

Matthew de Kersaint Giraudeau 0:05

Okay, hello, everyone.

The first thing I actually want us to do, I want us all to unmute our mics. Can everyone unmute their mics?

And then Can everyone just clap? That was

Unknown Speaker 0:39

a

Unknown Speaker 0:41

that was more exciting than I thought it would be. You could turn your mics off now. Thank you very much. I think someone's someone's getting this live stream from a industrial situation, some kind of factory. That was great. Thank you. I just wanted to hear what clapping sounds like in a group video chat. Because it's such a dry sound. And I'm thinking a lot about clapping as a kind of performance at the moment. But it's quite a weird thing because it's quite a dry minimum sound. It's like it's not really, it's not really anything, but when it's in a group, it can be quite a powerful sound. And I just wondered what happened when that group was connected by digital to technology. So clapping needs co presence, but it also demands co presence. Clapping demands clapping. If someone is clapping near you, it's partly a signal you need to start clapping. Clap is want other people to be clappers? they breed clapping clapping leads to more clapping. The only thing sad and the no one clapping is one person clapping. Clapping together designates the CO clappers as an audience. An audience is always clapping for something. But what are we clapping for? clapping is always clapping for but the clapping itself doesn't tell you what. It's for clapping performative act and like all performative, it gathers its meaning from its circumstances. Clapping signifies that something is over something is finished. And the thing that is finished is the thing that is being clapped for clapping is a sign that a performance has ended. Clapping is a sign that the time of performances over. Clapping is a way to show appreciation for an event that has finished to show appreciation for the people who performed at that event. It is also a turning away. It's a sign that we are no longer going to direct our attention towards the performance towards the people who performed if we're clapping our mind to turn towards other things. We're mentally halfway out the door. We're thinking of our journey home. We finished with watching we're finished with appreciating we're finished with taking things in. Clapping is also noise clapping is not language, but it but it does something to language in Acts within the realms of life. It finishes language ends thought it stops thought in its tracks. As a group action is simple, powerful cloud and I'm thinking, in fact it demands that we stop thinking it demands it from the clapper. And by demanding that other people join in, it demands non thought from others. Clapping is quantitative rather than qualitative. Clapping, clapping opposes nuance complexity, debate, discourse, learning information agonism, productive disagreement. Clapping is an endless return a loop repetition of sameness is the performance that ends all performances. And it's simple physicality. And the way it demands I'm thinking agreement is a resolutely anti political action.

Matthew de Kersaint Giraudeau 3:49

So, what I'm going to do with all of these seminars

Unknown Speaker 3:54

is think about a certain idea. In this case, we're going to think about performativity

Matthew de Kersaint Giraudeau 3:59

and we Gonna take us through the history of that idea.

Unknown Speaker 4:03

And think about how that idea can be used to create particular aesthetic, emotional and political outcomes. I'm interested in doing that because I, I like looking at bits of the culture and thinking about them. That's part of what I like to do in my practice, and in just in general, but also because I'm an artist, and I like to make things happen that have particular aesthetics, politics, emotions. So it is a lecture what this first little bit is a lecture I'm going to tell you about something. But I'm also trying to work something out myself and and this is about how, how I might be able to use the idea of performativity to understand something about these clapping events that seem to have become a feature of the lockdown of the virus. In Britain. I gave all the associates and anyone who wanted I gave them some text to read. If you haven't read the text, don't worry, that's not a problem. I'm going to be running kind of through the outline of them. Anyway. But this this is the beginning of the idea of performativity. And it's from a book called How to do things with words by Jane Austin. Austin basically invented the modern idea of what performativity is in relation to language. So whenever you see performativity described or talked about in theory or philosophy, or it all kind of stems from Austin's book. So if we all want to have an on kind of a simple understanding of performativity, then all you need to do is read the title of that book, how to do things with words. So Austin writing in the 50s was really responding to a form of philosophy called logical positivism, which said that the only meaningful kind of language that could be analyzed by philosophy with basically statements about the world that can be verified or falsified, ie they're either true or false. And that's how they had Meaning they were true or false in relation to a world outside. But Austin was interested in what he called comment. I think it was common language philosophy, and how language works in normal, normal reality where we're not always saying things that can be verified and falsified. So he came up with this, this idea that was this other sort of language and that it was meaningful, and that he wanted to look into it. And he came up with this idea, that of performative utterances, or he sometimes just called them performative as well. He said about them, they may take the form of a typical sentence, but they are not used to describe things and are thus not true or false. They have no truth value.

Unknown Speaker 6:46

And second to utter one of these sentences in appropriate circumstances is not just to say something, but rather to perform a kind of action. So if we look back at the title performativity is doing things with words. The other The other kind of thing you can do with words is say things.

So that's all performativity is doing something with words rather than just saying something. So he called these performative utterances. And in that section I give you he goes through some examples. One example is saying I do in a wedding ceremony. In that situation, you're not describing, getting married or talking about marriage or saying something about your partner, you are actually enacting the marriage ceremony you are getting married. Another example he gives is naming a boat. So you smash a bottle of champagne against the side of a boat and you say this is the good name this the good ship, Ludwig Wittgenstein, or wherever. And everyone Cheers. And that isn't you describing the sort of name that you'd like to give a boat? is you actually naming the boat. And then the third example was that which is quite interesting, actually, is the bet. So I bet that tomorrow all rain, you are doing some describing you're describing a future event that you think might happen, but the performative bit of it is that you're making a right then and there. So the next day when someone says to you, hey, it didn't rain, you owe me a pound. Partly The reason is because of the content of what you said about the it raining or not tomorrow, and that's verifiable or falsifiable. But the main reason you owe the money is because you made the bet. And that was a performative utterance. And then the final kind of important thing is that these have to take place within what Austin called appropriate circumstances. So you can't just walk around saying I do and getting married to people, or just like naming stuff, you can't just smash bottles of champagne on people's heads and name them. You have to do these within the appropriate circumstances. So the obvious thing is in marriage, you have to find a legally appointed person to conduct the ceremony. You have to have a partner who's also going to say I do, like all of these things have to be set up before you can do this performative utterance that in the legal language often talks about, he calls them operative clauses. That's a kind of legal term for the kind of little bits of language that do the most in a legal contract. So it's important to remember the appropriate circumstances because all the other texts that we look at, they're going to take those circumstances and they're gonna start bringing them into performativity. Whereas Austin kind of at the start just leaves them. He talks about the speech acts, these performative as though they're just standalone actions he actually develops the idea, in a sense eventually says that almost all language has a performative element. And so that's interesting, right? So that means that we can think about all language in terms of its content, and it's like a linguistic content, what it's trying to describe, but then we can also think about language and what it's trying to do. And that's a really powerful way of thinking about language, wherever it takes place. The next thing I did was I got you to watch a funny little YouTube video that describes Judith Butler's idea of performative identity. So Judith Butler is a philosopher I guess kind of gender theorists, but she does lots of work on lots of different things. She's really brilliant. It's very complex post structuralist philosophy. So Butler wrote a book, a while published a book in 1990, called gender trouble, which has been really popular, it's kind of had resurgence is in 1999, it was republished with a new preface by Butler. And in the last few years, a lot of people have been citing it in terms of discussions around trans rights and things like that, because it's it's really important book in terms of having a critical approach to gender. Important thing for our discussion today is that we might think of it as she uses to, she uses gender as a way of talking about performative identity. So she really is a philosopher who's

steeped in the Nietzschean and Foucault tradition. So these philosophers who were anti-rationalist or anti-enlightenment and critical of those ideas that underpin modernity, and one of those really big ones is the idea that we have some kind of stable or coherent identity. And the old days you'd call it your soul or your mind, you might call it, you know, the subject or something like that. And we talk about it as though it's an ontological thing like an object to some kind of just a stable, consistent thing. But Butler's theory of identity is that it's an ongoing process of becoming rather than a state of being. It's a sequence of actions that we undertake, and they retroactively constitute identity. So her idea of performativity, and this is what she brings to this history of this idea is there's two parts to it. We construct our identities according to culturally given discourses, structures and practices. That is we pick and choose from a range of available actions, ways of being things that we can do in terms of gender, if I'm performing as a man, since the doctor announced, you know that I was a boy when I was born. From then on, I've been offered like, culturally pre-selected range of ways of being. So ways of dressing, ways of talking activities. I could do hair styles, all of these things, really simple things, or really complex things, but simple things easier to talk about, we pick and choose between them. And for Butler this construction is performance in a real way. So it's it really is theatrical performance is performing for an audience, and a key for her is that that audience interprets that as well. So when I'm performing my gender, certain audience, they're interpreting that using their own kind of culturally given ideas of what gender is. And the second part of that performative identity is that once we've stabilized those actions once we've, once we can perform those actions without thinking about them too much. They come to feel common-sensical to us. They come to feel almost natural to us. And we flip it we flip the whole way of becoming subjects or subjective action. We start to believe that all the ways that we perform emanate from some inner core. So if I walk in a certain way, I don't think of myself as performing that work because of cultural norms around gender and lots of lots of other things, I guess. But I come to think I walk this way, because I'm Emad the development from Austin is that Butler brings in Austin's appropriate circumstances, and starts to think about how they're created by performativity. So performativity refers to cultural norms or circumstances that gift like those performances, their legitimacy, so engender, yeah, like, let's stick with this ways of walking thing. Like the way I walk is masculine, because that has been coded masculine by the culture. And that's what gives it all its legitimacy as a masculine walk. But then because I'm reiterating it, I'm re-performing it. I might add my own little twist on the way I walk and that feeds back into those cultural norms, so I'm both helping sustain cultural norms and changing them ever so slightly. I mean, you only have to look at something like fashion to think about how fashion changes so wildly, even in gender terms over hundreds of years to see how, even though we're trying to we're kind of re-performing things that we see. By doing that we end up changing things. And also, this other development from Austin Butler is interested in speech acts as performativity. But through her examination of drag, which is one of the things that she writes about in the book, she brings in non-spoken parts of performance, or explores speech acts as part of a wider performance. So in drag, obviously, drag evolves some kind of speaking but it involves tone of voice involves lots of clothing, it involves makeup, selecting songs, your drag name, and obviously she's talking about this as a kind of critical read performance of gender. So I gave you this video because I thought it was a good quick summary of those ideas or so I

watched it as as we all probably do. When I have an idea that I'm not too certain about, I just put it into Google. And this video popped up, and I watched it. And it was pretty good explanation of Judith Butler's theory of performativity. But what I thought was really funny and why I sent it to you was the itself is an example of performativity towards something that you might call like YouTube explanation videos.

Unknown Speaker 15:21
If you ever Google things,

Unknown Speaker 15:23
something like this will always come up a little animated video with happy music and text on screen, just kind of explaining an idea really simply. So it's got kind of twee copyright free music. It's got these quite basic vector animations. And then it explains it's a bit like a cooking video or a DIY video or a craft video or something. But for for gender theory, I thought it was really nice. And it even does the thing that lots of these videos do which is make the idea more simple than it really is. Which is kind of what Butler's arguing against right like gender is not what we think it is. And it Butler's Book reveals to us like a very complex way of thinking about identity. And in this video, at the end, it finishes with this line if we refuse to perform our gender script, then gender will cease to exist, which I think I wouldn't want to speak for Judith Butler, but I'm pretty certain she wouldn't think that it was that simple, but that's because this videos is conforming to tropes of its trying to perform as a YouTube explanation video so it has to end with a kind of simple summing up, so I thought that was just quite funny.

Matthew de Kersaint Giraudeau 16:32
Okay, let's watch another video now. This is the clapping video.

Can you hear that gives a thumbs up

Clap for Boris Video 16:58
come on. Like

a magic wand

we'll be back must be

Unknown Speaker 18:11
So having watched that video, what feelings come to mind for you? So all of them like any complex or simple feelings that come to mind? And then which pill feelings would you perform right now? That's a bit of a weird question, but what I mean is that which feelings would you be happy to kind of talk about or which feelings are a bit too complex or a bit too hard to talk about? And which feelings would you perform if you saw this video on the internet? If you saw it on Facebook or something and someone had commented, come on Boris get better soon or

something? Maybe you saw on Facebook and someone commented, that's gross. What a horrible person.

Unknown Speaker 18:51

If these are good, this is really nice.

Unknown Speaker 18:54

Well, we'll just write them down. I'm gonna, I'll kind of just run through some other stuff while people respond. So this guy's action, his speech, his movements, his tone, his choice of words is noise making a performative they do something rather than describing something. So they're performative in that kind of straightforward way. They don't give us an information. They are also performative in that but Larian way they refer to a context, which is the clap for NHS event, which give them legitimacy. So, this idea of clapping for NHS at 8pm on a Thursday, I'm assuming that's when he did it, rather than at 6am on a Tuesday where he probably would have got less of an audience and less clapping. But he's also reiterating that performance, right. So he's going back out and doing his own take on clap for NHS. And by doing that, he's changing. He's changing that context slightly, not for everyone, but just for at least for that little neighborhood within which he is.

Unknown Speaker 19:56

These are kids like you

Unknown Speaker 19:59

Yeah. For me, it's super interesting because it's like, who can capture clapping because clapping doesn't have any language in it, but you need language to capture it politically and bring it into political discourse. So it's it's kind of an a political or an anti political action. And then sometimes, people kind of try and re insert language in which changes the course of like a non linguistic Act. The next thing we're going to talk about is sir Ahmed in the performativity of emotions, so for me, I feel contempt, disgust, anger, pity, but I also feel shame for feeling like so annoyed at him. And there's some kind of class contempt as well, like I'm from, I'm from an estate, not quite like that, but like similar. It looks the same as that and I know people like that, I guess. And so I feel like a bit of disgust because that's my past I've left behind or whatever. But I also feel shame about feeling disgusted at these people who might Express kind of reaction opinions. Buy also I'm kind of amused, it's like funny. Right now I want to perform the amused thoughtfulness for you. I don't want to perform all the complex, shameful emotions that I have about that video because that's too much like, it's too much for this particular context. So for you as a particular audience, I want to perform a kind of thoughtful set of emotions that are like considered and not to, like extreme. Whereas online if I saw it, and I was in a particularly bleak mood, I might retweet it and then like, comment underneath that kind of start a thread, in which I mused on the end of the end of politics in this country or something like that. So it's interesting like which context we might choose to perform our emotions in and which emotions we perform to different people. So SAR Ahmed is the last text that I gave you, I just gave you the end of a text which is a chapter in a book called The cultural politics of emotion which is a brilliant book.

And this chapter is called the performativity of disgust. And she begins with a quote from Darwin, Charles Darwin from his notebooks, I think, where he, he tries to talk about disgust, as though it were a universal and universally felt feeling. As in, he talks about disgust as if we all know what disgust is, and we all know what every one thinks is disgusting.

Unknown Speaker 22:26

His particular example is of having a naked savage touch his food and that giving him a sense of disgust. Charles Darwin was kind of a figure of imperialism. He's a great scientific mind, also someone who benefited from traveling to other people's countries, and kind of conducting science in that Victorian colonial way. And so I'm he is critical race theorist and a queer theorist and a philosopher. And her interest in the star of this essay is to Help us understand that disgust is culturally and historically formed. And for people like Darwin, and for for many people today, disgust is tinge with kind of colonialism. And it's almost like a way to turn other people into objects. So he then goes on to talk about Kristeva, his idea of the object, which is all about designating some things as outside and some things as inside, and creating taboos around things that we do not want to take into our body, whether that's kind of literally in terms of food or metaphorically in terms of behaviors or actions or people or ways of living. What Sir Ahmed is saying is that disgust is not a simple internal universal psychological reaction to a disgusting thing is rather a performance of an emotion that designates what is disgusting. And interestingly, in terms of Judith Butler's notion of performative identity, it also designates the person who's performing as an disgusted person. So if I say that's disgusting. That's performative in the sense that that is a performative utterance. I'm designating something I'm naming something as disgusting. And in that naming, I am doing the work of disgust. I'm turning that object, maybe it's a foodstuff, or a person or a way of operating in the world into a disgusting object. I really like how she talks about proximity and recoil. So disgust, you're often you're like pushing something away, or you're moving physically away, or you're Mettaton early, putting something away like occur was twitter feed Google getting the city and that is a performance of disgust, you're throwing something into the sea, metaphorically, but but what disgust does is that both recoiled from the objects that have been designated as disgusting, but it also highlights proximity to it. Because disgust is all about what we don't want to take into our body. It has to get closest enough to us, for us to be disgusted by it right but for us to recoil from if you're close enough to recall from something, then you're close enough to kind of take it in for Ahmed, and this is a really explicitly theatrical performance. So it's performative, but it's also a performance. It's a performance of something of an emotion for other people. She says the speech act is always spoken to others who shared witnessing of the disgusting thing is required for the effect to have an effect. In other words, the subject asks others to repeat the condemnation implicit in the speech act itself. So you're performing for others, and you're asking them to join in a bit like the clapping. If you say, That's disgusting. You don't want other people to just be like, yeah, that's fine. You want people to be like, yeah, I am also disgusted by this. You see this online a lot. It's like outrage and disgust. You see something that disgust you and you can't help but want to share it with other people, which is quite a complex thing, right? With love. This is the best example I can give for an opposite effect. So if you love something or someone you don't necessarily always want To share it you might sometimes want to, but it's

not necessarily a performative emotion. Love might sit between just two people or a group of people, or some things and some people, but it doesn't always have to be shared, whereas Ahmed saying that disgust only really exists in the sharing of disgust. So in the last part of the essay that I gave you, she ended up talking about. I think it's in about this written in about 2006. And it's all about web noticeboards, where people are talking about 911. And she's what she's done is essentially conducted a kind of word analysis and found all the instances where people have talked about that act of terrorism as disgusting, and then she's kind of undertaken analysis of it. So I think that's really interesting form of analysis. That's what Bama does really well is take these fragments of language and subject them to a kind of phenomenological analysis. She basically says The sharing of disgust also becomes a shared rage or anger about the ingestion of the disgusting

Unknown Speaker 27:09

about the ways in which it saturates one's life. The speech act, it's disgusting becomes they are disgusting, which translates into we are disgusted by them. So by taking your disgust, putting it out onto an external object, you can then form up a community in which that external object is disgusting for everyone. So it generates a community of the disgusted. The end of this essay actually, I think is quite interesting for Ahmed disgust is also is basically not a very useful political emotion, because to be disgusted by something, you basically have to cast it out and not take any element of it in at all she talks about the the performance of disgust is almost a vomiting. I can metaphorical vomiting, which obviously follows literal vomiting when our bodies reject certain materials. And so she says that if you're going to have a successful political critique, whether you're, you know, if you think think of yourself as progressive, you can't just call other people's politics disgusting, because that presupposes that you will not spend the time to take them in and make sense of them. So I think that's super interesting way to end that. So this actually, this section finishes, in a few minutes, I've just got one example from the internet. So things I want to say about the internet are fairly simple, I'm just going to go through them.

Unknown Speaker 28:32

The entirety of the internet

Unknown Speaker 28:34

is created through a performative language,

Unknown Speaker 28:36

because it's all

Unknown Speaker 28:38

made with computer code. And all of computer code is performative in the very simple way that it is not merely a descriptive language. In fact, it is performative in the most pure sense in the sense that every time it describes something, it creates that thing, a successful description of something in computer code in x, the thing that it describes if that makes sense, all of the things that we use On the internet, social media, websites email, they've been coded using a

performative language. So that's interesting. The second thing that I was thinking is that since web 2.0, as it was called, basically, since the advent of social media, we have been the primary performers on the internet. So we're given these platforms upon which we operate. And they're already performative, Lee constructed and then within those, we, we perform as well. And then the third thing is that social media probably the most obvious example of this is that we construct our identities performative Lee online using these tools using these platforms. And it's really obvious that we construct it in a butler in way, right when we start a social media account. We don't have any content so we don't have any essence to draw upon. But over time, we put photos up we put comments up, we learn how we like to use the software and that becomes the way that we Think of ourselves online

Unknown Speaker 30:01
to the point where

Unknown Speaker 30:03
sometimes I think to myself when I just about to post a picture on Instagram, oh, this is not part of my brand kind of identity online, which is obviously insane for for practical reasons in the sense that I do not make any money from being online, so there is no brand, there is no meaning to maintaining a consistent online presence or identity. But it's something that a lot of us now take for granted that we have to have some kind of consistent presence online. When Sarah Ahmed was writing all these notes boards were full of anonymous users. So the idea of like, trolling almost didn't exist in the same way because there was no authentic self, who you might troll there were no like, permanent identities online. For me, a lot of the research I do is around the emotional performances that we use to construct our identities online.

Unknown Speaker 30:53
So

Unknown Speaker 30:55
emotion emotions, I think there are lots of them performative and we use We use them as ways of constructing identities online all the time. So disgust is a classic one sharing a new story that you've barely read and saying I am absolutely disgusted by this. And certain platforms privilege certain emotions, right? So you can't do that on Instagram, on Instagram, you post pictures of things and it does lend itself to a certain set of emotions. So it's a constructed environment in which our performances are limited in some way. It's easier to perform happiness or joy or delight or other stuff.

Unknown Speaker 31:27
Twitter I think is the like shaming, disgust anger

Unknown Speaker 31:30
platform that's why I'm drawn to it so much. I don't know what Facebook is. Any ideas? Does anyone put in the chat? What what emotions are privileged on Facebook? What performances

of emotions is privileged on different social media? I don't use Tick Tock. Although that seems to be all about humor and amusement, and kind of maybe delight another another nice emotion. Any other examples if anyone has examples, put them success? Ah, Yeah, that's true dog videos, his dog videos and emotion. Yeah, if anyone has any ideas, I mean, my experience is just is really limited to Instagram and Twitter and a bit of Facebook but if anyone uses, like Tick Tock or something I'd like to hear what people think is privileged in those

Unknown Speaker 32:18
media. Okay, last thing, I just want to

Unknown Speaker 32:21
play this

Unknown Speaker 32:25
play this video, things come from overseas and taking your jobs, made it safe to walk the streets, kept you trapped in your home, alternate it down and then I'll speak over it just cuz I want to finish this section up. So this video was an attempt at a viral video by an ad agency in London, I think. And it's called you clap for me now you clap for me now. So I'll read from the guardian. Just go In online article description, UK residents, immigrants and people of foreign heritage were medics, delivery drivers and teachers working hard amid the COVID-19 outbreak. They read a poem penned by Darren James Smith entitled you clap for me now. So, this is a response. This is a performative response to clap for NHS. And it's trying, as far as I could tell, in terms of very simple politics is trying to do the opposite to the guy with the pan. Clapping for Boris Johnson is trying to bring a kind of, I guess it sees itself as progressive, diverse, multicultural style of politics to clapping the NHS. And it does this by getting people to not clap or make noise. But to read quite a what's the phrase? Quite a nuanced poem? to camera, lots of different people. So it's, it's I mean to now my flags the mast IP is its heart is in the right place, right? Like, I doubt there's many people on this particular video chat who don't agree with the kind of message that it's sending out. If we if we think about it performative Lee, it's kind of trying to do what this guy did. But I feel like this guy within his very limited he understood his audience, he understood the power of the clapping as a symbolic gesture and as a performative gesture. And he used he used those things to re insert political language into that performative action. Whereas that video, it doesn't use any of the really powerful things that have happened in clap for NHS which Group Co presence,

Unknown Speaker 35:03
physical activity,

Unknown Speaker 35:06
loudness, and like the the end of language or the kind of anti linguistic act. I just wanted to end with that because I just for me, I'm always interested in at the moment why reactionary gestures seem to be more powerful than progressive gestures. And that's just a tiny little observation that I made about that viral that viral video. The kind of three key ideas are performative

utterances as words that do things, performative identity, which is the way that we construct our identities and then come to see them as natural law inside us in some way. And then the performance of emotions in which the emotions are kind of created through the way that they're acted out. You just watch the first three lectures given by me, Matthew de Kersaint, Giraudeau. As part of the seminars I'm hosting for language games, my artists mission for open school east. This seminar was about performativity emotions and the internet and was given on the 20th of April 2020. seminar two is about broadcasting and status and takes place on Monday 18th of may 2020. And seminar three is about interruptions in the attention economy, and it takes place on Monday the 15th of June 2020. Both seminars will be hosted online via the open school East website. Visit open school East org to sign up for their mailing list and take part in the seminars.

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai>