REVIEW ESSAY

Counter-fantasies: On Judith Butler, Psychotherapy and Politics[1]

By **Manu Bazzano**

Once during a *Living Theatre* street performance, a bystander (later identified as a lecturer on our campus) suddenly jumped into action by punching one of the actors, who promptly hit him back. The accident caused a stir; lively discussions ensued. At that particular point in the performance, the actors were advocating non-violence. 'You see?' – the lecturer gleefully remonstrated – 'non-violence may be a nice idea, but it's clearly impracticable.' For all my love of the *Living Theatre* (an experimental New York ensemble inspired by Artaud and motivated by an anarchist/pacifist ethos, and whose performances I attended religiously in my twenties), I sympathised with the lecturer, as I thought his stance expressed a fairly established argument within the Left which claims (or used to claim) that we live and breathe within a pre-existing force-field of violence, and that to believe that one can freely adopt a morally superior non-violent stance is near-delusional.

In her latest book *The Force of Non-Violence*, Judith Butler (2020), a contemporary gadfly like few others in a lineage of indispensable philosophers, begs to differ. Her version of non-violence is thankfully removed from the abstract, saintly stance normally associated with the term; it is wedded, instead, to unambiguous political commitment to a notion of equality grounded in interdependence. For Butler, non-violence is not an absolute principle but an ongoing tussle with the tangible presence of violence in society. It is not passivity, but an admirable way to channel our seemingly innate aggressive instinct. Non-violence means above all accepting aggression and then choosing *not* to act violently.

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Clearly, there is more to violence than the physical blow, the rape, the verbal assault. Social structures are themselves violent, engendering and supporting discrimination and injustice, including systemic racism. The book's subtitle is *An Ethico-Political Bind*: when assembling her more avowedly *political* argument, Butler converses in a compelling manner with the likes of Walter Benjamin, Foucault, Frantz Fanon and Etienne Balibar, building on their important legacies, rectifying, often persuasively, some of their stances. When bringing in psychoanalysis in order to discuss the more unconscious aspects of *ethics*, she relies (excessively, in my view) on Melanie Klein's hermetically sealed description of the psyche.

The 'force' in the book's title may well be included in the meaning of *Gewalt* in German (e.g. *Naturgewalt*, 'force of nature'), a term used by Walter Benjamin in his seminal essay 'On the critique of violence' (1921, in Benjamin, 2009), and normally translated as 'violence'. In that sense, the *force* of non-violence also indicates the necessary violence (aggression) of non-violence, even though this

very same definition has been used manipulatively by authoritarian governments since the times of Max Weber to chastise peaceful demonstrators and, historically, to condemn creatively disruptive actions such as work strikes, hunger strikes, sanctions, cultural boycotts, petitions, and all the different ways of refuting unjust, inhuman, homophobic and racist authority – *Black Lives Matter* being a case in point. 'Force' is a term pregnant with meaning: a Nietzschean/Deleuzean slant, not mentioned by Butler, would differentiate between the *reactive force* of State, government and police aimed at defending institutional injustice tooth and nail, and the *active force* of progressive movements, aimed at instating equality and justice (Bazzano, 2019).

Non-violence cannot be reductively defined as a ban against killing, nor can it be exclusively claimed by dubious political stances which favour an abstract notion of 'life' while deeming expendable – 'ungrievable' is the term Butler uses since her tour de force *Frames of War* (Butler, 2010) – the very real and concrete life of others. Consider the *Pro-Life* movement: the existential condition of the woman (or the person barely living on constant life-support) is ignored in the name of a merely notional defence of life. Consider the *Right to Exist* movement: Israel's relentless and scot-free brutality against the Palestinians is sanctified in the name of 'self-defence'.

There are several interesting parallels here with Walter Benjamin; in the aforementioned essay he confronts Kurt Hiller, for whom 'higher still than the happiness and justice of a particular existence is existence as such', seeing Heller's view as 'wrong, even dishonourable' (2009, p. 26). Privileging abstract existence (*Dasein*) over existents, i.e. the concrete life of sentient beings, is, incidentally, Heidegger's dishonourable blunder at the core of his thought.
'Self-defence' is a case in point: *who* or *what* is the self evoked here? Who or what is defending itself against the alleged threat of desperate migrants dying at sea, against black people choked to death or shot in the back by police officers? It would appear that the net of relatedness in which this 'self' is embedded is confined to the lives of those who are proximate and similar, whose lives are deemed more valuable and more grievable than others.

This brings us to the question of interdependence itself, a key concept in Butler's current argument, though one that is, however, insufficiently articulated. This is where a brief foray into Buddhist thought may be of help. Central to the Buddha's teaching is *dependent origination* ('if this exists, that exists; if this ceases to exist, that also ceases to exist'), a notion that percolated into Western culture via the American transcendentalists, and was (badly) rendered as 'inter-connectedness'. In the process of translation, what was meant to be a far-reaching deconstruction of the self, a 'seeing-through' its ephemeral, painfully non-autonomous (i.e. non self-existing) nature, morphed into a Romantic paean to the unity among all things and of harmony between humans and 'Mother Nature'. The first stirrings of two profoundly naive stances that are pervasive today – namely, contemporary psychotherapy's 'relatedness' and our thoroughly anthropocentric romance with the wilderness – may be traced here.

What is missing in the notion of interdependence which Butler inadvertently subscribes to – *Anicca* in Pāli, *anitya* in Sanskrit, *impermanence* in English; that is, the absence of an abiding self in all living things. Grievability, a key Butlerian notion, begins here: in life, or rather deathlife (*shōji* in Zen). My suggestion to base non-violence in impermanence does not invalidate her plea. On the contrary, it makes it all the more potent: all lives are equally grievable because each life is unique and all the more precious because impermanent in an impermanent world. And

each death, Derrida would say, is the end of the world as such, since each human being is the remarkable and unrepeatable origin of the world itself. This dewdrop world is but a dewdrop world. And yet....

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Butler's stance remains unique, her work building on poststructuralism and Critical Theory, injecting them with the urgency and passion of feminism, gender politics and identity, renewing and revising the often stale political discourse of the traditional Left. Among other things, her work over the years has been useful, I believe, in helping us realise that despite psychoanalysis' many constitutively normative biases (for instance, the elevation of the Oedipus complex to a transcendent structure essential in the making of the self), it may be possible to make use of its language, insights and methodologies, and turn psychoanalysis against its own cherished doctrines and hopefully (I am being optimistic) into an arsenal for psychical subversion. All the same, the fact remains that Butler sees eye-to-eye with psychoanalysis' structural premises and does not see them as intrinsically normalising (Colebrook, 2014). Fortunately for some of we practising therapists, Deleuze and Guattari (1972) helped us see clearly that Freud's psychoanalysis is *intrinsically* normative and that its tenets need to be taken with a deconstructive pinch of salt. Clare Colebrook explains:

> For Deleuze and Guattari... it is that negative notion of desire and anxiety – the very structure of psychoanalysis *as a theory* – which remains tied to normalizing notions of 'man'. For Freud it is anxiety that effects repression: the subject, faced with a world of intensity and affect, must delimit and organize the libido into a state of equilibrium or constancy. (Colebrook, Internet file)

At times, psychoanalytic theory proves too binding even for Butler, as demonstrated by her critique of psychoanalytic intersubjectivity that she offered years ago in relation to the work of Jessica Benjamin (e.g. Butler, 2004). It built up an argument which contemporary psychotherapy would learn a great deal from – *if*, that is, the latter were ever open to question the now normative ideal of relatedness (Mackessy & Bazzano, 2020). Briefly: at the heart of Butler's argument was the notion that the therapeutic dyad is 'an achievement, not a presupposition' (Butler, 2004, p. 146). Rupture and destruction are ever-present in the inevitably asymmetrical encounter, and constitute the foundation for psychical transformation. Hegel's notion of recognition (*Anerkennung*, also rendered as 'acknowledgement') in the 'I and You' encounter between the Master and the Slave (crucial in laying down the first concrete foundations for a historically concrete *self* beyond the solipsistic perception of 'me' inherited by liberal and, later, neoliberal individualism) never overlooks struggle and conflict, nor gives in to humanistic sentimentality. Tersely reinstated by Butler in her postscript to her book is also a central argument found in Hegel's *Phenomenology*: the dyadic encounter is only a small if important part of the story. Yes, I need you and you need me in order to endure and thrive. But you and I need the tangible presence of a supporting world of social relations. What we do *not* need is a monstrous technostructure, an anthropomorphised market economy whose demands we're obliged to feed, day in and day out, with our own precarious lives of flesh and blood.

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There is *phantasy* and *fantasy*, Judith Butler says, paraphrasing Melanie Klein's view of the psyche. *Phantasy* is unconscious, often setting the scenery for the frenzied phantasms of racism, homophobia, hatred of the poor and the migrants. *Fantasy*, on the other hand, is understood as conscious aspiration, crucial both in fashioning a vision of origins (as in the so-called 'state of nature', whether the dog-eats-dog Hobbesian version or the noble wildness of Rousseau) and in *forging a new imaginary for the future*. This is no mere academic disquisition; without adequate (counter)-fantasy, there's no future for justice, equality, or for an ethics of solidarity.

Counter-fantasy is sorely missing in the contemporary political Left, a lacuna expressively addressed in this book. The Left is bound to lose again and again if it relies solely on old narratives and worldviews, especially when it is up against, for instance, the deeply entrenched conservatism of English civic society. Former Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn was subjected to a carefully and cynically orchestrated campaign of political assassination at the hands of a unanimous chorus of mercenary hacks, distinguished raconteurs of centrist hogwash *à la* Jonathan Freedland, and the abysmally dull management consultancy project headed by Keir Starmer. With hindsight, the difficult question is whether the core of the project of profound and much-needed renewal behind Corbyn, for all its tremendous courage, ethical rigour and commitment, lacked a coherent counter-fantasy.

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Melanie Klein's emphasis on the inevitable tangle of love/hate in intimate relationships certainly rings true, and it may be helpful in motivating one of the 'applications' of psychotherapy outside the clinic – namely, an emancipatory ethico-political project unburdened by credulity. Equally useful is her reminder that you and I are to one another defective replacements for our irrevocable past. Her discovery of partial objects was a stroke of genius, a very perceptive insight into the structure and workings of the psyche, but hopelessly devoted to so-called 'integration', with fatal consequences for psychotherapy to this day. Integration is a prescriptive and ludicrous imposition: 'parts' are *not* destined to be included within a prearranged 'whole', as Melanie Klein believes, nor do they necessarily constitute the disastrous origin of the paranoid-schizoid position, one that is supposedly going to be fixed through re-incorporation of the various splinters within a multi-faceted psyche.

From Nietzsche (1968, p. 12) we learned that ascribing unity to phenomena is precisely one of the meanings of *nihilism*, caused by our having 'lost the faith in [our own and the world's intrinsic] value'. Believing that we need to ascribe our own cute notion of unity to an unfathomable, excessive world is nihilistic: as if the world would be nothing (*nihil*) without our normative fantasies. Equally, envisaging a form of intrapsychic unity and a consolatory holistic inter-relatedness that were once lost ignores that there is another, altogether different unifying link which also constitutes a valid, *emancipatory* alternative to the integrated 'whole' dreamed up by Klein and by virtually most contemporary psychotherapists after her. Its name is *desire*; its work is *desiring-production* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972), a future-oriented (rather than archaeological), liberative practice that understands psyche not as a theatre but as a factory.

We are not here to repeat, redress or refurbish an Oedipal, Hamletian or Antigonian scenography. Nor are we here to itemise and embalm the silver river of experience within the precincts of some insipid Dasein, a set of smothering Jungian archetypes or some farcical Wachowskian matrix. What prevents us each

time from conceiving of desire as a generative, active force rather than a reactive force based on lack? Fear. And what prompts us to supinely accept each time the sinister surrogate of unity available, i.e. an autocratic and controlling technostructure that governs our existence? The answer, again, is fear: not the Kierkegaardian anxiety, precursor of independence, or the intrinsic existential dread born out of wisdom, but the reactive panic at the magnitude of lifedeath, the fleeting sight of which makes us reach for the closest bargain on offer in the metaphysical jumble sale.

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Drawing sizeable inspiration from Melanie Klein, as Butler does, is a problematic move. Klein's emphasis on the process of 'projection' cannot be seriously situated at the origin of psychical formation, unless your name is Bishop George Berkeley. Not everything comes from the so-called inner life, 'like rabbits or doves from the magic box of tricks' (Laplanche, 1999, p. 133). This (literally) *self-centred*, 'Ptolemaic' view of human experience conveniently forgets that *others are no mere projections*; their presence is real, thoroughly external, concrete and compelling. We cannot simply conjure up the other out of the hat of the same as all idealist thinkers have done, from Berkeley to Fichte to (late) Hegel. I cannot conveniently manufacture the alien simply in order to better recognise and acknowledge myself and my existence. The external, real existence of the other cannot be re-appropriated for myself and my life project.

The other's real presence is mysterious, painful – *seductive* even, to use Laplanche's (and early Freud's) unequivocal, untimely terminology – and it is precisely this factor that constitutes the basis for the creation of a radical ethics. Even more important is the other's *enigmatic message* to the self, a message the other is not fully conscious of, a message subtly working within us, opening our experience to the domain of *culture*. It is by working, more or less consciously, with the other's enigmatic message within us that we come to compose our songs, dance our dance, and paint our canvas, and in the process learn the lessons of solidarity and transformation. Our dance (our cultural message) to the world is bound to be political even if we happen to live, as we all are, within gated and imagined communities. It is in the nature of the cultural message to fly over those gates and reach receptacles, be they contemporary or future. The Paris Commune continues with the October Revolution with May '68 and with every new contemporary and future insurgence. The song of our cultural message may be set to avant-garde music or a popular ballad, or to the rhythms of chanting and shouting of outrage at the White House, at 10 Downing Street and wherever privilege and conceit huddle and squeeze, oozing their scented stink on to the streets of our cities.

The above are precisely the sort of subversive insights and implications lying dormant and inexplicably unseen within the psychoanalytic/psychotherapeutic cultural legacy. Inexplicably, that is, as long as one passes over the embarrassingly sycophantic stance contemporary psychotherapy on the whole has assumed towards the (neopositivist, neoliberal) powers.

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Given how indispensable the cultural domain is to revolutionary politics, it is baffling that it should be entirely missing from Butler's ethico-political project. To Antonio Gramsci (1971) we owe the often-quoted, rarely applied insight about the importance of *cultural hegemony*, crucial especially for any emancipatory political project operating within the manipulative democracies of the developed world. No plausible examination of violence can afford to

bypass predominance by consent, the smuggling of ideology as common sense, the manufacturing of false consciousness, the cultural manipulation with which ruling classes and elites historically hold sway, before they resort to coercion, mass incarceration and police brutality. A counter-hegemonic cultural struggle is crucial to a political project of emancipation; without new visions outside the narrow parameters of neoliberalism, the Left does not stand a chance in the world.

The other important facet of hegemony (one that looks, with progressive forces on the defensive on a global scale, disconsolately remote) is, for Gramsci, the persistent effort to maintain cultural hegemony even when progressive forces are in power. The set of loyalties on which that hegemony is founded is in constant need of re-adjustment and re-negotiation (Simon, 2015). This is diametrically opposed to projects such as the UK's New Labour and others across the world, for whom gaining and remaining in power invariably means abandoning progressive cultural values and adhering to the coarse ideologies of nationalism, social climbing, motivational codswallop and supine obeisance to the dictates of an anthropomorphised market.

True, the Gramscian notion of hegemony rarely features in socialist Anglophone literature and discourse. But there are remarkable exceptions, particularly the extraordinary work of Stuart Hall (1988) and that of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). There are unsettling parallels between Gramsci's 1920s and more recent dark ages when (with Thatcher and Reagan in power) the sinister wailing was first heard as from the cradle of Rosemary's baby of what became the new neoliberal norm, the rule of the 1 per cent over the compliant and often therapised 99 per cent. Paraphrasing and reframing Gramsci for our times, Stuart Hall relived and reflected on Gramsci's painful disappointment when, after the October Revolution, the tide turned, all over Europe, in the opposite direction. When a *conjuncture* unrolls, there is no turning back. In Hall's own words:

> What I have called 'Gramsci's question' in the *Notebooks* emerges in the aftermath of that moment, with the recognition that history was not going to go that way, especially in the advanced industrial capitalist societies of Western Europe. Gramsci had to confront the turning back, the failure, of that moment: the fact that such a moment, having passed, would never return in its old form. Gramsci, here, came face to face with the revolutionary character of history itself. When a conjuncture unrolls, there is no 'going back'. History shifts gears. The terrain changes. You are in a new moment. You have to attend, 'violently', with all the 'pessimism of the intellect' at your command, to the 'discipline of the conjuncture'. (Hall, 1988, p. 162)

We must attend, 'violently' (that is, urgently, forcefully) – Hall says, paraphrasing Gramsci – to the discipline required by the seemingly intractable and concerted challenges of cultural, economic and political dominance by the dark forces of ignorance and conceit. In Butler's terms, we must attend to the challenge we now face with the full *force* of non-violence. What she does *not* say is that despite obvious differences with the 1920s, the Right dominates the present conjuncture culturally as well as politically, and that without addressing the issue of cultural hegemony, the Left is forever doomed. It is my belief that the *ethics* in the ethico-political project promoted by Butler may be better assisted by utilising the *subversive* insights present in psychotherapy rather than settling with the psychical conservatism present in those aspects of the Freudian/Kleinian model upon which Butler seemingly relies.

There *are* parallels between the 1920s and the current conjuncture – not so much in terms of the observable likeness between historical

fascists and the sinister characters now pacing the international leadership catwalk of horrors, but more in terms of the nature of the *crisis*. Stuart Hall's insights are invaluable here. The crisis in question – in the 1920s as in the late 1980s when Hall was reflecting on this, as in our current circumstances – is a *monumental crisis of the Left*. Not the very same crisis, but one that is recognisable now, as I write this, on a September day in 2020, in the *now of recognisability*. The Right has morphed and shifted with incredible cunning, getting people strolling in Hungry Ghosts Boulevard with the promise of financial freedom in the dark years of Thatcher's reign, and now wearing jeans, sharing and caring on social media while shouting for 'liberty' in shrill homo-social rallies in support of Trump, while in little England we call an incompetent and opportunistic prime minister affectionately by his first name. The Left has conceived of the Right as 'always exactly the same: the same people, with the same interests, thinking the same thoughts' (Hall, 1988, p 162). In moments of profound political crisis, the discourse on the Left also becomes oversimplified and defensive, clutching for respectable and puritanical allegiances in the vain hope of gaining the attention of a chattering majority kept in the dark and fed on *Fox News*. This *may* (just about) explain Butler's perplexingly defensive choice of clutching for support from Klein's conservative view of the psychical domain as well as in the ethico-political stance of Gandhi.

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The latter choice is untenable, for Gandhi was a man whose ontological absolutism, hatred of the body, divinely inspired, eloquent defence of the brutal, unjust and racist caste system *and* of racial segregation against black people in Africa – justly denounced over the years by the likes of the luminous Dalit leader B.R. Ambedkar (2016), Perry Anderson (2013), Arundhati Roy (2014, 2017), Ashwin Desai and Goolam Vahed (2015) among others – have began to discolour somewhat Gandhi's genteel aura imprinted on the minds and T-shirts of deeply conservative middle-class yogis and yoginis gazing at their precious navels on expensive yoga mats and healing the Earth one spoonful of muesli at a time between one asana and the other.

The Greek and Latin origins of the term 'crisis' suggest a decisive moment, when things can get better or worse in a disease. When faced with a client's/patient's individual crisis, the psychotherapist's task is to help rebuild (or build from scratch) the psychic transitional space eroded by an environment bent on pursuing unsavoury goals – in our neoliberal age, *profit* for the 1 per cent and the maintenance of an alienated existence for all involved – rather than *culture*. But there is a twist, as Julia Kristeva (1987) made abundantly clear. Dangerous and uncertain it may be, but a crisis also represents an atypical moment of departure from the enclosure of our alienated existence; the psychotherapist's ethico-political task is to make sure that psychotherapy acts as 'the instrument of a departure from that enclosure, not as its warden' (ibid., p. 379). The question is: 'Are we to build [through the creation of] a psychic space a certain mastery?' Or would we be better off pursuing a different course of action – namely, to 'follow, impel, favour breakaways, drifting?' (ibid.). Merely attempting to stitch together the old psychic patchwork of identifications and projections that rests on the reassuringly dull and claustrophobic bedrock of family sagas recycled *ad infinitum* by a narcotic pseudo-culture is the task of a psychic constabulary, not of a psychotherapist. Under the guise of crisis, a different way of being may be struggling to emerge. In this domain of *undecidability*, the therapist's/analyst's task is to help others speak, write and mould an uncertain language through *free association* – a lost art in our barren psychic landscape. For there are no words (yet)

for the cluster of emergent phenomena we often call a crisis. The eccentric, polyvalent nature of this new discourse is a breakthrough, a threshold outside the old mummy–daddy scenarios, something that cannot be achieved via that tired existential trope, 'meaning'.

It is not a matter of filling John's 'crisis' – his emptiness – with meaning, or of assigning a sure place to Juliet's erotic wanderings. But to trigger a discourse where his own 'emptiness' and her own 'out-of-placeness' become essential elements, indispensable 'characters'... of a work in progress. What is at stake is turning the crisis into a *work in progress* (Kristeva, 1987, p. 380).

9

Overt, arrogantly advertised violence (as in the killing of George Floyd) is often the exhibitionistic display of an unchecked autocratic *id* run amok and becoming personified in high office as ogre (Trump, Bolsonaro), buffoon (Johnson, Berlusconi) or a combination of the two (Mussolini) – each era in turn producing its own variation on a hideous assembly-line of flashers and bullies. Historically, as in the 1930s, overt violence is the frenzied last-resort reaction from a ruling class terrified of the looming spectres of democratic socialism or libertarian communism. Extreme forms of coercion are only occasionally implemented in civic societies narcotised by social media and the so-called news dished out by the corporations.

In his terse, astoundingly prescient essay 'Postscript on the societies of control', Deleuze (1992) traces the development of forms of domination exercised by different societies through history: *societies of sovereignty* gave way in the Napoleonic era to *disciplinary societies* (brilliantly described by Foucault), in turn ousted by our contemporary *societies of control* where corporate 'healthy' competition between employees and the all-pervading 'motivation' pits one individual against the other while simultaneously dividing each individual within.

Focusing on the shift from discipline to control (and long before Alan Sugar's *The Apprentice* was conceived), he notes that 'if the most idiotic television... shows are so successful, it's because they express the corporate situation with great precision' (p. 4). It could be that money marks the difference between the two forms of society, from minted money 'that locks gold in as numerical standard... to floating rates of exchange' (p. 5). If the animal symbol for disciplinary society was the mole, a creature living in enclosed spaces, societies of control are represented by the serpent, undulating, 'in orbit, in a continuous network' (p. 6) forever surfing, inhabiting a shiftier and more difficult world.

10

Stating one of the reasons for her disagreement with Deleuze, Butler wrote a few years back:

> Psychoanalysis seems centered on the problem of lack for Deleuze, but I tend to center on the problem of negativity. One reason I have opposed Deleuze is that I find no registration of the negative in his work, and I feared he was proposing a *manic defense* against negativity. (Butler, 2004, p. 198, emphasis added)

Somewhat encouragingly, Butler is now revisiting mania, framing it in a more positive light and without fear of being accused of bypassing negativity as she has done so sternly against Deleuze. She does so in her discussion of Freud's political thought in relation to the necessary moral restrictions imposed by the super-ego on the instinctual desire to unleash destructive tendencies, especially when these

are encouraged by current leaders who endorse misogyny and racism on a large scale. The recognisable problem with the super-ego is that it can itself become a lethal force when held hostage by 'a pure culture of the death drive [which] often enough succeeds in driving the ego into death' (Freud, 1917, p. 251).

What is the antidote? Many within the humanistic tradition would say 'love', and analysts too, I suspect, would say something of the sort. After all, if the super-ego tends to be hijacked by Thanatos, the neutralising force is bound to be Eros. That is at least what (a dualistic) logic would suggest. Self-preservation, *amor proprio*, *conatus essendi*, love of thy neighbour *as yourself*, evolutionary survival: from every corner, the tradition reminds us of this 'instinctual' need. Except that from Sappho onwards we also know that Eros is *glukupikron*, sweetbitter, for as many of us have tested the sweetness before the inevitable chagrin. Even though we forget and in the blessed realm of forgetfulness keep cynicism at bay. We tend to ascribe to love (agape as much as eros, seizure by the numinous as much as craving for the glutinous) the positive terminal in the life force's battery. But love can also be the name ascribed to the 'ambivalent constellation of love and hate' (Butler, 2020, p. 162), or of self-preservation/self-destruction.

There is another possible alternative to self-destruction: *mania*. Dictionaries tend to describe mania as mental and physical hyperactivity, disorganisation of behaviour and mood, as well as excessive, unreasonable enthusiasm. But it may also be conceived of as an effective *antidote to self-destruction*.

> Mania is, as it were, the protest of the living organism against the prospect of its destruction by an unchecked super-ego. So, if the super-ego is the continuation of the death drive, mania is the protest against destructive action directed toward the world and toward the self. Mania asks: 'Is there any way out of this vicious circle in which destructiveness is countered by self-destructiveness?' (Butler, 2020, p. 167)

It would appear that a Deleuzean/Nietzschean appreciation of the active, life-affirming forces which in a body-subject defies organismic holistic synthesis as much as repressive interpellation after all has some place in an emancipatory psycho-political project.

11

Becoming aware of my phantasmatic projections on to the other is only one-third of the story. I must also realise and fully take on board the concrete presence and otherness of the other, and then attempt to respond adequately through ethico-political action.

Butler's parallel of the Kleinian view of the child–parent bond and the one between society (institutions) and the individual comes close to inadvertently replicating the paternalism of patriarchal and capitalist institutions she rightly decries. Where is the place for the inevitable, necessarily disruptive subversion of institutions if all we demand of them is to take care of us like children to their parents?

At the cusp of phantasy and fantasy is the daydream, the place where we can envisage either the *beach* underneath the street, as revolutionaries did in May '68, or the *sewers*, as our cynical age arguably tends to do. Laplanche, summarily mentioned in the book, presents a far more nuanced view than Klein's, and one that sits effortlessly alongside emancipatory politics, and may go some way, if pursued, in developing a consistent counter-fantasy. In Laplanche's view, paraphrased by Butler, we are not dealing with a division between fantasy and reality, but are operating at all times within an organising psychic modality through which reality itself is

consistently being interpreted. Paying close attention to the fantasies we create is crucial, and even more crucial is cultivating counter-fantasies outside the discriminatory, racist and unjust psycho-political structures we inhabit today.

Note

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About the contributor

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