

AGENCY AND SUBJECTIVITY: RETHINKING POSTSTRUCTURALISM

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Email: agencysubjectivity@ucm.es

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ABSTRACTS (alphabetical order)

A Poststructuralist Approach to Political Emotions and the Question of Agency

Melike Akkaraca Kose (Universidad de Navarra, Spain).

This paper discusses if one can study the emotions in politics within the framework of the post-structural discourse theory (PDT—specifically the Essex School) in an ontologically and epistemologically compatible way. While there is a growing literature which adopts PDT for politics and policy analysis, it comes with its own unique theoretical challenges, one of which is certainly the issue of agency and subjectivity. Furthermore, putting emotions into the center of political discourse analysis amplifies the epistemological problem since the common view in the literature is that emotions or affect in general are deeply subjective in Cartesian sense and extra-discursive. PDT argues that the human subject is positioned within language and discourse as a place from which it can speak and act. However, it rejects to make a choice between conceptions of subjectivity either as a passive effect of structures or as an active self-determination and proposes a dynamic account of the relationship between structure and agency. In moments of crisis and dislocation, subjects become active agents when they can no longer “go on” in performing their normal practices and regular routines and in return, they identify with new objects, discourses or ideologies. This methodologically opens the prospect of choice and freedom for the subject enabling the empirical analysis to take into account decisions, choices and interpretations made by the political subjects. Furthermore, affects and passions come to the fore in those moments of agency but they also play a significant role in accounting for the persistence of sedimented structures, as they foreground the enjoyment subjects procure from their identifications. PDT (dis)solves the epistemological question concerning the emotions as follows: While affects and bodily enjoyments arise within discourse, they can be observed only indirectly in the form of identities, practices and significations they bring into being and which materialize them. Thus, affect is non-discursive in itself but it can be translated into discourse in a positive and substantive manner—for instance as emotions or fantasies. The view that the emotions are “containers” which channel affects into discursive phenomena for social circulation of affect and therefore, that they are subject to discursive construction and re-construction processes in society and politics has a great potential to deal with both the “artificial” contradictions between the agency and subjectivity, and the epistemological concerns about the “collective emotions.”

Resistance *sive* Desire: A Spinozist Discussion of the Subject between Foucault and Deleuze

Faye Alafouzou (Panteion University, Greece)

Following the Nietzschean notion of the subject as an effect, Foucault argued in the mid-seventies that what we call a subject is the product of dynamic, dispersed, differential and immanent power relations. The Foucauldian account of the subject is an explanation of its own constitution rather its constitutive action. However, Foucault enigmatically specifies that resistance comes first and actually, is the inherent, sine qua non, reason of power relations and not their passive result. Therefore, before power, there is “something” that resists, hence, the conceptual character of resistance must be elucidating regarding the status of subjectivity. However, a perplexing question arises: how is it possible that resistance “comes first” if it presupposes that which precedes it, that is power? Two topics become relevant at this point and can help us clear out this problem: the

Spinozist ideas of immanent causality, conatus and the distinction between potentia and potestas and the deleuzian primacy of desire over systems or assemblages of power. I would like to claim that regarding the «desire versus pleasure debate» between Deleuze and Foucault, it is arguable that the notion of desire as immanent production provides us with a way of understanding the primacy of resistance, without reanimating the transcendent subject of freedom. In order to understand the differential unity of desire and power as resistance, we must employ the Spinozist concept of conatus, which illustrates the desiring subject as immanent externality while making comprehensible the correlative distinction between power as resistance, qua potentia and power as secondary, temporarily solidified force, qua potestas. This step, along with the notion of immanent causality, according to which the cause has no existence outside or before the effects and the effect retroactively defines the cause, helps us distinguish between three relations of immanent causality which distinguish the ontological and the historical dimensions of the analytics of power: desire or power/potentia is the immanent cause of power/potestas, whereas the latter is the immanent cause of resistance, which, as an immanent effect retroactively springs the action of power relations. Through these immanent, social and productive processes a desiring-resisting subjectivity as external interiority can be formulated without the concept of a foundational subject, thus freedom becomes the result of resistance and not its presupposition.

Events, Actions and Agency across the Analytic/Continental Divide

Sean Bowden (Deakin University, Australia)

There are reasons to be dissatisfied with existing treatments of the relations between events, actions and agents, and on both sides of the analytic-continental divide. On that analytic side, the standard, causal theory of action that Davidson inaugurates understands actions as a species of events. An action is an event whose causal antecedents are other events associated with mental states such as desires, beliefs and intentions. As articulated by Nagel, Hornsby, Frankfurt and others, this view has given rise to well-known problems such as “disappearing agents” and “deviant causal chains”. Attempts to preserve the causal theory of action by modifying it in ways that avoid these problems (e.g., in Velleman and Mele) continue to be debated. Nevertheless, another problem besets the causal theory of action that, it seems to me, has not yet been sufficiently addressed. The causal theory has trouble accounting for action cases in which the representational content of an intention—the intention or desire-belief pair which causes the subsequent action in virtue of representing the success conditions the action must meet—cannot be specified in advance of the performance of the action that is supposed to be its effect. On the other side of the divide, several poststructuralist approaches to the relation between events, actions and agents straightforwardly claim that actions presuppose events whose intelligible content can only be specified in the performance of that action. For Deleuze, for example, actions (in some broad sense of that term) are progressive actualizations of events whose intelligible content can only be retrospectively determined, if at all. The events that action presupposes are not here understood as subjective mental events, as they are in analytic philosophy of action. They are rather ruptures with and transformations of the (conceptual, epistemological, ontological, socio-political) structures constitutive of subjects—subjects which, caught up in such processes of transformation, participate in some sense in the actualizing or coming about of the event. What thinkers such as Deleuze tend to under-theorize, however, is the relation between agents and the actions we would ordinarily want to attribute to them. They tend to criticize accounts of intentions and intentional action of the kind

we find in Anglo-American philosophy of action, but it is an open question whether or not they develop a viable conception of intentional action in response. Indeed, Deleuze has been accused of another version of the disappearing agent problem: agents are mere arenas or vehicles for the transformative power of events and are not themselves the authors of anything. Arguably, we also find in Deleuze a tendency to collapse the very distinction between actions and events: if there are no agents who are the doers of deeds, there is only what happens—events and their impersonal unfolding. The task of this paper is to start building bridge across the analytic/continental divide in the philosophy of action and agency by outlining an “expressive” conception of agency that promises to do two things. First, it will account for action cases in which the intelligible content of the events they presuppose can only be specified in the performance of those actions. And secondly, it will account for the relation between events, actions and agents in a way that each side of the divide can find at least some reasons to accept, while also ensuring that actions and agents do not “disappear”.

The Revolutionary Subjectivity of the Multitude: Re-imagining Political Agency

Diana Bulzon (University of Art and Design Linz, Austria)

In *Empire* and *Multitude*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri offer an analysis of the structure and functioning of the neoliberal globalized capitalism and identify conditions of possibility for a revolutionary subjectivity, conditions nevertheless intrinsic to the structure of this system. As they draw the contours of the multitude as a revolutionary collectivity, they re-conceptualize the notion of 'class' and, precisely due to the characteristics fundamental to the paradigm of immaterial labour as the hegemonic paradigm of production, they must consider the poststructuralist critique of the subject. Namely, since immaterial labour is a paradigm where the production of subjectivity becomes a moment intrinsic to the production process, part of a structure where control is immanent to the reproduction of society, it's imperative to understand how a subjectivity constituted within this system can act against it or imagine a new world. The agency of the multitude, a collectivity defined as "singularities that act in common", is described by using Judith Butler's conceptualization of “performance” and, to a lesser extent, the notion of “habit” as used by the American pragmatists. Performance would thus be able to describe a mode of being and producing in common that posits neither a total determination of the subject nor her/his complete freedom—it rather points to a field situated between the two. Although ultimately insufficient, “habit” can also describe a mode of social agency that, while nevertheless being influenced by past habits and ways of being, is still capable of forming new habits and of acting independently. Lastly, in order to properly account for this agency as collective, the production of a common becomes a key element. In this presentation, I would like to discuss the multitude as a revolutionary collectivity whose condition of possibility depends on the re-articulation of the relation between subjectivity and agency that attempts to (1) re-institute the concept of class as a political category, (2) take into account a definition of subjectivity as constituted by power and (3) re-establish the possibility of political agency on behalf labouring subjects. Moreover, in order to grasp the viability and coherence of this political category, I will place it in dialogue with Laclau and Mouffe's post-Marxist articulation of the political field as formed by various identities and antagonisms in order to articulate both a poststructuralist re-conceptualization of political subjectivity and action, as well as a possible response and re-affirmation of “class” and “proletariat.”

Deconstruction and Self-Definition: The Case of Religious Identity

Marie Chabbert (University of Cambridge, England)

In his 1997 *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*, John D. Caputo first shed light on the many possible imports of deconstruction for theological reflection. Though without messianism, Derrida's messianic commitment to something—he knows not what—that remains to come does open new perspectives for thinking religion beyond what makes it “ridiculous and dangerous and draws opprobrium down upon its head” (Caputo 2020: 16), such as its idolatrous preoccupation with blasphemy and dangerous tendencies to mystification and literalisation. Derrida's confession that he is “le dernier des Juifs”, “le dernier à mériter le titre de Juif authentique, et en même temps, à cause de cela, ... celui qui joue à jouer le rôle du plus juif de tous” (2014: 88), is particularly helpful when it comes to thinking religious fidelity in a way that not only stays clear from temptations of fundamentalism but also welcomes diversity and pluralism. Derrida's “religion without religion” prompts us to being “toujours et malgré nous à la fois fidèles et infidèles sans jamais pouvoir juger de la valeur ou de la limite entre fidélité et infidélité” (Cohen & Zagury-Orly 2003: 260). In fact, according to Derrida, undecidability is such that one can never know “what” one is: when asked about his own religious identity, Derrida replied that “I am the atheist they think I am, which is why I say that I ‘rightly’ pass for an atheist, but I would also approve of those people who say exactly the opposite. Who is right? I don't know. I don't know whether I am or not” (2003: 32). For Caputo, then, a crucial lesson of deconstruction is that “‘rightly passing for’ this or that is as much as one can hope for in life” (2003: 36). Though I recognise the merits of such an approach, I do not think that deconstructive undecidability and the logic of “rightly passing for” is a satisfactory model for religious identity—or indeed, any other form of identity and belonging—for it overlooks individuals' agency and tends to deprive them of the empowerment that comes with *self-definition*. This issue has been dealt with by anthropologists of religion, who warn social scientists against the temptation to label communities as “unfaithful” based on their own pre-conceptions of what the “faithful” look like (or *pass for*). In this paper, I examine (and question) the apparent incompatibility between deconstructive undecidability and the empowering logic of self-definition by looking at the specific case of religious identity.

Foucault's Agentive Discharge

Luke Collison (University of Cologne, Germany)

In “Lives of Infamous Men”, Foucault describes the otherwise minor personages, on whom he focuses, as “particles endowed with an energy”. They are propelled by “a violence, an energy, an excess”. He finds a similar “inverse energy, a discharge”, “smouldering [at the] centre of all revolts”. It is “something in the social body, in classes, groups and individuals themselves which in some sense escapes relations of power”. These remarks, in their appeal to an excess energy, recall something of the “divine spark”, that according to Christian doctrine constituted the specific soul of the human individual. In the early 20th century this divine excess of the subject was central to both Carl Schmitt's decisionist conception of the sovereign, as much as the Catholic foundations of the doctrine of Human Rights (via Jacques Maritain). Is there any significance to this paradigmatic displacement from theology to physics? If Foucault's metaphor resembles earlier models of human subjectivity, its poststructuralist decentering would suggest such parallels are largely deceptive. My paper explores this problem by juxtaposing the conceptions of agency at work in Foucault's anti-decisionist account of the *coup d'état* and Schmitt's decisionist state of

exception. Despite the overlap between Schmitt's *Dictatorship* and the *STP* seminars, Foucault substitutes "regulation" for the "decision" that Schmitt claimed such situations demand. While not judicial, Foucault notes that regulation has the "form of law", much as the techniques that he later identifies in Greek practices of the self have the form of rules. Training, asceticism, and similar techniques were understood to be constitutive of the agent who could act in a particular situation, consistent with the principles learned. In the 1930s Schmitt offered a similarly *constituted* model of personality, as the mechanism by which consistent legal judgments are ensured. Nonetheless, in this paper, I argue that Schmitt and Foucault's respective preconditions demonstrate fundamentally distinct models of the constitutive process itself. Although Schmitt was influenced by the work of Georges Sorel, who also appealed to models of energy, Schmitt largely understood these through a vitalist framework similar to Henri Bergson. In Foucault's work this vitalism is attenuated, with agentive energy emerging spontaneously and almost mechanically like a form of friction.

"The Experience of Undecidability": Derrida and the Subject of Hospitality

Thomas Froy (University of Antwerp, Belgium)

Over the past two years, our homes have become unavoidably present and important for daily lives: for those who felt imprisoned in them, for those who longed to leave them, for those who longed to have them. Jacques Derrida's reformulation of dwelling hospitality begins with a certain distance-taking from the Kantian opposition between conditional hospitality and unconditional respect for rights. Kantian hospitality determines the rights of hospitality according to a set of calculable conditionals, while Derridean hospitality is unconditional. Theorizing dwelling as unconditional hospitality appears to shift the focus away from the subject who might provide hospitality, and gives greater agency to the other in need of hospitality. Derridean hospitality begins with the other who asks the hospitable subject if they are due hospitality. This presentation will focus on the experience of undecidability provoked, in the hospitable subject, when asked for hospitality: on the one hand, the experience of undecidability shifts attention away from the powerful hospitable subject and into the hands of the other; on the other hand, our attention remains with the undecided subject. Hospitality does not need to decide between either of these cases, but rather should itself remain an experience of undecidability. Thinking of dwelling as hospitality allows us to rethink the agency of the subject in the experience of undecidability.

Agency beyond Metaphysics of Subjectivity

Erik Kuravsky (Tel-Aviv University, Israel)

One of the problems with a post-structuralist account of agency is that it appears to reject the freedom of an acting subject, thus seeming to deny the very phenomenon of agency. However, this is only a problem if we think that human beings can be agents exclusively in terms of being subjects, that is, if we think agency *subjectively*. Indeed, we tend to understand traditional theories of human freedom (e.g., Plato's or Kant's) in terms of a peculiar ability of the subject. In my paper I suggest to de-subjectivize agency with the help of Heidegger's later thought. To do it, I argue that classical theories of agency may indeed be *interpreted* as subject-oriented (sometimes even by their authors), but do not *have* to be read as such. Namely, I claim that what makes agency what it is, what is essential in agency, is not its belongingness to a *subject*, but its ontological configuration. We may say that agency "happens," and that there is a very specific ontological characteristics to this happening. I argue that we can find these characteristic in the classical accounts of agency and that

these characteristics are sufficient to distinguish human freedom from other natural phenomena. I suggest thinking agency not as belonging to human beings but as an ontological event in which human beings take part. More specifically, human beings are determined ontologically (unlike animals or plants) by always already taking part in the event of agency. That is, one cannot stop being an agent, but one can participate in agency in different modes. What enables this participation is the ways human beings non-thematically understand the *ontological difference*. For example, for Plato, one acts freely only if one is led by an *idea* of the good, while for Kant the imperative for free action is *categorical*. The agency of an agent is thus dependent on the differentiation between ideas/categories and beings met in experience—one is “free” from contingent sensibility in terms of what is different from it *ontologically*. In this light, modern dependence on subjectivity is evident in the fact that the ontological difference is thought as belonging to one’s thinking, consciousness etc. That is, it is taken *subjectively*. A non-subjective account of agency, on the other hand, requires thinking this difference as belonging to Being itself, and thinking human beings as a medium within which occurs the non-human force of ontological differentiation.

Political Stupidity in/via Derrida’s “The Beast and the Sovereign”

Yonathan Listik (University of Amsterdam/University of Leiden, Holland)

This proposal aims to explore Derrida’s arguments in “The Beast and the Sovereign” to challenge the account that the current turmoil in democratic systems are disruptions of western democracy’s natural development. I would argue that this traditional account masked a deeper repressive and undemocratic tendency inherent in political philosophy that remains unresolved in contemporary theories. the assumption that the *polis* is the public realm of intelligence where those capable of making decisions grounded on reason are free while those lacking the capacity to participate [the *idios*] are to be safeguarded in the private realm. The alleged crisis of politics is not an extraordinary challenge by undemocratic elements but, instead, expressive of the crisis-prone structure centered around the relationship between technocracy, in its capitalist permutation that associates sovereignty to economics knowledge, and democracy. Power resulting from ‘proper’ economic intelligence, i.e., grounded on technics and social management, is always automatically legitimate. In other words, the *demos* is challenged as the principle of the democratic ethos. It becomes contingent or even an impeding factor for the proper implementation of societal rationality, i.e., to the proper management of society. In understanding the administrative logic of intelligence my aim is twofold. Demonstrate that what is portrayed as democratic is to a large extent undemocratic. In other words what is described as autonomous and self-governing, is in fact a form of control. And, moreover, attempt to provide an account of what could be democratic exploring the way stupidity’s disruptive power of intelligence is a form on democratic intervention—the political ramification of stupidity as a form of unconditional and truly free mode of agency. This will be possible via a politico-ontological ramification of Heidegger’s philosophy in terms of the anarchic principle that appears Schurmann’s book “Le Principe d’Anarchie”. Even though Schurmann argues that the Heideggerian anarchy is not political, I find that the reference to the *polis* in ‘The Introduction to Metaphysics’ allows for the connection. There Heidegger comments the *axunetoi* as those who fails to grasp. This Heideggerian anarchic principle is grounded in the fact that being stands in front of *logos* but fails to grasp it. (The Introduction to Metaphysics: page 99). This Heideggerian entanglement between *polis*, understanding (*logos*) suggests that the Heideggerian *axunetoi* could serve as a formulation of an anarchic subject that in not understanding, becomes ungovernable. In

other words, stupidity as a mode of being challenges the sovereignty of intelligence and reason hence opening the possibility of an alternative political subjectivity.

Contingency Begins at Home: Materialism, 4EA Cognition, and the “Biomedical Others”

Maksim Miroshnichenko (Pirogov Russian National Research Medical University, Russia)

It is widely known that continental philosophy is going through a materialistic turn. One can see ontological and epistemological reasons for this move. Philosophy abandons discursive idealism and social constructivism of previous research, manifesting the scientific image of the human being. Neuroscience, for instance, can provide a concentrated version of this materialistic view. One can find the appropriations of this neurophysiological reductionism in posthumanism and the new ontologies. As Catherine Malabou emphasizes, neuroscience today enacts the *deconstruction* of subjectivity. The human as a neurophysiological machine turns out to be enclosed within the world, recreated by the computational capabilities of her brain. It means the inaccessibility of the ‘objective’ world for cognition. For Quentin Meillassoux, the world is metaphysically contingent. Therefore, meaningful interaction between humans and the world can be interrupted at any moment in ontogeny or phylogeny. It is so even though this correlation is predetermined by the evolutionary development of ‘correlation between thinking and being.’ At the same time, enactivism/4EA (Embodied, Embedded, Enacted, Extended, Affective) cognition, the alliance of phenomenology and non-reductionist cognitive science, opposes this disenchantment of the human. Within its empirical and theoretical studies, the return of subjectivity, experience, agency, and the body is achieved at the cost of devaluing a human’s special status against the background of nature. Like many other forms of life, a human individual develops within the limits of her perceived reality, and in this, she differs from the protists only in degree. Each species is placed in its own *Umwelt*, predetermined by its cognition/action cycles triggered by the environmental affordances. Nevertheless, there are meaningful intersections between different worlds, at which it becomes possible to build an interspecies reality. In my presentation, I want to show how, using Malabou’s idea of epigenesis and enactivism, to ground the contingency in the cognitive agency of living systems. Subjective agency, then, is the contingency that the new materialism is looking for. However, contingency here is not metaphysical, it comes from the very experience of living and cognizing systems. I propose an immanentist reading of contingency through the agency and subjectivity of various forms of life, based on phenomenological and enactivist immanentism and the rejection of redundant metaphysical analysis. Meillassoux’s sought-after world of the ‘utterly other’ can be found ‘at home.’ Based on Malabou’s idea of destructive plasticity, I will show that the ‘biomedical others’ in their agency and subjective world reveal alternative ways of realizing human subjectivity, thereby deconstructing it even further. In particular, I want to concentrate on the experience and agency of patients with neurological diseases and traumas, such as paralysis, locked-in syndrome, and other severe disabilities. Being humans ‘by courtesy only’ (as Katerina Kolozova calls it) until recently, these people disclose the contingency of being correlated to the surrounding world, beyond totalization and normativity.

The Sick Subject: Agency and Illness in the Poststructuralist Subject

Cillian Ó Fathaigh (Universidad Complutense de Madrid)

This article argues that changes to our sense of self during illness can be usefully understood through Catherine Malabou’s concept of plasticity. I propose that the ‘emergence of a form and

explosion of this same form' which this idea describes can provide a model for how we think about the destruction and construction of identity during illness. Engaging with current debates in the medical humanities around the concept of resilience, I propose that plasticity can better account for both the agency and subjectivity of those who are ill. Resilience has been used frequently in clinical and psychological studies particularly to explain how ill people maintain a high quality of life and satisfaction with life, despite often extremely difficult material circumstances. Yet it has also underplayed the radical impact that illness has on the individual's sense of who they are, as well as their capacities for action. Indeed, the idea and word itself suggests that some part of this person's identity will have remained untouched and that once illness has been adequately processed by the subject will spring back (elastically) to its previous form. I propose that the link between plasticity and subjectivity in Malabou's work—a link present already in its earliest articulations in Goethe and Hegel—can help us better understand the ways illness transforms the subject itself. Importantly, this article will argue that it does so by removing any sense of redemption within such transformation. Alongside this, I propose that it provides a way of reframing agency during illness. Rather than agency being judged by the degree to which an individual can remain resilient and retain a prior identity during illness, the plastic model would allow us to understand agency in the diverse ways that ill people adapt to their new circumstances, environments and identities.

Misunderstanding as a Condition of Collective Agency

Gavin Rae (Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain)

Collective identity has tended to be premised on an aggregation model, where the collective is defined as the aggregate of its members, discursive agreement between its members, or in terms of a substance identity that exists independently to its members. In this paper, I argue that Ernesto Laclau's work on the epistemic conditions of collective identity and agency points to another alternative, far subtler, nuanced, and somewhat paradoxical understanding that highlights the role that "misunderstanding" plays in creating and sustaining collective identity and agency. To outline this, I briefly outline Laclau's thought through three logics—termed the logics of universal imposition, negation, and symbolic mediation—to argue that he rejects the first but adopts the latter two, with the logic of symbolic mediation being particularly important. Rather than unity resulting when distinct groups agree over a positive meaning of a signifier or when it is imposed on them by an authoritarian leader, Laclau claims that unity depends upon the existence of empty signifiers that lack substantial meaning. Engaging with the structure and functioning of this lack, I turn to Laclau's notion of "constitutive distortion" to highlight the important role that a structural mismatch—between the belief that the various groups of the collective identity have regarding their common understanding of the empty signifier and the "reality" which lacks such agreement because, strictly speaking, each group invests the empty signifier with different meaning(s)—plays in the genesis of collective identity. This misunderstanding, which must remain hidden from the participants of the collective identity, is a fundamental condition of the process because it permits the various groups to believe that they share a collective identity while maintaining the heterogeneity that is necessary for the continuation of such identity. In turn, their misunderstanding leads them to believe that they are working together the "same" end, when in fact they are not; a paradox that accounts for the instability of collectives and the tensions that define their activity.

(Trans)Feminist selves' Polyvocality as a condition for Subjective Agency

Francesca Scapinello (University of Bergen, Norway)

Being suspicious of what we include in the notion of the self is, among many theoretical and practical frictions, (trans)feminisms' philosophical trademark. Excluded from the theoretical conceptualization of it, since the XVIII century feminist philosophers have systematically been tackling not only the unity of the subject, but also its (masculine) origin, unveiling the consequences surmising the tight nexus between concepts and practices. In contrast with an ego-centered, individualistic self and the coherently following capitalistic structure, (trans)feminist selves have a different texture, in so that they are constantly reminiscent of and attentive to their cultural, political and social relations (they are aware that "(k)nowledge comes from acknowledging"). Never centers of themselves in a discriminatory tone, nowadays (trans)feminist selves vindicate the polyvocality of their constitutions taking the sets of relationships and diffractions to be hinge concepts and practical principles that root thinking in acting. In this sense, I want to argue that an effective and solid post-structuralist (trans)feminist subjective agency is guaranteed: (trans)feminist movements stem from and evolve around a need for emancipation from a systemic gender-based oppression. The metaphysical groundings of the agency of a diffracted self are entailed by the capability of thinking and acting together instantiated by (trans)feminist political practices. Therefore, the dismantling of unity doesn't lead to a lack of realization, as far as we conceive the subject as constituted by the reflections and refractions of otherness in a mutualistic spirit. Alterity is the mirror and the extension of the (trans)feminist self, the reciprocal space of self-awareness that plays with identity as difference without deflating difference into a-critical assimilation. To show this character, I will consider the contributions of Paul Preciado, Donna Haraway and Elena Ferrante. I will touch on Preciado's *Testo Junkie*, considering it as a vocalization of the self with a conceptual commitment implicit on its structure: shaping a theoretical and political matter from a personal perspective, Preciado construes this text as a dialogue with and for an audience that can inherit the link between the personal and the political. I will then turn to Haraway's *Chthulucene*, where multispecies relationships seek ways to "live and die together" thanks to the collective acknowledgment of individuals as made by relational *compost*. Finally, I will consider Ferrante's *My Brilliant Friend* as the story of two lives lived through each other's eyes and constituted by this activity of constant research and loss of ourselves in the space that the other leaves us.

What is an Event to a Subject? What is a Subject to an Event? Musical Folds

Michael Szekely (Temple University, USA)

In the collection of interviews published as *Negotiations*, Deleuze remarks that "it's art, rather than media, that can grasp events... I have, it's true, spent a lot of time writing about this notion of event: you see, I don't believe in things. *The Fold* [Deleuze's book on Leibniz and the Baroque] returns to this question from another viewpoint. My favorite sentence in the book is 'There's a concert tonight.'" How do we square pronouncements like "monism is pluralism" and "the One is the Multiple" with concerns regarding subjective agency? Consider Deleuze's discussion of "perspectivism," which "amounts to a relativism, but not the relativism we take for granted"; "not a variation of truth according to the subject, but the condition in which the truth of a variation appears to the subject." He also frames perspectivism in terms of a "pluralism," which is not so much about "discontinuity," but is rather about "points of inflection [that] make up a first kind of singularity in space," or, more generally put, as *continuous variation*. Moreover, as something of a

reminder that we can neither talk about subjectivity outside of the event nor outside of processes of subjectification, Deleuze writes: “The transformation of the object refers to a correlative transformation of the subject.” I would like to go to the concert with Deleuze. Deleuze suggests that “the musical model is the most apt to make clear the rise of harmony in the Baroque, and then the dissipation of tonality in the neo-Baroque.” I want to extend this insight concerning music by using music similarly to how Deleuze uses the Baroque. That is, I wish to address issues at the intersection of subjectivity and the event—including, by extension, the “agency” that is also of thematic concern to this very conference, as well as the ways in which agency might also speak to correlative concerns with intentionality. Music is not only “ambiguous” (Deleuze’s word) in the sense that “it is at once the intellectual love of an order and a measure beyond the sense, and an affective pleasure that derives from bodily vibrations,” it is also occupies an intriguing space at the threshold of event and agency, subjectification and subjectivity, difference and totality.

Foucault’s Account of the Will: Technological Transformations of Agency

Tuomo Tiisala (University of Helsinki, Finland)

Foucault notes in 1978 that the question of the will is at the heart of his work, and yet the alternative account of the will he developed has received little attention. This article offers a detailed interpretation and defense of Foucault’s original account of the will. The key idea, which distinguishes Foucault’s account from the naturalist and juridical approaches he rejects, is that the will is essentially embedded in a social matrix of technologies that (aim to) shape it. Language of ‘techniques’ and “technologies” is pervasive in Foucault’s work on power and ethics alike. But what do technologies of power and technologies of the self have in common? What is the underlying notion of technique? I argue that Foucault’s use of technological vocabulary betrays a set of rarely discussed but substantial commitments that link his philosophical outlook to some of the key ideas in the epistemological work of Canguilhem and Bachelard. First, they share a view of science, according to which theory is parasitic on technology. Consequently, they agree that science not only explains and predicts but it is essentially a technological activity that transforms the reality under study by creating new phenomena. Against this background, Foucault’s studies of the human sciences should be appreciated as a critical engagement with technologies of agency. In the account of the will that results, the capacity to choose what to do is the target of technological transformation both through strategies of governing the conduct of others and in self-governing.

Kafkaesque Responsibility

Nina Tolksdorf (Freie Universität Berlin, Germany)

In May 2020 a huge German car company released a short promotional video on the social media platform Instagram and received strong “democratic protest” (Rezek) that was also unjustly framed as “shitstorm”. The clip was explicitly racist on several levels and the addressees of the video requested a statement from the company as well as consequences for the producers. Not surprisingly, not one responsible actant was found. The reason: so many people were separately involved in the production of the clip that in the end, no one was (being held) accountable for the texts and images produced. Often, this impossibility to find responsible subjects for actions and utterances is being traced back to linguistic theories that became prominent within poststructuralist and deconstructive thought such as intertextuality and repetition. Armed with the alleged slogan “anything goes” on the one hand and a reduced understanding of utterances as always already being

a quote, misunderstanding responsibility in the wake of poststructuralist theory is easy. However, as this talk will show, in its beginning and in one of its most important literary references—Franz Kafka—deconstruction is based on not a weaker, but on a much wider concept of responsibility. It is bound to specific actants, and the same time reaches beyond the individual subject. A reading of Kafka's *The Trial* will show that in contrast to wide-spread opinions, poststructuralist and deconstructive thought knots all parts into a net of responsibility that does not shrink the responsibility to its parts but is carried by each member and actant in its incomplete and open entirety. Kafka, read through Butler and Cavarero, shows us precisely that by contesting the myth of the self-sufficient individual beyond relationality (Butler, *The Force of Non-Violence*, 30).

Removing “Sex” from Sex?: On Sex and Gender in Judith Butler and Joan Copjec

Veerle van Wijngaarden (University of Amsterdam, Holland)

Judith Butler's poststructuralist theory on gender has provoked many philosophical and social debates, politicizing what used to be seen as the 'natural core' of gender: sex (Butler 2006). While most critics of Butler attempt to retrieve the 'natural' substance called sex, this paper starts from a different line of critique. Working from a Freudian/Lacanian psychoanalytical point of view, Joan Copjec agrees with Butler that sex cannot be reduced to a natural fact (Copjec 1994, 201). However, according to Copjec, something is lost in the transition from “sex” to “gender.” She argues that, for psychoanalysis, gender is part of signification, whereas sex shows the very *limit* of signification. Sex is not an entity, but rather the absence of signification, and this has consequences for all other significations. In focusing on gender instead of sex, “gender theory,” Copjec writes, “removed the sex even from sex” (Copjec 2012, 32). Butler's notion of sex as gender and Copjec's notion of sex as the limit in signification make their works seem irreducibly incompatible. Nevertheless, by turning to Butler's concept of “gender trouble”, I suggest that Copjec and Butler might actually complement each other. It is exactly Copjec's notion of sex that shows that signification and meaning are not complete, that hegemony is not fixed. In *What Is Sex?* (Zupančič 2017) Zupančič argues that “sex”, as the limit of signification, can be mobilised for emancipatory politics. By turning to sex as that which disrupts social hegemony, we can see how to do, what Butler calls, “gender trouble”. Gender trouble is not “adopting” a new gender, but contesting the hegemonic gender norms. I argue that gender trouble might be such a mobilisation of sex, by showing, *doing*, and politicizing this instability of meaning that sex puts forward.