not developed in any signifying chain or in anything else.' (Butler, 2000a, 51-52; *The Ethics*, 278.)

Lacan conceives a legal order set apart from any sort of symbolic order. This legality is sourced in divine law yet is different and detached from it and from any other legal structure or symbolic law. He proposes an alternative to his own conception of the symbolic. He sees Antigone willingly lodged there, untouchable and secure, a limit place beyond mortal legality; mortals can't go there nor can they transgress the laws there.

Butler continues:

Thus she [Antigone] does not establish herself within the symbolic, and these unwritten and unwritable laws are not the same as the symbolic, that circuitry of exchange within which the subject finds herself. Although Lacan identifies this death-driven movement internal to desire as what finally takes her out of the symbolic, that condition for a supportable life, it is peculiar that what moves her across the barrier to the scene of death is precisely the curse of her father, the father's words, the very terms by which Lacan earlier *defines* [her italics] the symbolic: [Butler cites Lacan in *Seminar II*] 'The discourse of my father, for instance, in so far as my father made mistakes which I am absolutely condemned to reproduce - that's what we call the super-ego' (Butler, 2000a, 52; *Seminar II*, 89.)

Butler considers that while Lacan conceives Antigone as outside symbolic intelligibility because the law motivating her - her legal status fails to coincide with any signifying chain, Lacan still insists that Antigone is removed from symbolic intelligibility by the curse of her father. Returning to *Seminar II* Butler reveals that for Lacan the symbolic is the father-discourse identifiable with the super-ego (the part of the mind that develops conscience and moral standards according to Freudian theory) - a dooming kind of mimesis - doubling dad's mistakes.

If the demand or duty imposed by the symbolic [is, in Lacan's words, and Butler cites these] 'to transmit the chain of discourse in aberrant form to someone else' [end of citation in *Seminar II*, 89], then Antigone transmits that chain but also, significantly, by obeying the curse upon her, stops the future operation of that chain. (Butler, 2000a, 52.)

Butler modifies Lacan's conception of mimesis. For Lacan mimesis is the double in sadomasochism evident as the aberrant transmission in *father-discourse* i.e. knowingly doubling dad's mistakes in the sort of repetition that always creates the same aberrant transmission, incestuous desire is the only criminal desire reiterated over and over

again, which, for Lacan, is consistent with Antigone's desire. Butler revises Lacan's account by suggesting that if Antigone mimes her father's mistake by loving her brother too much she does so by deviating from her father's communication (the Oedipus discourse) and his mistake, first because hers is not a mistake and second she also knows that her punishment will be her death and that her end will end all aberrant transmissions of the same; Antigone's death ends her father's dynasty and his mistake.

Still, Butler's Antigone does more than to modify unchanging-repetition by dying.

Although she operates within the terms of the law when she makes her claim for justice, she also destroys the basis of justice in community by insisting that her brother is irreducible to any law that would render citizens interchangeable with one another. As she asserts his radical particularity, he comes to stand as a scandal, as the threat of ruination to the universality of law. (Butler, 2000a, 52.)

Antigone operates in the contradictory legal terms of her reality. She obeys divine law, which demands justice for all in death, only to defy state law, which is made specifically for Polyneices and counters divine law - sets her up against all odds. Yet Antigone particularizes Polyneices when she says she will break the law only for him. In this she counters the fundamental element of law, especially divine law, which is indiscriminate, not-particularize-able. In particularizing Polyneices in his death Antigone scandalizes Polyneices to destroy justice itself. Butler explains that the basis of Antigone's particularization-crime is her refusal to share in the conventions of universal law. Antigone refuses submitting the love she feels for her brother to anyone else's notion of love.

In a sense, Antigone refuses to allow her love for her brother to become assimilated to a symbolic order that requires the communicability of the sign. By remaining on the side of the incommunicable sign, the unwritten law, she

refuses to submit her love to the chain of signification, that life of substitutability that language inaugurates. She stands, Lacan tells us, for ‘the ineffaceable character of what is’ [end of citation in *The Ethics*, 279]. But what *is* [her italics], under the rule of the symbolic, is precisely what is evacuated through the emergence of the sign. The return to an ineffaceable ontology, prelinguistic, is thus associated in Lacan with a return to death and, indeed, with a death drive (referentiality here figured as death). (Butler, 2000a, 52-53.)

Antigone refuses to subordinate her love for Polyneices to the symbolic order - the mutual representational system (“communicability of the sign”) because it generalizes the notion of love. Her love for her brother is too unique to compare with any other love. Assimilating it to any mutual conception of love would detract from its specificity and matchlessness. For Lacan however Butler notes citing in his text, Antigone is destroyed in the symbolic exchange, is evacuated via the emergence of the sign - when symbolic intelligibility happens. Lacan, Butler says, conceives the symbolic exchange in terms that imply a pre-linguistic ontological possibility - that “recourse to what is beyond or before the symbolic (Butler, 2000a, 51)” which he thinks is ineradicable and which he associates with the evacuation of life, with death and with death driven desire. And, Lacan thinks it is always cited when signification takes place. In calling it “the ineffaceable character of what is” Lacan establishes death-driven-desire as the null point - the Sadean support and evacuated (destroyed) meaning, a reference to death that makes death manifest - a death trope and the only thing that just keeps repeating in his view. Lacan’s version of the symbolic assumes and explains the relationship between living beings and life by taking death as the only salient and lasting element in that exchange. Butler considers an alternative to Lacan’s view, an alternative set in his view, consistent with but also contrary to Lacan’s tropological production of death, which begins below and leads to Butler’s conclusive statement at the end of “Unwritten Laws, Aberrant Transmission.”

But consider that, pace Lacan, Antigone, in standing for Polyneices, and for her love of Polyneices, does not simply stand for the ineffaceable character of what is. First of all, it is the exposed body of her brother that she seeks to cover, if not to efface, by her burial of dust. Second, it seems that one reason that standing for her brother implicates her in a death in life is that it abrogates [repeals] precisely the kinship relations that articulate the Lacanian symbolic, the intelligible conditions for life. She does not merely enter death by leaving the symbolic bonds of community to retrieve an impossible and pure ontology of the brother. What Lacan elides at this moment, manifesting his own blindness perhaps, is that she suffers a fatal condemnation by virtue of abrogating the incest taboo that articulates kinship and the symbolic. It is not that the pure content of the brother is irretrievable from behind the symbolic articulation of the brother but that the symbolic itself is limited by its constitutive interdictions. (Butler, 2000a, 53.)

Butler considers that Antigone seeks to efface her dead brother's body and not his *being*. Antigone's action literally translates to an act of effacement, which does not endow her with representational worth that translates from this action; just because she effaces does not mean she represents effacement. For Lacan however, through her effacing activity Antigone represents death by association ("implication"). Butler's second point, if Antigone is dead while living she cannot have representational worth for the living. In Antigone's case, according to Lacan, death is willed, desirable, to suggest she wills herself outside intelligible bonds of community and its regulations. Butler considers that Antigone's death is not simply the result of her self-removal from life in the effort to recover the material *being* of Polyneices hidden inside the symbolic. If that material content is recoverable this is not why Antigone is fatally punished. Antigone is punished because of her incestuous love for her brother. Lacan is blind to the fact Butler says alluding to Oedipus, that Antigone is fatally punished for refusing the incest taboo, which is the convention that regulates the terms of kinship in

her community. The symbolic in Lacan's conception is so stringent that it will not tolerate even its own constitutive term - incest, Butler says.

Lacan casts the problem in terms of an inverse relation between the symbolic and a pure ontology: [Butler cites Lacan] 'Antigone's position represents the radical limit that affirms the unique value of his being without reference to any content, to whatever good or evil Polyneices may have done, or to whatever he may be subjected to.' (Butler, 2000a, 53; *The Ethics*, 282.)

Using Lacan's words Butler suggests that for Lacan the symbolic deals with incestuous desire by staging a dialectical relation between materiality and pure *being* to expel (purge) incestuous desire in the process. In note 18 that follows Butler cites Lacan:

Antigone appears...as a pure and simple relationship of the human being to that of which he [Polyneices] miraculously happens to be the bearer, namely, the signifying cut that confers on him the indomitable [impossible to defeat] power of being what he is in the face of everything that may oppose him (Butler, 2000a, 92n18; *The Ethics*, 282.)

In other words, for Lacan Antigone is Polyneices's facilitating medium. Antigone furnishes Polyneices with his human status when she bears the unbearable destructive power of linguistic exchange ("the signifying cut") - the evacuation of materiality in the emergence of the sign that Lacan understands as death. Antigone and Polyneices are dialectically entwined for Lacan; Antigone equated with pure ontological *being* is devoid of bodily life and desire while Polyneices is and has bodily life. He becomes human by interacting with her, she inhuman by enabling his humanness. For Lacan this separation and evacuation of the signified (that which carries meaning and importance) happens in the course of symbolic exchange.

In response to this view Butler says this:

If, as Lacan claims, Antigone represents a kind of thinking that counters the symbolic and, hence, counters life, perhaps it is precisely because the very terms of livability are established by a symbolic that is challenged by her kind of claim. And this claim does not take place outside the symbolic or, indeed, outside the public sphere, but within its terms and as an unanticipated appropriation and perversion of its mandate. (Butler, 2000a, 53-54.)

Butler embraces Lacan's claim i.e. that Antigone presents a conception that opposes symbolic order and life, because Butler thinks that only a challenged Lacanian symbolic can facilitate liveability - possibilities we can live with, tolerable possibilities in life. Antigone's claim happens within the unpredictable terms of the symbolic as Lacan understands it, Butler says, through the mimetic appropriation of the Lacanian symbolic I suggest.

If the symbolic is governed by the words of the father, and the symbolic is structured by a kinship that has assumed the form of linguistic structure, and Antigone's desire is insupportable within the symbolic, then why does Lacan maintain that is it some immanent feature of her desire that leads her inexorably toward death? Is it not precisely the limits of kinship that are registered as the insupportability of desire, which turn desire toward death?

Lacan acknowledges that there is a limit here, but this will be the limit of culture itself, a necessary limit beyond which death is necessary. He asserts that [and Butler cites Lacan] 'life can only be approached, can only be lived or thought about, from the place of that limit where her life is already lost, where she is already on the other side' [end of citation in *The Ethics*, 280]. But to what extent can this death-driven thought return to challenge the articulation of the symbolic and to alter the fatal interddictions by which it reproduces its own field of power? And what of her death is a social death [...]? This seems a crucial question, for this position outside life as we know it is not necessarily a position outside life as it must be. It provides a perspective on the symbolic

constraints under which livability is established, and the question becomes: Does it also provide a critical perspective by which the very terms of livability might be rewritten, or indeed, written for the first time.

Does she, as Lacan suggests, [and Butler cites Lacan,] ‘push to the limit the realization of something that might be called the pure and simple desire of death as such’ [end of citation in *The Ethics*, 282]? And is her desire merely to persist in criminality to the point of death? Is Lacan right that ‘Antigone chooses to be purely and simply the guardian of the being of the criminal as such; [end of citation in *The Ethics*, 283], or does this criminality assert an unconscious right, marking a legality prior to codification on which the symbolic in its hasty foreclosures must founder, establishing the question of whether there might be new grounds for communicability and for life? (Butler, 2000a, 54-55.)

This marks the end of Butler’s second chapter, “Unwritten Laws, Aberrant Transmissions.” It begins by querying Lacan’s notion that Antigone is intrinsically endowed with the kind of desire that features a reflexive death driving force. If as Lacan thinks the symbolic is facilitated by a linguistic (symbolic) structure featuring the father’s words, crimes or mistakes then it is this symbolic that facilitates Antigone’s words (citations) and desires and not some immanent feature of Antigone or of her desire - Butler suggests, affirming her point by posing a rhetorical question that concerns the whereabouts of desire’s death-directionality in the Lacanian interpretation of the image of Antigone: *are kinship-restrictions and kinship’s possibilities not indexed in and by the symbolic, as intolerable desires that tropologically turn desire to death?* It is the Lacanian symbolic’s restrictions that tropologically turn desire to death and not the turning mechanism that Antigone manifests for Lacan - Butler suggests. And though Antigone’s love for her brother is fatally passionate Antigone forfeits the seminal specification of Lacanian symbolic - abrogates the incest taboo (Butler, 2000a, 53,) which suggests that her desire is

distinct from the one that Lacan attributes to her and deploys to explain his account of symbolic regulation.

In the following passage, using citation in Lacan Butler shows that Lacan recognizes that a limit condition is mobilized in the symbolic scenario that he narrates. Butler says that while Lacan stages a scenario that mandates a limit for which death is compulsory he attributes this limit to culture; he proposes that the limit is culture's limit and not his own. Lacan recognizes the intolerability of Antigone's desire as a limit the crossing of which is punishable by death, and that this narrow lethal tolerance zone may symbolically stand for a general limitation on desire, on deviations in normative desire. Antigone's residence *on the other side* in Lacan's text (Butler, 2000a, 54; *The Ethics*, 280) implies she assumes (stands for) *alterity* for him. Lacan suggests that as *alterity* Antigone may only live her life as already lost, which he generalizes; Antigone's *othered* position in Lacan's text is established as everyone's liveable possibility, to argue that life in general proceeds in respect to this limit for which alterity stands, that life may be lived and be thought only and always by default as lost in advance. This is more than a communally condemning metaphysical conviction. It is a theory that mobilizes alterity as a metaphysical supposition to efface alterity. Earlier Butler located Lacan in what Freud called "the culture of the death drive. (Butler, 2000a, 29-30.)" Here (in the citation in *Antigone's Claim*, p. 54, above) Butler suggests that a death driven thought stages (symbolic) fatal interdictions in the Lacanian version of symbolic order as its own source of power. Butler rephrases Lacan's claim that Antigone's life is lost in advance, rewrites Antigone's representational function in the Lacanian symbolic order via the turn trope as formulated in Freudian psychoanalytic theory; *the return of the repressed* establishes that nothing is lost and if it is it always returns turned.²⁰ Lacan's death driven thought is doomed to die and as such it is

²⁰ Freud explains repression as "a task of fending [...] dealt with by [...] reversal into the opposite or turning round upon the subject's own self. (Freud, 1978, 147.)"

Repression's failure is *the return of the repressed* he says (154), which, he adds, returns turned (altered) (157).

psychoanalytically defaulted to return, which it does equipped with the power by which it was destroyed, to alter that power - Butler proposes; Lacanian theory returns Antigone from *the other side* of the norm to challenge and modify Lacanian theory and the norm it engenders. Butler poses this as a rhetorical question that also considers the scope of the power of this return. And then she poses an additional question that establishes Antigone's death as a social instance to consider that Antigone challenges the power by which she is relegated to the outskirts of sociality in Lacan's thinking. Butler proposes that this critical question may rewrite the terms of life to write them for the first time; that contrary to Lacan's claim, the terms of liveability - intelligibility's symbolic foundations have never been written at all.

In what follows Butler's method is again to cite Lacan's assertions as questions, to challenge his assertions by proposing (their) alternatives in the form of rhetorical questions. First Butler says that Antigone "push[es] to the limit the realization of something that might be called the pure and simple desire of death as such (Butler, 2000a, 55; *The Ethics*, 282,)" - an assertion cited in Lacan's text that in Butler's is established as a proposition set *in terms of and contrary to* Lacan's conception of Antigone's desire and fate (fatal passion). Mobilizing the failed referential operation of the Lacanian symbolic - the crisis and limit of representation for which Antigone stands wavering between life and death in Lacan's conception, Butler suggests that Antigone expands Lacan's realization. Antigone refers to and transcends Lacan's realization, signifies *the pure and simple desire of death* but also beyond it; by Lacan's own account this *pure and simple desire of death* is quite impure and hardly simple (as we have seen in reviewing his text). Butler goes on to question Lacan's notion of Antigone's desire, as a simple dogged insistence on the kind of criminality that summons death as its goal. And then Butler questions the accuracy of Lacan's conception of Antigone's metaphysical vocation in desire: Lacan's assertion, that "Antigone chooses to be purely and simply the guardian of the being of the criminal as such (Butler, 2000a, 55; *The Ethics*, 283)" rhetorically turns into another question in Butler's text, to propose that instead of desiring mortal guardianship in another's crime Antigone's desire is of the sort that declares an unconscious right - a criminal desire

that would more properly be understood as a claim (a demand and shares) in the Lacanian symbolic law, a challenge to any restriction on desire, a challenge that presents new foundations to life, to symbolic exchanges and communicability - capacity for communication (Butler, 2000a, 55). In this Butler invokes Lacan's views, that the symbolic corresponds the structure of unconscious criminal desire (Butler, 2000a, 91n-15) and that the symbolic is founded upon an alternate legality that precedes symbolic intelligibility - that "invocation of something that is, in effect, of the order of law, but which is not developed in any signifying chain or in anything else. (Butler, 2000a, 51-52; *The Ethics*, 278.)" Butler uses Lacan's notions to Lacan's detriment because she thinks that his account of symbolic regulation is too rigid (she says "hasty foreclosures"), that Lacan blithely extrapolates Antigone's fatal passion to prompt her erasure along with prohibitions against deviant forms of desire that are not incestuous (Butler, 2000a, 30). If as Lacan suggests symbolic law and the sexual crime (criminal desire) are mutually determined, and if as he suggests the sexual crime is a primordial right that precedes symbolic law then by Lacan's own account not only does Antigone have a right to her sexual crimes but Antigone's crimes must necessarily be presupposed by Lacanian symbolic law and abided - Butler suggests. Mutual determination doesn't work both ways for Lacan. The crime always precedes the law - the Lacanian symbolic law. Butler deploys this conception of criminal precedence and mutual determination to prompt the Lacanian symbolic's collapse. For Butler the possibility of a collapse is a positive challenge to Lacan's version of the symbolic law, its liability but its only possibility, but also the possibility of its renewal (variation) considering that intentionally or not Lacan misperceives Antigone's fatal criminal passion. Only a challenged Lacanian symbolic can facilitate liveability because Lacan fails to understand Antigone's desire.

For Lacan Antigone is the keeper of criminal desire. Her sexual deviation is sadomasochism in his view, her mimetic feature enables her to perpetuate her own suffering, which for Lacan is necessary to sustain a symbolic order in which kinship is determined by a fixed set of relations - doubling dad's mistakes, transgressing in desire and in alterity - being *othered* or crossing to the other side, for which there are fatal

metaphysical consequences (attributes). Butler shares in Lacan's logic and concept of symbolic intelligibility, in his legalist language, death bent conception of desire, his notion of a criminal desire that manifests a metaphysical truth, in his correspondence between the crime and the law - the constitutive interdependence and mutual determination between unconscious desire and its symbolic regulative intervention. Butler agrees with Lacan, desire is criminally instigated and an ineffaceability anterior to and separate from any signifying chain, symbolic order, prohibition and communicational convention or exchange, and she agrees that criminal desire is symbolic law's precondition, a precedent legality that symbolic legality must presuppose and to which it must bow. Lacan uses this logic in what Butler thinks are hasty foreclosures. Butler uses this logic to subordinate the Lacanian symbolic to alternate legality in deviant desire. Butler refutes the manner by which Lacan deploys Antigone's desire, her crime and her fate, to organize kinship in terms of too narrow a tolerability-zone. Butler embraces symbolic viability in terms of a wrong or a right though, as Lacan proposes these, as incestuous desire or incestuous-desire-always-foreclosed. Butler does so to refute what emerges from Lacan's account of symbolic possibility i.e. prohibition of all *other* forms of desire. Using Lacan's terms, which evoke unnecessary limitations on desire, Butler shows that desire exceeds these evocations and emerges viable in alternative configurations to the incestuous one.

Hasty foreclosures miss the mark; the Lacanian symbolic fails to regulate desire - allows Antigone to die in the process of asserting her right to her criminal desire that is inscribed in the unwritten law. And the Lacanian symbolic fails to properly understand Antigone's desire when it explains the fact of her deviant love for her brother in terms of her father's mistake. It affirms its inherent inclination to failure once again, not as a referential function - that always already failed reference to incestuous desire, but when it fails its own description. Lacan claims that his version of the symbolic law corresponds to and hampers foundational unconscious criminal desire and the deadly consequences of this. Criminal desire, wrong or right, always triumphs by Lacan's own account, is always anterior to any symbolic order and law. And criminal desire assumes the status of a right in Lacan's text in Butler's opinion. Butler goes with

this too. Rights are inherently legitimate, are a part of the law, entitlements granted by law. Rights stand apart from laws to redress a fault, flaw or a lack in the law. And, rights are immutable; they may not be overridden or contradicted by modifications to the law. The Lacanian symbolic order proceeds, depends upon and must endorse the right to criminal desires that precedes it, even those that do not merit symbolic status in Lacanian symbolic terms. These criminal desires will be the new foundations of symbolic laws to come by Lacan's own standards, begging the question - *are we still in the Lacanian symbolic or have we just observed its demise?*

Chapter 4 - Speculating My Art Practice.

In this chapter I elaborate my visual art practice to produce consistency between it and the previous chapters. I treat my artworks as speculative objects of inquiry. The title - 'Speculating My Art Practice' confirms this to suggest that in its discursive elaboration visual practice is assimilated to speculative philosophy and subordinated to its terms. I begin with an extended discussion that generalizes the artworks to unify their terms, after which I focus on four individual video movies. I analyse and interpret my artwork by comparing it with the speculative interpretations of tragic art conducted earlier. Finally, I consider that visual images of *desire* produce speculative philosophical momentum. I suggest that my art practice is speculative. In this sense the chapter promotes art and philosophy as two equivalent constituents of a single speculative project.

To introduce the artwork - a return to Judith Butler's criticism of the 'natural body' in Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*. Butler says: "[if as Merleau-Ponty thinks] the body is an expressive and dramatic medium, the specifically corporeal locus of existential themes [...] and these themes are gender-specific and fully historicized, then sexuality becomes a scene of cultural struggle, improvisation, and innovation, a domain in which the intimate and the political converge, and a dramatic opportunity for expression, analysis, and change. (Butler, 1989, 98-99.)" My artworks and the images of bodies in them converge *the intimate* and *political* in an interrogative re-elaboration of established visual conventions. *The intimate* is mobilized in this art practice through private acts in self-impelled seclusion and as an affective implication in *the political*. This is understood as public imperatives concerning visual cultural norms and sexual representation. *The body* in the artwork is mobilized as a sexual idea; the image of the body I suggest, is always already sexually implicit - the body implies sex. This is intensified in the artwork via performance (dramatic expression) in corporeal action - bodily acts done in domesticity. The artwork performs visual cultural imperatives, gender specific visual conventions and sexually implicit visual practices, through mimetic interpretations in their terms, to query

sexual coherence as a facet of erasure, to consider how mediation may alter *sex*, how *speculative reflexivity* - tropological turns in received visual conventions engenders new possibilities of *identity*, *desire* and *sex*.

Mimesis facilitates this artwork, emerges as hyperbolic adherence to convention - a practice of obedience, opposition and deviancy (simultaneously) in visual norms, in representations of *sex*, *desire*, *identity* and in the production of *intelligibility*. It renders slippage between acts and identities and is quite synonymous with Butler's conception of performativity. This is understood as a function of iterability in Jacques Derrida's conception (BTM, 95, 244n-7). Mimesis in my artwork features iterability - "the logic that ties repetition to alterity (Derrida, 1977, 180,)" the prospect of radical absenteeism in the certainty of death and the uncertainty of authorial presence, desires and intentions; and the idea of infinite context enabled by this (177-180, 189). A hyped notion of *repetition*, this kind of mimesis proliferates as an emblem of sexual misconduct in my artwork. It engenders unanticipated *turns* through re-enactment.

Desire and *originality* proceed as features of mimesis in my artwork. The fictive status of *originality* is produced through mimetic acts, the generative power of *desire* - through the body of the performer in the artwork, through the production of intimate scenography. Mimetic desire in the artwork - appropriation in established conventions queries the originality-status of the conventions that are mimed. It produces hybrid identities and amalgamated genres. This is the speculative at its utmost. The videos present a generically identifiable set of terms while departing from these at once, to question sexual and identification-al imperatives in hegemony. The fictional status of the subject to which "we" are nonetheless given (Butler, 1995, 134-136) - elaborated in my second chapter in terms of discursive conventions and linguistic mandates, is likewise a concern in my visual art practice. *Fictional status* in my artwork pertains to visual mediation. I suggest that while visual mediation renders fictional subjects, subjects are nonetheless given to it; that while subjects are determined by fictive visual terms, these may be deployed to alter what it means to be a subject. This may

be done via visual practices that waver in the certitude of their own constitutive terminology and imperatives.

In the previous chapter, through Butler's interpretations in the various texts we saw how art practice - tragic literature inspires or assumes (simulates) symbolic viabilities and excesses in these. Antigone's speech - *I don't deny I did the deed* (*Sophocles*, 81) - was elaborated in terms of linguistic performativity. I considered that through her use of language Antigone diversifies the negating context of the question put to her by her king. Creon, her king, seeks establishing if she buried her brother contrary to his command so he asks her: *Do you deny you did this, yes or no?* (*Ibid.*). From his perspective Antigone's response destroys him, his manhood and his sovereign law (83). Analysis of their exchange showed that Creon is more infuriated by Antigone's language than by any of her other contradictions, that this language is mimetic and an assertion of a right; that Antigone asserts a right that he seeks denying which she does by assimilating his language against his imperative to eliminate the ambiguities of symbolic possibilities in language, *sex*, and in *subjectivity* (Butler, 2000a, 39). Through her claim in language Antigone turns (alters) Creon's vocabulary - the discourse of the sovereign, a power set in normative discourse that Antigone assumes by multiplying its sexual annihilations only to contradict and ruin this power (8-12). I suggested that Butler does a similar thing, mimes Hegelian discourse of Antigone, assuming its force to redefine or ruin its sexual annihilations.

Butler considers that Hegel and Lacan suppress the recognizable force of Antigone's language by promoting Antigone's desire as beyond recognition instead (Butler, 2000a, 39, 51, 54). For Hegel and Lacan, Antigone's unrecognizable desire places her outside of proper discourse - outside the laws of kinship and of the state (30). Not fully in either though given to mutual implications among them, Antigone is still without a subject position in Hegel and Lacan's interpretations of the drama (13-14, 46-47). Butler embraces this conception of Antigone's partial residence to expose Hegel and Lacan's evacuation of Antigone from public recognition and proper discourse as erroneous, first by showing that Antigone's language is publicly recognizable and second by explaining that Antigone's partial residence in laws is the dialectical force of

laws, as elaborated by Hegel and which Lacan implores. The laws that are presumed to command Antigone's language and her desire fail their imperatives. They allow Antigone to proceed in unanticipated deviations from them, which renders an opposition to these laws in their terms, an opposition these laws cannot stop (30). Likewise Butler shows us, the Lacanian symbolic law allows Antigone to proceed in a way that contradicts Lacan's imperative to establish Antigone's desire as enigmatic (*The Ethics*, 275; Butler, 2000a, 45-46) and un-represent-able (*The Ethics*, 249-250; Butler, 2000a, 47). Antigone cannot be anything but intelligible in Lacanian terms, her desire deviant though it may be, is established in kinship (symbolic) constraints (Ibid.), her speech - a part of the mutual signifying chain (*Seminar II*, 98; Butler, 2000a, 42). Antigone as such informs the future of symbolic law - new possibilities of communication (Butler, 2000a, 55).

I propose a reading in my visual art practice modelled on this account of partial residence in laws. I suggest that *the norm*, *symbolic law* and *normative discourse* are synonymous with the idea of *convention*, visual or otherwise. And, that my artworks perform the ambiguity of mandatory mimesis in convention in a way that redefines the conventions mimed in the artwork, which impedes their imperatives, diversifies their claims (regulative limits) and produces new possibilities in *subjectivity*. Foregrounding visual acts of misappropriation - wrongful usage in the terms that are mimed, the acts performed in my artwork deviate in convention, in proper accounts of visual norms. This renders an opposition to norms, which the norms enable and cannot stop. It might expand the limits of intelligibility, and rights in law. The artworks expose the limits of tolerance in the conventions they mime, and failure to implement control over the subjects given to these conventions in occasions of obedience and complicity with their terms. They pronounce impossibility of completion in/of norms, by fictional means - artifice, technical affect and surrealism, and through excessive citation, *reflexivity* and ineptitude, inadvertent or deliberate deviations in established visual denominations and in standards of visual propriety. The artwork proceeds in terms of the established conventions of pornography, video art, MTV pop music clips, Bollywood film, and documentary conventions - video-verite or reality cinema and home movies, and less

recognizable, the Israeli military apparatus in which chorus-performance units are deployed to boost morale. Yet the artwork fails to fully become any of these established conventions. This makes it intelligible in limited ways, generically hybrid - a limit art practice. The videos and the bodies in this work facilitate to depart from the terms that are mimed in order to query the body's construction in regulatory schemes of *identity*, to reconsider the body's implicit or explicit sexuality, to understand how images of bodies facilitate ideology and symbolic legibility, and to suggest how bodies may immobilize or regenerate legibility in visual directives and mediation, to alter representational conventions that determine viable subjectivity through sexual or other annihilations.

I make this artwork in terms of the assumption that bodies and acts which exceed the limits of recognition and are still recognizable in limited ways, may expand the limits of recognition and symbolic tolerability. I consider how terms that are prohibited from view may amount to power nonetheless, to proffer a conception of power understood as *recognition scarce of normative definition and consensus*. The constancy of *identity* is queried in the artwork as a visual cultural imperative - the mandate to be and to have a unanimous identity, the idea that identity may at all be maintained, kept selfsame over time and re-enactment. And I query the identities of *sex, desire, intimacy* and *possibility* in terms of *visibility*, as *visual-visible* terms. How visual cultural imperatives concerned with private practices may be altered through visual re-enactment, by dramatizing private acts in the domestic sphere, exacerbating the excessive possibilities of intimacy and seclusion. *Desire* is mobilized in sexual terms and as abstracted longings in the artwork, through the Hegelian dialectic of self-recognition in Butler's conception, while *sex* is posited as a ritual practice in temporality and usage - the idea performativity modifies the performance and is a dynamic measure of thinking *sex*.

Intimacy and *the body* are constructed in terms of *speculative reflexivity* and *drastic presence* - unimpeded individualistic expressions of energetic agitation. *Intimacy* and *privacy* in the artwork engender separatism and hyperbole, (images of) bodies in seclusion doing uninhibited or perverse acts, and devotional duties - strict

adherence to convention, tasks inclined to turn, which turn against themselves and against *the subjects* who perform them. Reflexivity - the speculative philosophical self-conception, the manner by which philosophy defines itself. I elaborated this throughout the dissertation, in the first chapter as a self-reflection bound to turn against itself - a literary rhetorical strategy of analysis (Butler's) set in the psychoanalytic trope of sadomasochism, and a strategic convention of turning (alternation) in oppositional terms - hyperbolic in Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's conception. In my second chapter, it was elaborated as *the turn* trope in the possibility of exceeding binary conceptions of power and expanding given discursive conventions. In the third reflexivity was in the structure of Antigone's speech - the claim in language producing a critical review of the terms that inform it, a mimetic revision in received convention, which spawns a new discourse. *The turn* emerges as a verification of the embodied presence of the subject in my artwork, and as visual tropes, to establish and to question certainties, to consider how mimesis or performativity in *intimacy* may reproduce conceptions of *bodies*, to deregulate standards in bodily practices and generate subjective possibilities instead - unique positional bearings in practices of *desire*. *Subjection, the body, being, desire*, these are linked in my art practice. They emerge to amplify *reflexivity* as a reference to *the self*, to recognizable terms in identities, and as a reference to what is beyond coherent identity, knowable possibilities in publicly recognizable terms (*laws*).

The identity of *the visual* is explored as a phenomenological occasion in the art practice to suggest continuity between visibility and tangibility. This was elaborated as Butler's embrace of Merleau-Ponty's *intertwining*, the notion of embodied reflexive experience in mutual implications between the senses of vision and touch, to replace the Cartesian *knowing subject* (Butler, 2001, 65-66). In this respect I propose that visual art and particularly my own produces *intelligibility* through *visibility*; that prohibited terms may be sanctioned by dint of being seen in publics, and that it may be possible to promote socio-cultural change by visual means. Furthermore, the concept of *the visual-visible* in my artwork establishes *present-ness of the body*, that the body of the performer in the artwork has tangible existence, is a physical presence practicing intimacy; that the artwork documents performances of real-events in real-time,

authentic, realistic renditions of deviancy in public (proper) versions of *desire* and *sex*. Likewise however authenticity in visual norms is produced in my artwork to be queried. This is done through tropological turns - reflexivity, through catachresis - the rhetorical strategy of misnaming attributed to Irigarayan mimesis, but also through *literalisms* - "strict adherence" in exegetical practices.

In my previous chapter I noted the paradox of literalisms in exegetical practices considering that interpretation always refers beyond its object - the text being interpreted. I considered Butler's conception of the Sophoclean literalism in *fundamental law*. The drama (*Antigone*) refers to a law that is fundamentally inherent to socio-cultural order yet which is not in existence nor fully known - a paradoxical reference. This law appears in the form of dramatic speech, dialogic relations - its literal rendition (Butler, 2000a, 38). Butler relays Hegel's perception of this law, how Antigone facilitates it for Hegel. In Hegel's interpretation of the drama, and also in Lacan's, Antigone's partial subjection to laws precludes her subjection at all, and acts as a barrier to the possibility Antigone may represent ethical, social or political imperatives. Butler suggests that this is because Hegel and Lacan question the Sophoclean literalism by literalizing it themselves, Lacan by promoting Antigone in the name of a *death-in-life* (51), Hegel by erasing Antigone's name from his text (31), literalizing her fundamental status in this law in *alternate legality* (Butler, 1999a, xiv). Both literalisms establish the figure of Antigone as a reference to an unwritten unassailable law only to preclude Antigone's viability - that she is *subject*, to obscure the fact that Antigone's actions, desires and language are determined by proper public conventions of law (Butler, 2000a, 37-40, 47). Butler literalizes Hegel and Lacan's erasures in terms of Antigone conceived as a revision to symbolic constraints (55).

The Secret Life of Dafna Ganani (2002-2003) is the first in a series of four video movies that I discuss individually. It proceeds as a literalism in hetero-normative law - dominant visual norms that foreclose homosexuality and lesbianism. It concerns visual cultural ideological apparatuses that render intelligibility by producing sexual ideals. The artwork produces the ideal by failing it - a questionable sexual possibility, inadequate sex in normative versions of sexual representation: an apparent woman

with a wig and a strapped-on dildo fucking a blow-up sex doll in a bedroom on a bed. I deploy home moviemaking techniques, a domestic setting, jittery camera work, and street noise. The editorial arrangement suggests a linear narrative development, it tells the story of how the air goes out of the sex doll in efforts to have sex and procure sexual pleasure. A mimetic catachresis in detumescence, it phallicizes the sex doll.

Sex in the clip is performed as a task - the labour and ritual practice in the historicity of signifiers that reveals how the concept of sex alters through its usage (Butler, 1995, 136). And, sex is performed in terms of mimesis, amplifying mimesis's sexual implications. This is done through hyperbolic citation in hetero-normative law and in the act-identity slippage of "post-structuralist penetration politics" - Butler's *phallic lesbian*. I elaborated this in my second chapter to consider how the vanishing terms in a text may be deployed as a medium of its contrary power. Butler considers that from Irigaray's perspective Plato's text on mimesis completely erases the possibility of *the feminine* that it implies. Butler argues that Irigaray mimes Plato catachrestically, which reifies the Platonic erasure as a specific possibility of femininity in Irigaray's text (BTM, 37). And, that this produces feminine specificity in terms that erase the possibility of phallic lesbianism (51). I suggested that in this Butler reifies the phallic lesbian in her own text, that speculation is literalism presented through a set of open questions about the stability of 'male' and of 'female' when two apparent feminine figures are practicing penetration (50-51). Similarly sex in my artwork is mobilized as a formative-performative occasion (convention), asking - How are coherence of *the self*, gender specificity and role allocation mutually informed by intimate bodily acts, determined in and by sexual practices? Why are some sex acts more prohibited than others in mainstream visual conventions, deemed unworthy of public approval and visibility, conceived as misconduct in standards of visual propriety? What critical possibilities may be gathered from partial coherency in sexual specificity and practices? Can visual improprieties modify sex through its image, or reify various

erasures in images of sexual misconduct and disobedience? Isn't visual transgression foundational to the visual norm?²¹

Considering that visual norms may be altered in terms of their deviations, I propose a standardizing (normalizing) practice in sexual illegibility through this artwork. The sexual occasion that it represents transpires through tropological turning in an unverifiable account of sex - *the turn* trope as elaborated in *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. *The turn* is a mimetic performative figure Butler explains. It partakes the explanation it generates by making a paradoxical reference to its own formative occasion, an occasion that is unverifiable from the start (PLP, 3-4, 201-202n-1). Sexual activity in this artwork is established in terms of the uncertain assumption that a sex act is taking place while this uncertainty is obscured by the assumption (that sex is taking place). The representation of sex in the piece - a very unstable image, falls short of the standard, fails producing a normative visual account of sexual activity. An expression of sexual individualism - not fully heterosexual, nor exactly lesbian, sex in the piece passes for normative sex only partially, is recognizable in limited ways. And if the piece proliferates it may normalize the deviant possibility of sex that informs it. Or, it re-signifies the visual-sexual norm altogether, prompting it to include its fundamental omissions by expanding the meaning of *normative sex*.

The rest of my video work is made in reference to my experience of being subject to Israeli terms of liveability - symbolic Israeli law and its limits. These terms include the Arab/Israeli conflict, constant state of war, mandatory army service. *The Secret Life of Sergeant Ganani: A Trilogy* (2003-2004) mimes the Israeli military apparatus of song and dance - the chorus performance units of the IDF (Israeli Defence Force). It consists of three separate pieces each named after an army song, "No Way Back," "Paratrooper's Song" and "Flowers in the Gun Barrel." Each piece presents a performance of an army song, which is done in the bedroom or bathroom. The subject in the videos impostors an army soldier in singing the songs. The lyrics are set in

²¹ This question informs my proposed postdoctoral research project 'Visibility in Erasure: The Use of Sexy Bodies at the Beginning of the 21st Century.'

nationalist ideology and sexual dialectic. They impart the story of the nation's establishment, producing its ethos and historical mythology in terms of *death in action*, glorifying this imagery as the ultimate sacrificial act to the state by its subjects, as a necessity for the establishment of community. The songs are performed in state-venues and are popular hits in Israel today as they were in its becoming. In my artwork they are performed to be questioned, and to question their persistent presence in contemporary Israel. This is done through ambiguity of the performance, and through *reflexivity*. The artworks speculate on a deed done in the past - mandatory army service - critically reviewing it, miming to magnify sexual implications in the lyrics of the songs, performing a sexual transgression precisely in the terms of Israeli military apparatus of song and dance, deploying the recognizable force of the IDF (choral units) and its sexual annihilations to rhetorically re-render it as a power of (its) contrary persuasion. Shot in one take, using unedited footage, this artwork suggests video verite, a sense of *the real*, that these are documentary renditions of domestic performances in zealous nationalism, which the artworks deliver and defy at once. Butler says this of Antigone's deployment in the language of sovereignty (Butler, 2000a, 28). I suggest this artwork is a form of power implicated in the power it opposes, like the kind of feminism that Antigone represents for Butler (2).

In this I propose a comparison between this artwork and Antigone's speech. The artwork - a reproduction in the military apparatus of Israeli sovereign law, the speech - a reproduction in Creon's sovereign law, both set in the power of a normative discourse. The main similarity between the two concerns ambiguity of performance in the power of normative discourse, that complicity with law and its defiance are mutually implicit. The central dissimilarity concerns the specifics of sexual deviation in each reproduction, that incestuous desire is not fundamental to Israeli law while it does inform Antigone's speech. This is suggested by the other characters in the drama (*Sophocles*, 82) and by its speculative interpretations. Additional differences concern the fictiveness of the two productions, and how ambiguity winds its way to the end of each drama. Fictiveness facilitates the two but it operates differently in each. As far as we know Antigone is a fictional figure, the terms informing her speech are fictive, as

are her death, the death of her brother, her burial act, Creon's prohibition against the burial, and her speech itself. In comparison and although the subject in my artwork is fictive, the terms informing this artwork are not fictional, Israeli military apparatus of song and dance is a reality as are its subjects. And, nor is my reproduction in it fully fictitious considering it is a videoed live performance.

Antigone is fatally punished for her insolent language - a sexual transgression in the terms of normative discourse - sovereign law (Butler, 2000a, 9-11; *Sophocles*, 83). Her punishment extends from Creon to Hegel and to Lacan. Butler suggests that Antigone's speech impels the survival of the distinction between kinship and state as a fatal ambiguity to the end of the drama (Butler, 2000a, 7). And, that Hegel and Lacan's interpretations of the drama promote a rigorous dissociation between the mutually determined terms of the laws of kinship and state. The laws, which regulate language and desire are converged Butler suggests. Similarly, my artwork stages the distinction between *the intimate* and *the political* in terms that are mutually determined, the possibility of domesticity is portrayed in military terms and vice versa - military apparatus is established in domestic practices. I stress the impossibility of separating these terms. However, ambiguity, though it survives in my artwork in these terms and in respect to mutual implications between *complicity with* and *opposition to* law, it is not finally fatal. Making this artwork and the subject in it is not punishable by death. On the contrary, failing or opposing Israeli law, insubordination to its mechanisms, refusal to serve in the military - these increase the Israeli subjects' chances of survival, prevents their death in action.

Butler considers that in Antigone's drama the representation of the idiom of the state is performed by that of kinship (Butler, 2000a, 10). She suggests that there is no (concept of) kinship without that of the state and vice versa - that military apparatus is formed in terms of kinship bonds, by replication and exploitation of kinship terms by the state. Ambiguity of this distinction is apparent in Antigone's relation to her brother after his death Butler says. Antigone assumes her brother's manhood by idealizing to vanquish it in a sexual dialectic (rivalry) with him in his death. This prompts Antigone to question the notion of glory in his burial (11). Similarly my

performances assume the claims in the lyrics of the army songs, to mobilize death in war as a glorified occasion as also to query this notion, the idea that cultural coherence and coherence of the self must by necessity be elaborated in terms of war as an indelible constitutive term, the inevitable tragic doom of the nation as of its individuals. Mimetic activity in the songs of the Israeli army chorus units prompts the fiction of the distinction between individuality and the state only to reveal that in fact there is no such distinction, that military apparatus inhabits the bonds of the broader community in Israel through its cultural forms. Through my performances in these songs I protest against *glory in burial*, which the army songs promote as the fundamental bond among state and citizens and the basis of community in Israel, when in fact death is radically individuating.

Jaffa Bollywood (2006) literalizes an escapist fantasy. Or it performs the idea that fantasy is the only way to overcome the violent tragic terms of the city of Jaffa. These terms include poverty, socio-economic disparity, ethnic and sexual discriminations, and social injustices. These go unrepresented in my artwork. They are evident only in its title. Through naming the title of the piece delivers and preserves the violence of the city's historical establishment and the contemporary manifestation of this violence. The piece has two parts and is shot from an estate housing project in Jaffa, through a window overlooking the street. The window becomes evident in the second part of the clip. In the first part we see two Vishnu-like figures floating in midair slowly coming into view from the distance. They emerge from nothing and gradually grow in size, showing their efforts to stand on one leg and position their limbs like proper Indian divinities. They are multiplied and resized in video effect to have numerous arms. Each followed by a delayed copy of itself, gives a sequential formation to the movement of their arms. The two in the forefront converse and mime one another. The others follow along in unison. The sun behind them is animated. It also grows in size. It blows out of proportion by the end of the first part of the piece. This happens after the Vishnu figures fade out. Then the first part ends and begins the second revealing the window and the title again. Immediately the Vishnu images fade-in and begin their routine. Then suddenly the audio track changes, street noise and car

engine sounds turn into Indian hip-hop remix, and the Vishnu figures individuate, they fall out of formation and more Vishnus emerge in the sky, dancing and gliding over the street, the building and cars. Finally the scene fully facilitates a dancing-space, animated stage design - waterfalls cascading from elephant trunks, the cityscape completely vanishes from view. *Hyperbologic* is the speculative mechanism which best describes this possibility of simultaneously overcoming and preserving tragic terms.

Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe conceives hyperbologic as an alternative conceptual mechanism to *aufhebung* - Hegelian speculative dialectical overcoming. He thinks that *aufhebung* is a destructive mimetic gesture of interpretation, which takes tragic art as its object; that Hegel mimes tragic art in the process of writing about it only to deny the constitutive status of tragic art in the establishment of speculative philosophy - a discursive genre that “sees” itself as more critical than tragic art (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1998, 208-209). Lacoue-Labarthe is concerned with how philosophy establishes *truths*. He questions speculative truth-claims and thinks that tragic art discloses alternative truths to those in its Hegelian interpretations (223, 227). Hyperbologic is a speculative mimetic mechanism that underlies the definition of tragic art - he says (231). It is the tragic implication in the speculative, which mimes back. It mimes *aufhebung* to stop its attenuations (230-231) in the production of oppositional metaphysical terms - *presence*, *identity* and *causality*. Hyperbologic immobilizes the oppositional element of these terms by alternating *presence* with *absence*, *identity* with *difference*, *cause* with *effect*, and *truth* with *fiction* (231). This maintains an oppositional conceptual framework but it engenders a continuous alternation within it, to diminish its erasures (denial of tragic art). I elaborated this in my first chapter reading in “The Caesura of the Speculative” (208-235). I ended my chapter by proposing a certain revision to hyperbologic, which I do to address the sexual discriminations in speculative philosophy that Lacoue-Labarthe does not - Platonic prohibition against female mimes. Considering that hyperbolic is a mimetic form, I prioritize its mimetic implications i.e. sexual ambiguities, to alter definitive sexual conceptions in speculative interpretations of tragic art. *Jaffa Bollywood* is set in this reversion to hyperbologic.

Jaffa Bollywood is comic theatre that has tragedy in its structure, and mimesis too. It re-presents (mimes) the subjects of Jaffa by generating the tragic definitive truth of their constitutive condition only to pronounce it in unreserved ambiguity, to remove the barriers posed by rigid terms of identity. It immobilizes the oppositional sexual, cultural and ethnic norms of the city, promotes cultural diversity by converging Bollywood filmic gesture, video art and reality video. It promotes sexual ambiguity by alternating 'male' and 'female' specificities. Oppositional terms are mobilized in the piece to be fully assimilated each in the other, never to be resolved in unanimous terms. *The self* and *the other* are likewise established hyperbologically, are made of images of a single performer, produced to exceed specificity and singular *identity*, to hamper positional uniformity. Oppositions are staged in the piece in terms that exceed oppositional thinking. This is hyperbologic. The tragic reality of the city of Jaffa diminished by an image of everyday life on its street, produced as meta-physical placing - floatation, sexual and geographic dislocation. The private domain in the artwork, suggested by the sound of a toilet being flushed, and tea being made in the kitchen - household sounds are set against images of the street, buildings and birds in the sky. This mobilizes *and* blurs a division between the public and private domains. The transition from specific location to absolute fantasy rescinds the norms of the city, which, nonetheless, are performed in the name "Jaffa."

Love and Exile (2007) is a hyperbolic rendition of unrequited longing for *homeland*. It performs *displacement*, is a literalism in it, and in *desire* and hybrid identity. These terms transpire in or through the body of the subject in the artwork, a body presented as a kind of physical momentum interrupted by its desire, displacement, and hybrid terms of identity. Desire in the piece emerges as the "transfiguration premised on the impossibility of return. (Butler, 2000a, 14.)" This is Butler's reading in Hegelian dialectic of recognition in "Lordship and Bondage." The idea desire informs the manner by which one knows oneself which is at once implicated in knowing alterity, a reflexive experience that happens in profoundly dislocating passionate directives - unalterable reorganizations in subjectivity (*the self*); and the sexual character, or velocity of this condition of longing which motivates and directs

subjectivity in the process of its *becoming*. Desire as such produces a dramatic change in the body's appearance (transfiguration). It conveys a forever-hampered drive to achieve final restoration, a perpetual effort to return to *the self* as a point of departure and a reference to self-coherence. This is never attainable for the body in exile - an image which performs its own dispersion.

The piece begins with an image of the sea at sunset in the city of Jaffa. It cuts to a woman dancing in a bedroom. She dances to the opening cords of the Israeli national anthem *Hatikva*. This literally translates to "the hope." The dance is staged around hybrid terms of Israeli identity, my own half European-Jewish, half Arab-Jewish origin.²² It ends with a looped image of convulsion, and with *take me home country roads*, sung in a droning (devastated) voice mixed in the soundtrack. Throughout a tenuous subjective state of motion is established through deceleration in normative bodily gesture. This is done using slow motion video effect. The soundtrack is disarrayed, involves contradictory styles of music and cacophonous combinations, dissonant sounds layered against each other, disparate ethnic-regional scores juxtaposed, remixed and expanded in temporality - tampered in speed through sound effects. Mixing and merging recognizable styles of movement - dance motifs from oppositional geographical locations, the images produce an amalgamated cultural form that questions the constancy of its own identity, and the possibility of belonging at all.

Reflexivity mobilizes the body in the artwork. The body proceeds as an aspiration to accomplish its definition, reflecting upon its own movements - the dancing motifs that it performs. Its motion renders an endeavour to become and be recognizable. It attempts adapting, constantly readjusting itself to the music in the soundtrack and to ideas about stylistic fluency. Efforts to adhere recognizable dance conventions fail to reference unanimously, to amount to stable constructions, visual cultural norms of movement and dance. This produces a limit practice - the body in exile is generically unintelligible. And it presents a contradiction of terms, the terms of

²² Arab Jews are Jews from Arab-Muslim regions.

its possibility - an *immobilized momentum*, its performance of exile signifies *being away from home* as also being at home - *the home* itself.

Butler considers that performing norms always entails repetition in their terms and that repetition always exceeds these terms and self-same identity; that this posits instability and de-constitution in norms (BTM, 10). I suggest that the sequence of images in *Love and Exile* is set in what Butler describes as performativity in norms yet that it exceeds her description - that the visual body in this artwork is a unique speculative effort formed in stylistic abandon. It fully depletes its performance of standards, destroying the ritual productions and styles by which it proceeds. This body distorts itself, is incoherent in normative terms, its movements, motion, interruptions to these - they are quite impossible. Its continuity hampered, self-impaired, it is disabled by the rationale of its desire, the vulnerability of the condition of its longing, a desire so intense it impounds this body, the kind of desire that is or can never be assuaged. It scatters itself, is its own displacement, and so it finishes in the looped images of convulsion, not a release from its constraints but from efforts to perform its possibility properly - to be coherent, an intelligible form. The looped image of bodily gesture proposes (the notion of) eternal desire, suggests that the figure is locked in its unrequited desirous state forever, yet its termination, just before fade-out, is very focused, and extremely intense, which promotes its desire as a force of endurance.

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