I speak, I lie, I admit

by

Hokuto Kodama

Stockholm University of the Arts
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Supervisor: Sandra Noeth
Examiner: Frederic Gies (Senior Lecturer)
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1. Introduction

What does choreography do to create a dancer? Why do we dancers keep our mouth shut? I started my degree project with these two questions which emerged from my long career as a dancer. But why do I target my question not to dance, but to choreography? Because I often find it problematic to use the word dance, as it is too general, undefinable and its meaning proliferates according to each and every culture. On the other hand, the term choreography can be seen in accordance with the history of European theatre dance since the 17th century court ballet. Through studying the modern discourse of body politics, subjectivity and power, I eventually began to think that the history of choreography had developed in accordance with the paradigm shift of power structure in the whole modern western (and “global”) society. If this is true, choreography’s close relationship with the development of knowledge and power on body directly concerns my initial questions. I identify myself within such context because of my background as a Japanese dancer trained in ballet since early childhood, which lead me to approach the practice of choreography critically, based on my subjective experience.¹ To overcome this dilemma as a dancer/choreographer, I started working on the solo performance based on my own body as a locus of identity inscription. As a dancer, I am really “westernized”, even though my physical identity is situated in different tradition. Not that I think of myself this way, but this split identity can be received critically. In many occasions, I have experienced some difficulties to take any position to speak from. This experience caused by the identity inscription on body and mind urged me to create a work that operates freely within the continuous landscape between dance and choreography, practice and theory, inside and outside of the work, and subject and object. I place myself somewhere in between, with a bit of critical distance. This text is written from the same perspective and it accompanies the creation process of my new work to be presented as the degree project of MA in Choreography at DOCH. The title of the performance Untitled (I speak, I lie, I admit) is inspired from French thinker Michel Foucault’s text,² and this title manifests my nonchalant attitude, operating as the backbone of the process. To speak, to lie, to admit are the key ideas of this work, dealing with the societal construction of the subject through performance. As we proceed, I will try to unpack my thoughts along this title, and pull the threads together to see how I tried to work with these ideas during the creation process so far.
2. I, Subject

Being involved for so long in the world of professional ballet companies allowed me to experience what physical discipline can do to person’s mind, and likewise what ideologies can do to their body. My question here is, how are these powers applied, and who is applying the power on whom? I have witnessed that, more than anyone else, it is the dancers ourselves who are both the subject and object of power at the same time. Through the construction of subjectivity as a dancer, we internalize the system of complex power relation to master our own body. For example, ballet dancer’s impossible obsession for extreme body often push them to the edge of mental breakdown, and it causes large numbers of dancers to experience some type of eating disorder in their career. On top of it, strict physical discipline requires one to watch one’s own body all the time from external point of view. Dancers are trained to watch over themselves through the mirror, and eventually, they internalize this external perspective in their own body. There is no place to hide from this gaze onto oneself. Through these observations, I find Michel Foucault’s theory on subjectivity to be very accurate in analyzing the construction of dancer’s subjectivity. The internalized apparatus of surveillance as mentioned above makes me think of Foucault’s analysis of “Panopticon”\(^3\), the form of modern prison architecture in which the prisoners are under the constant threat of being watched by someone. While it might sound very shocking to compare dance to a prison, Foucault argues that the Panoptic model has been deeply integrated in the broader social context, such as hospital, army or school.\(^4\) Foucault expands on this relationship between the gaze and power in his book *Discipline and Punish*:

“He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection.”\(^5\)

By being watched, one begins to watch oneself and even assumes responsibility to do so. Power is automatically applied since one has the “knowledge” of being seen at all times. Once this relation to self is established, discipline starts to take its real effect. Applying repressive power of the gaze on their own body, dancers reify this relation to self through their daily training. The tricky thing for ballet dancers is that they are required by this form of *art*, to discipline themselves, to be disciplined, to be silent, and to embody the strict hierarchy. These different requirements have different practical purposes, yet they are often put together in the same package under the name of seemingly absolute values, such as beauty, truth or art. Thus, these requirements are even perceived as strict moral requirement, and the disciplinary practice is followed with certain pleasure and
desire for perfection. These ideologies are definitely forming dancer's limits of thought, without making them notice such effect. The power is not always obviously coercive, rather, it is often pleasant, beautiful and even seemingly “natural”:

In short, it arranges things in such a way that the exercise of power is not added on from the outside, like a rigid, heavy constraint, to the functions it invests, but is so subtly present in them as to increase their efficiency by itself increasing its own points of contact.\(^6\)

This dimension of self-control is what Foucault called “technology of the self”\(^7\), taking a crucial role in the process of political formation of the subject. This ‘technic’ has always been important in the European history of politics, but together with what Foucault calls the disciplinary society in the 17th century onwards, it began extending to whole social field as an effective method of power and control. It is not a violent coercion, but rather, a moral requirement to “know” oneself. Under this efficient system of mass-control, political ideologies required new bodies appropriated with disciplinary practices. Conversely, through these disciplinary practices, “knowledge” became secretly inscribed into the body, so it is in the body before the subject knows. The technology of the self situates knowledge on the subject. Here, we have to note that “subject” has double meaning. On the one hand, the subject is an independent agency opposed to the object. And on the other hand, it is the subject of control. Subject dominates itself by knowing it at its own will. This is the process of the construction of the subject which I call here “subjectivation”. Once this process establishes itself, there is no more necessity for the discipline to be forced. The subjects “correct” themselves according to the social norms. Choreographed bodies played important role in the visualization of this correction, as the body that is disciplined, orchestrated and even seemingly empowered. This embodiment of “correct” knowledge naturalizes the inscription of ideology, making the knowledge and power form coherent relations:

We should admit rather that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.\(^8\)

Could it be possible that ballet dancer’s body is constructed as a result of this knowledge-power relation to represent control and strictness of ‘beauty’, in the same way as army, hospital and school create the body that are ‘unified’ ‘healthy’ and ‘useful’? If so, can we consider that this is a part of the project targeting the whole social field, a modern technology to transform the body as “docile body”?
3. I speak

It happens to me occasionally that people ask me: “Why do you study dance?” Or they tell me innocently as some kind of complement: “You are thinking a lot of things despite being a dancer!” It is an unfortunate reality, but there is a certain conservative assumption that dancers don't think but just do. What causes people to have this opinion, and how did this sort of idea come to be accepted? It doesn’t seem like such a heavy constraint, but this sort of stereotypes based on body-mind dichotomy have maintained the social distribution of bodies in Western society. There is definitely a culture of silence in the whole field of disciplinary practice, and in dance, it seems to be exaggerated because of the pre-assumption that “dancers don't need to speak”. Dancers are very often in fragile situation as a replaceable body without voice. This precarious position forces dancers to accept conditions that are implied on them and to be even more mute. In a word, docile. Choreographed dance is not a silent art form. On the contrary, I would argue that there are layers of messages underneath the silence, which are fighting for the locus of inscription. And these silent inscriptions fold back onto performers, possibly making us even more hesitant to speak up. Dancer cannot be a speaking subject, only because she or he is inscribed that they are not in the position to do so. I suspect that this prejudice is a construction based on political and social purpose to keep the body of the “doer” mute. This is important to criticize, because it means that the silence is not at all a given condition of dancer, yet we tend to ride on this fiction, actively reproducing the power structure surrounding us. In my view, the false idea such as “dance is silent”, or “dancers don’t think, but just do” is a product, and instrument of subjectivation. If this is the case, a simple statement "I speak" is an act of resistance, to break the loop of subjectivation and such institutionalized consensus. In my work, I speak as a strategy, a conscious choice to put myself on stage as a dancer, who speaks. I state, that I do not take a part of this reproduction.

So, speaking is a political act for me, to resist the stereotypical figure of silent dancer. But this simple proposition “I speak” takes the situation even further into questioning of the subject position. Foucault suggested so in his text Thought of The Outside, and this led me to analyze theoretically about the relationships between the modern subject and speech. He opens the first section of the text titled “I Lie, I Speak” saying:

In ancient times, this simple assertion was enough to shake the foundations of Greek truth: "I lie." "I speak," on the other hand, puts the whole of modern fiction to the test.⁹

According to Foucault, spoken language was considered as the truth over written language in ancient Greek. But the proposition "I lie" tricks this hierarchy, as this speaking subject must be also lying about lying. The cause of this dilemma was the belief that the speaking subject is speaking
about himself. In this way of thinking, the proposition "I speak" should have no problem as it would mean: I am saying that I speak. However, in the modern context, more complicated question arises: I speak about what? And who is this I? Unlike the presumed stability of ancient Greek speaking subject, modern literature is characterized by its self-reflective structure, in which the position of "I" can be occupied by many. So, the simple proposition "I speak" has an open subject, and its object is also open, therefore the proposition is suspended. It communicates only the communicability of language. It speaks, but it doesn't inform. It is a movement towards exteriority, "to the outside in which the speaking subject disappears."¹⁰ The proposition “I speak” draws out fundamental ambiguity of the subject by vomiting out its empty content.

Contrary to the outward movement of "I speak", Foucault also puts emphasis on the inward movement of the proposition “I think”. In the essay “My Body, This Paper, This Fire”, Foucault examines René Descartes’ famous proposition "I think, therefore I am”, which creates the strong movement of interiority towards a single vanishing point of the subject. For Descartes’ thinking cogito, everything surrounding me might be a dream or delusion, but the fact that I am thinking, is the only proof of my existence. However, Foucault argues that, even for this inward Cartesian cogito, it is in fact a fundamental necessity to keep contact to the exteriority, because otherwise the cogito would have no distinction between dream, madness and sanity, making it impossible to ‘doubt’ anything in the first place. In criticizing this paradox, Foucault points out:

If I must begin doubting the place where I am, the attention I am paying to this piece of paper, and this heat from the fire which marks my present moment, how could I remain convinced of the rational character of my undertaking? In placing this actuality in doubt, am I not at the same time going to render impossible all rational meditation and remove all value from my resolution to discover the truth at last? ¹¹

In order to think, there is an absolute necessity to bring awareness towards the outside. It might be worth taking a note that Panoptic prison model isolates each prisoner from surroundings to put them in meditative self-contemplation, simultaneously as exposing to the constant surveillance. This creates Cartesian cogito like situation where one is confined within their own body, making them lose the sense of reality. The body becomes the cage of the mind. And the panoptic gaze becomes the only contact to the outside, controlling the thin line between the madness and sanity. The isolation of body naturalizes the idea that the body and mind are separate, and it prepares the body for the process of subjectivation. The panoptic model extended to whole social field very fast, because it was the perfect match with the Cartesian model.
The statement “I think” tried to establish the subject inside the body, while "I speak" undermines the closed thinking cogito by opening up to the outside. These two propositions reveal the continuity of the outside and the inside, subject and object, creating a Möbius-loop like topology. This is the complexity of subjectivity. Who really is I, that is speaking, or thinking? Am I being performed, or performing? All that this proposition “I speak” says is that the subject is ungraspable inside, yet it is directed toward the outside. What is outside? The environment, the spectator, the choreography, the performance, the work and everything interior and exterior to it. From these speculations, I came up with a simple strategy to use in my work: to describe the present situation. I name the objects in the room, I call out what I am doing at the moment, I enact the script that is at the same time projected on stage, I declare how many minutes the coming section will be, and I reveal what is the movement task I am working with. This doesn’t teach or inform anything more than what is already obvious in the scene. Instead, this is an action to be open to outside, and to expose the emptiness of the inside. I simply perform “I”, without identifying myself.

4. I(image) speak(s)

By this point, it became clear for me that speaking is a very important strategy in my work, in response to the wide spread prejudice that “dancers don’t need to speak”. In relation to that, the statement “I speak” would provoke the impossibility of identification of a modern subject, revealing its actual emptiness and dependence on the outside environment. The idea I draw out for the practice, is to describe and to refer the surrounding situation, in order to keep the subject’s connection to outside while acknowledging the emptiness of the subject. Now, I would argue that this descriptive strategy can also resist another prejudice: “dance is silent”. Description brings awareness to what is silently present in each scene. This does not ‘reveal’ anything hidden, because they are already exposed. But it still reveals something that is overlooked, in so far as these obvious messages tend to get lost inside the complex chains of significations. I would hold that seemingly sterile and innocent image can deliver strong and coercive message, and function in the process of subjectivation. In order to investigate my claim, I would like to work with Roland Barthes’ text on photographic image. His essay “Rhetoric of The Image” mainly speaks about advertisement photography but aims to extend its range to the whole dimension of image and its relation to language. In this section, I would like to show the system in which the silent image carries multiplicity of messages, and that such messages’ strength does not depend on the original intension by the creator of the image.

As the base, Barthes gives definition of three kinds of messages within the image:
1. Linguistic message ➔ Textual message

2. Literal message (Denotative image) ➔ “Pure image”

3. Symbolic message (Connotative image)

Linguistic message supports the image “as title, caption, accompanying press article, film dialogue, comic strip balloon.”¹³ They can be the text visibly present in the image but can also be invisibly present. For example, title of the work functions with the image even if it is not visibly present on the same surface. Linguistic message has two functions: relay and anchorage. Relay puts image and text in complementary relation to generate a message at the higher level. In contrast, anchorage fixes the meaning of floating signifier of the image. For example, the titles are powerful in anchoring the reading of otherwise too uncertain work.¹⁴ According to Barthes, linguistic message guides the reader “With respect to the liberty of the signifieds of the image, the text has thus a repressive value and we can see that it is at this level that the morality and ideology of a society are above all invested.”¹⁵ Question of ethical responsibility comes to the surface, with the projective power of the image.

“Pure images” are what I have been calling the ‘silent’ image, the image without any text accompanying it. Within it, literal message is a message without any code. It is a direct message free from any connotation and only one reading should be possible. Genuine signification. It is just that, and nothing more, purely natural with no hidden meaning behind it, so the message is clear and “innocent”. But is such a message possible? On the contrary, symbolic message signifies indirectly through cultural codes, so it creates different meanings in each case depending on the reader’s cultural background. Here, Barthes says that purely denotative image (literal message) is “utopic”, since every image includes some sort of cultural code allowing different readings, and in the same way, any composition or style intervening the image would constitute connotations. On the other hand, connotation cannot be achieved without the recognition of simple units made possible by denotation, otherwise the image can only be conceived as colours and lines. Literal message is an integral part of recognition of image. Therefore, literal message and symbolic message must co-exist within a same image. Moreover, obviousness and innocence of literal message “naturalizes” the violently scattered symbolic messages in the same image. As Barthes says: “the discontinuous world of symbols plunges into the story of the denoted scene as though into a lustral bath of innocence.”¹⁶ Silent image without text might appear innocent, but that is not at all the case. These “pure images” can be involved in the process of subjectivation. Image affects the way we can think
and act. One might raise objection that an image connoting so many possible meanings cannot be so strong of a message. However:

The variability of readings, therefore, is no threat to the 'language' of the image if it be admitted that that language is composed of idiolects, lexicons and sub-codes. The image is penetrated through and through by the system of meaning, in exactly the same way as man is articulated to the very depths of his being in distinct languages. The language of the image is not merely the totality of utterances emitted (for example at the level of the combiner of the signs or creator of the message), it is also the totality of utterances received: the language must include the 'surprises' of meaning.17

Multiplicity of meaning is already included in the language, therefore a message’s strength doesn’t get ‘weaker’ because of the unclearness of the original intension. Barthes’ analysis on photographic image has its importance here, because camera as technical apparatus has its decisive characteristic in capturing everything including what is not intended. Even if the message seems innocent because of its lack of intension or its ambiguous signification, it can still be powerful enough to affect the situation. Of course, It is not my intention to condemn the whole of this enormous field of “the language of the image”. However, my aim was to think about the relationship between the image, silence, subjectivation and choreography. In that case, my strategy “I speak” can work to point out the hidden relation of denotation and connotation within the image, and to clarify the responsibility for what I choreograph and present. As I have mentioned earlier, I would reveal the movement task and the script of the scene in my practice. This would bring the separation of signifier and signified to the foreground. No matter how much I try to describe, it cannot exhaust the scene. Every image contains obviousness that allows the recognition, yet every recognition brings out different readings depending on the viewer’s cultural perspective.

5. I lie

As we briefly touched in the section 3, the proposition “I lie” shock the foundation of the Greek society, because of the paradox it creates concerning the position of speaking subject. So, does that mean I cannot lie? This sounds like a moral question, but in fact, it is a fundamentally systematic question. Actually, the purest truth, the “thing-in-itself” is absolutely incomprehensible for man. Even the most “direct” perception before translated to language is still a result of “metaphors”. We go through already multiple translations within this level of recognition. There are discontinuities between what is there, what is seen and what is said. Just like the reading of
connotated image, multiple results can be possible when jumping over such discontinuity, therefore it reveals that I might be perceiving entirely different view of the world than you do. What we need in order to communicate is an anchor, established convention which should not be broken. This is what we call “truth”. It is a pure social construction which functions as an anchor of linguistic communication. “Truth” is a deception as much as “lie” is. In fact, people look for the deceptive value of truth and are not interested in its disturbing truth. So, condemnation of lie is not directed towards its deceptive values, but towards its breaking of the conventions of happy truths. Constructed truth determines the illegal area of linguistic system, in which lies belong to. It is a law, which is a system of control. This kind of “truth” has been used as an important tool in the method of subjectivation, as we have discussed through the ideas of Foucault. Modern subject has a moral requirement to know, and to declare oneself in accordance with the convention of how others see him/her. In relation to the purest truth (the unreachable “thing-in-itself”), everything we “know” is a lie since there are discontinuities and transferences at the level of aesthetic perception. And at this level, there are spaces for interventions by cultural influence, such as social convention or political manipulation, to determine what can be seen, said and done. In other words, Aesthetics intervene with politics at the heart of the perceptual foundation. We will examine this idea later in the text.

As in the argument in the previous section, I try to destabilize the chain of signification in order to expose the arbitrariness of naming in my work. This arbitrariness ironically captures the reality very well, creating a meta-perspective on the performance. In the same way, the body’s “reality” becomes blurry as I declare my identity in such environment. There opens some ambiguity between lie and truth, or inside and outside of the performance. To demonstrate this withdrawal of the image and ambiguity of naming, I would like to introduce René Magritte’s famous painting This is Not a Pipe. This is a work Foucault paid special attention in his text also titled “This is Not a Pipe”. In my view, Foucault worked on the linguistic inscription in the painting, to show how it can actually change the image. What is said about it can change what is seen. This is one of the central ideas of Foucault, throughout his intellectual career. Although Magritte’s work belongs to a different discipline than my practice, I believe this methodology can be transposed on stage from canvas. In my work, I would establish this ambiguity by the linguistic play similar to Magritte, and at the same time I will juxtapose my identity and body on that same level of operation. This would suspend the performance in between the signifier and signified.

Let’s take a look at the painting. At the first sight, you immediately recognize a pipe, because you already know the conventional idea of pipe. Then you read the linguistic message under the painted pipe: “This is not a pipe”. This text cancels out the image and puts the judgement
back to the level of aesthetics, recognition is destabilized. Readings can be multiplied now: this painted pipe is not a real pipe; it is just lines and colors and not a pipe; this is a painting of a pipe but this painting itself is not a pipe, and so on. When we realize this, we cannot say anymore that this painting is lying, as we have completely lost “truths” for this painting. This simple play is made possible because of the media that allows lying, the “unserious” media such as canvas or perhaps, theatre. I think I can use this strategy to point out the arbitrary system of truth and lying, in combination with the theatrical environment of the performance. What it reveals is not so much about Magritte’s actual intention, but the ambiguous system of image recognition, its dependency on cultural convention, and how innocent this process appears despite its potential impact.

French choreographer Jérôme Bel uses this strategy in his work The Last Performance. I often refer to Bel’s work, because of common interest we share such as identity politics and representation. But in this work, these concepts are emphasized more than any of his other works, as the title The Last Performance suggests. In the beginning, the dancers come on stage one by one, dressed as someone else, and utters a statement “I am…” before they execute their tasks. In the first half of the work, they affirm the name of their given role, such as Andre Agassi, Jérôme Bel, Hamlet, or Suzanne Linke. But in the second half, Bel comes on stage dressed as himself, and utters: “Je ne suis pas (I am not) Jérôme Bel”. This is totally a Magritte moment. In “ordinary language”, he is lying, as this statement goes obviously against the uniform convention. But at this moment of utterance, he cannot be “Jérôme Bel”, as the role of Jérôme Bel was already taken by someone else earlier in the work. It plays with the idea that “Jérôme Bel” is a fictional construction, even Jérôme Bel himself performs this role every day. I mean, at this moment, he really looks like he is performing Jérôme Bel… Am I mad to think this way? No, the work is really dependent on the effect caused by this Magritte moment. He used a simple rhetoric characteristic of modern literature. Bel knows that his utterance here does more than what it says. In short, that his utterance is performative.

6. I perform

The term “performativity” entails rather complex discourse around it, but it is absolutely the key concept of my artistic interest. For something to be performative, in my view, means that certain “representation” affects or constitutes the reality rather than merely being an innocent copy of it. This idea paved the way for the theoretical discourse and practices bridging; body, power, identity, language, performance, and art in the second half of 20th century. Through the arguments in this text so far, I have hopefully clarified my interest in the process of constitution and
reproduction of identity and body through the language and action. In this section, I would like to expand my thoughts on the concept of performativity, and its relationship to my work. First, I will introduce the performativity of utterance and its linguistic analysis by J. L. Austin and Jacques Derrida, to situate my artistic practice in this context. Then I would like to propose a possibility of systematic analysis on the performativity, based on the structure of utterance and image.

In 1962, J. L. Austin in his monumental book *How to Do Things with Words* introduced the idea of performative utterance (the book is a publication of the lecture he gave 7 years earlier). He claims that certain utterances are performative, that they act and give effect on the situation, as opposed to the constative utterance which just describes and does not affect the situation. The performative requires certain set of conventions to take effect, otherwise the performative becomes “unhappy”. This means that performative depends on the right environment and intension, which determines the context. For this reason, Austin considers that:

a performative utterance will, for example, be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy. This applies in a similar manner to any and every utterance—sea-change in special circumstances. Language in such circumstances is in special ways—intelligibly—used not seriously (emphasis by HK) but in many ways parasitic upon its normal use—ways in which fall under the doctrine of the etiolations of language. All this we are excluding from consideration. Our performative utterances, felicitous or not, are to be understood as issued in ordinary circumstances.20

Therefore, he would reject the view that Bel’s utterance in the performance is performative. It is true that Austin’s favorite examples of performative like “I swear…”, “I bet…”, “I name this ship Queen Elizabeth!” or “I do (at the wedding ceremony)” wouldn’t have their real effect when uttered on stage. But, is it appropriate to call these situations more “ordinary” than the stage performance?

To update the idea of performativity, Jacques Derrida’s 1972 essay “Signature Event Context” criticizes Austin’s theory on performative utterance, in aiming to deconstruct the hierarchical structure between writing and speech in Western tradition. In the earlier quote, Austin rejected non-serious use of performatives because it is “parasitic”, in other words, because it is merely a citation. Derrida criticizes this rejection for two reasons: First, for the seriousness to be determined as a foundation of performative, the *intension* has to be totally clear and transparent, but this is not at all the case. Second, this possibility for parasitic use, “citationality”, is in fact the essence without which there is no performative success/failure. Citationality cannot be the cause of failure, as it also makes success possible. Derrida questions: “would a performative utterance be
possible if a citational doubling [doublure] did not come to split and dissociate from itself the pure singularity of the event? "21 He acknowledges the fact that citation (the repetition freed from its original context) leaves the state of absolute and non-repeatable singular event, therefore it opens itself up for alterity. This “repetition-ality” is what he calls “iterability”. It creates the risk for failure, but only with this risk, possibility for successful performativity arise. Purely singular event cannot be performative in any way:

Could a performative utterance succeed if its formulation did not repeat a “coded” or iterable utterance, or in other words, if the formula I pronounce in order to open a meeting, launch a ship or a marriage were not identifiable as conforming with an iterable model, if it were not then identifiable in some way as a "citation"? Not that citationality in this case is of the same sort as in a theatrical play, a philosophical reference, or the recitation of a poem. That is why there is a relative specificity, as Austin says, a "relative purity" of performatives. But this relative purity does not emerge in opposition to citationality or iterability, but in opposition to other kinds of iteration within a general iterability which constitutes a violation of the allegedly rigorous purity of every event of discourse or every speech act. Rather than oppose citation or iteration to the non iteration of an event, one ought to construct a differential typology of forms of iteration, assuming that such a project is tenable and can result in an exhaustive program, a question I hold in abeyance here. 22

Citationality, or more precisely, “iterability” is the condition of performative utterance. My critique for Derrida, is that he still negates the possibility for performative utterance on stage, as he might be thinking about a traditional play, or more likely, not thinking about any concrete example at all. Of course, “I bet…”, “I do” or “I name a ship…” would be non-serious on stage, but in modern literature or contemporary theatre, actors or characters can intervene the outside. Their performance does not only create closed fictional realm, but it affects and constitutes the reality by changing the way we see what we see. Magritte’s This Is Not a Pipe is a clear example of this, if we consider the canvas as a theatrical space. In the same way, “I am acting”, “Music is playing” or “I am Jérôme Bel” can be perfectly serious, and potentially it can affect the situation, therefore performative, rather than constative. Simply put,” I am not Jérôme Bel” or “I lie” can work as confession, a form of performative utterance, in a performance situation.

This play with performative utterance in a theatrical atmosphere is a strategy I would like to develop in my work. In ancient Greek, “I lie” undermined truth because the speaking subject cannot be lying about lying. In contemporary theatre, “I lie” undermines truth because I am actually lying when I am claiming that I am Hokuto Kodama, and this confession reveals the arbitrariness of the
constructed-truth and subjectivity. The proposition is still powerful and contradictory, because it is one of the rare cases of “pure truth” when one confesses “I lie”.

Through the argument so far, I might have made it look like the system of “performativity” is very complicated, but is it so? Now, I would like to try to simplify the system in which performative utterances work. This might give us some clue about how performatives can take different forms other than the utterance, to affect the reality. In the case of performative utterance, iterability makes the utterance have different readings, therefore it produces the possibility of successfully meeting the cultural convention or failing to do so. At the same time, the utterance is recognized as an event, each time having its unique singularity. Therefore, this iteration is not recognized as just a pure repetition (hollow-copy) of what happened before (although it signifies the same). Because of this singular event-ness, the utterance performs. And when it meets the established and formatted set of cultural conventions, certain legitimacy is confirmed and validated as a singular event constituting the reality that was promised by such an act. In short, performative utterance is a combination of cultural codes and their execution. When the executed cultural code is more commonly established, more powerful legitimation is activated, and the effect that performativity creates becomes more “real”. The thing is, that the cultural code is literally found in every word, in fact, recognition of each sound is already a reading of a cultural code. This is why every utterance is in some way performative.23

If we think of the system of performatives simply as such, I would argue that it can be applied to image as well. Earlier in the text, I have worked with Barthes’ text on image analysis, and Derrida’s text for the analysis on performative utterance. They are known to have taken different positions in relation to their text analysis, however, I find their image/utterance analysis to share some crucial points. The most important is the fact that they both claim that the effect of image/utterance does not have its source in their intensions. This point alone indicates to us that they agree that image/utterance are not innocent but greatly affects the situation. In other words, performative. Hopefully, very simple analysis below can justify my controversial use of these two texts next to each other.

As we have seen, every image has a multiplicity of cultural codes, therefore, they are iterable. Iterability has to be recognized in deferential marks of each singular event. I would argue that singularity of event is punctuated at the moment of recognition of the image. Each iteration (reading) is different but points at the same image, and the same image becomes actually different in each iteration. This is why connotative and denotative can never be purely isolated and they always coexist in a same image as well. They must function reciprocally. While connotative
differentiates the readings of image by its iterability, denotative unites (naturalizes) to make it look like it is a same image. Both performative utterance and image can be imagined as the bundles of many utterances/images under the surface of one utterance/image. In this sense, purely constative utterance or denotative image is impossible, meaning that not only every utterance, but also every image is somewhat performative. Image is performative, and its system works at the level of image recognition and not as the result of translation to the other system of performatives.

We always knew intuitively, that image is performative. Yet, we tend to believe that the image itself is innocent, the receiver interprets it for themselves, and its varying effect depends purely on the context. Therefore, the ethics of image is questioned only when there is obviously bad “original intension”, otherwise the reader takes most responsibility. But as I have shown, ambiguity of intension does not weaken the force of performative. I find that this is a critical point in relation to subjectivation through silent image, because my view is that messages in image can carry repressive value, and its effect can be serious. Yet, the producer of the image can be ignorant, because of the silence of the very image he produces. My claim is that the image’s performativity and ethics should be thought separately from the original intension of the producer of the image. This is something deeply related to our role as choreographer. Austin’s theory of performative utterance paved the way for updated debate on linguistic violence and discursive repressions in the last 50 years. I thought that if one can explain that the image is already performative without going through the translation to other performatives, new ethical awareness and discourse for production of image can arise. I am fully aware that it is probably too big of a task for me to carry out such a philosophical investigation, but I would like to work with this idea of performative image in my artistic practice.

7. I am what I perform

So far, we have discussed the performativity of image and speech, which means that what we see and what we say are not just innocent and superficial phenomena passively waiting for interpretation, but they act on us to form our reality. They affect our system of sense perception, intuitive recognition which then reforms the foundation of what we can see and say. This is the reiterative process of subjectivation as we have analyzed before, and at this level, aesthetics and politics meet. Artistic practices don't just inspire us or move our emotions, but they act on us at the most fundamental level of aesthetics. It penetrates into the “metaphorical” gap between what is seen and what is said and changes their relations. It shifts what can be seen, who can say what, where and when one can be, what we can do and how we can think, because these intuitions are based on
the consensus formed by aesthetic experiences. In this sense, aesthetics intervenes politics, by affecting our perception of the world.

Having said that, even what we call “body” is also a cultural construction. The way we see the body is largely interrupted by the discourse and power on the body. Therefore, I would argue that, to presuppose the body as an absolute departure point of thinking would overlook the fact that the body is also constructed by cultural intervention. The theories of a performative act and gender construction, are of specific importance when we think about the construction of identity and body together with the concept of performativity. Foucault argued in late 1970s, that the power on body and identity constituted the discourse of sexuality as a domain of control in the history of “Western” society. After his death, American philosopher Judith Butler updated Foucault’s argument further, claiming that the normative gender performance has been reproducing false “reality”, naturalizing the fact that the gender is an entirely artificial construction in favor of western patriarchal society. Dualistic classification of sexual organs is politically attached to the social division of stereotypically gendered bodies. Butler explains in her own word that, “for something to be performative means that it produces a series of effect.” Acting in accordance to social norms produces a series of effect, and they reproduce the social norms which the act is based on. Through the reenactment of this gender performance, the arbitrary definitions of binary sex and its correspondence to gender are naturalized. In short, “gender is performative” means that gender performs like it is a “fact”, by being performed. Gender is not by any means a “natural expression” of the body. At the same time, it seems difficult to refer to the body as we know it without seeing through the filter of a gendered or sexed body, because these phenomena are produced and reproduced all the time. Our perception is extremely limited by cultural convention. This system of gender construction can be applied to much broader field of identity politics. Stereotypes of nationality, race, health and even occupation can be the result of similar processes.

One thing to note is that Butler’s theory of the performative act is focused on the reproductive relationship between act and effect, whereas I have been discussing the performative utterance and image on the system of their recognition. How do these two different arguments meet? Here, I would like to re-introduce the idea of iterability and singularity of the event in connection to Butler’s theory. Butler indicates in her text that “There are social contexts and conventions within which certain acts not only become possible but become conceivable as acts at all “. Just like the utterance or image, act is already culturally pre-established before the performance, otherwise it would not be even recognized as an act. The act is iterable:
The act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene. Hence, gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again. (…) This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation. \(^{28}\)

Iterability of the act is marked by singularity of the event that which individual actors perform. Each recognized act reproduces the cycle of legitimization, therefore as I discussed earlier, these acts become performative. Performativity constructs the reality on the system of recognition, and this reproduces the perfect medium for itself: the body.

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### 8. I admit

The famous character *Don Quixote*, from the book Miguel Cervantes wrote in 1605, is the representation of the old world. In this world, appearance was directly connected to knowledge. But in the modern world, believing and acting according to the appearance was no more regarded as sane, and the old form of knowledge is now a mere delusion of madman. The man who believed in the book of chivalry and lived as the representation of the world of representation admitted that he was mad, as he gave his will at the dying bed. “I was mad, and now I am sane; I was Don Quixote of La Mancha, and now I am, as I have said, Alonso Quixano the Good. May my repentance and sincerity return me to the esteem your graces once had for me, and let the scribe continue.” \(^{29}\) By admitting his madness, he had gained modernistic external perspective on himself. As a representation of the old knowledge, he had to die exactly because he had accepted the consensus of the new world. In short, he became a sane, modern subject.

The idea that madness can be cured by overcoming the incapability to recognize the self, was actually considered as proper treatment, and could be seen up until the 19th century. So-called “truth therapy” was an iconic method in psychiatric treatment of madness, which was basically an interrogation and torture to make the patient admit that he or she is mad. By making them recognize themselves in the same way as how others recognize them, the patient was considered to be cured. This precise affirmation, the moment mad turns into sane, is a perfect example of the self-inscription through the performative utterance. Foucault argues that these technics of admittance and confession had been an important method of subjectivation in western society. And at the core
of it, there is a fundamental requirement; “one of the main moral obligation for any subject is to know oneself, to tell the truth about oneself, and to constitute oneself as an object of knowledge both for other people and for oneself.”30 This moral requirement to know oneself and to declare it to the other does not have its purpose in revealing the truth, but it has a coercive function. What is confessed has to match with what is imposed on this subject, otherwise the subject is considered to be mad, and still in that case, one is required to declare his or her madness.31 At the same time, this moral requirement to know the self is used for people to voluntarily modify themselves in order to reach a state of happiness, perfection, beauty or purity and so on. These two functions work reciprocally, to constitute what Foucault calls “government”;

Governing people, in the broad meaning of the word [as they spoke of it in the 16th century, of governing children, or governing family, or governing souls] is not a way to force people to do what the governor wants; it is always a versatile equilibrium, with complementarity and conflicts between techniques which impose coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by himself.32

Here, I would like to bring attention to the way artistic practices intervene into the process of subjectivation. Ways of making and doing shifts sense perception and intervenes the subjectivity, at the same time, there is another dimension of subjectivation on the level of coercive discipline and desire for self-governance. Artistic practice affects both receiver and practitioner at the foundation of their subjectivity. It is an extremely sensitive and important field of politics, where control and resistance form chiasma at the level of perception. As choreographer, we deal with this level of aesthetic intervention with politics through the spatio-temporal arrangement of bodies. It would never be enough to emphasize the importance of care for what choreography does, and what is the responsibility as a choreographer, when there is no way to avoid dealing with bodies and subjects. What we do is definitely related with politics at the fundamental level.

Descartes’ thinking cogito puts this aesthetic level of subjective constitution literally unthinkable, because aesthetics and moral requirement comes not only after, but also before thinking to form a ground for it. There is an aporia. As discussed earlier, Cartesian cogito needs to presuppose his sanity in relation to outside, to constitute himself as a thinking subject. It is now impossible to consider thinking as the subject’s foundation of being. Rather, thinking can only be thought in relation to outside which is actually conditioned deeper inside below the level of thinking. And this inside is formed by aesthetic intervention from outside. Interiority of “I think” and exteriority of “I speak” are not clear-cut dichotomy, but they are coexisting in the same space, forming a continuous topology of inside-outside. Cartesian cogito masks the bottom half of this
Möbius strip, making this loop seemingly discontinuous. And this masked unthinkable area is where politics developed the technology of subjectivation.

In one part of my work, I dance a choreography made by someone else who affected my work. I could appropriate a choreography from historical work, but it is not my intension to connect the work to specific discourse of dance history, so I am thinking to interpret a choreography by someone who is not yet historical but close to me, such as my classmate. This choreography is simultaneously outside and inside of my work, hopefully distracting the cogito-like closed circuit of the solo performance. As I make connection to objects outside of my body, the work makes connection to other works outside of its body. When the movements of interiority and exteriority are recognized on the same topology creating its own ecology, there emerges a dynamic equilibrium of being. Power is always at work between anything from any direction, and we transform ourselves all the time according to these power relations. This metamorphose can be triggered by a simple but decisive performative utterance: I admit.

9. I resist

So, we have seen that there is a lot going on behind the silence. A multitude of forces and movements of inscription are constantly at work, through the technology of the self and of domination. What we do with silence is something that needs to be taken care with the consciousness for dynamics and structure of power in society. Why do we keep our mouth shut? Are we resisting, or feeding the power structure? What can we do now?

Three years after the death of Foucault, in 1987, Gil Deleuze gave a lecture titled “What is Creative Act?” I have watched the footage of this lecture many times, but never understood what he meant by saying “A work of art has nothing to do with communication.” But after having to go through the process of writing this text, it suddenly made sense. In saying this, Deleuze is thinking specifically about Foucault and his remarkable analysis of relationship between power and knowledge.

Primarily, communication is the transmission and propagation of information. (…) Information is communicated to us, they tell us what we are supposed to be ready to, or have to, or be held to believe. And not even believe, but pretend like we believe. We are not asked to believe but to behave as if we did. That is information, communication.

Communication is often assumed as a transmission of meaning, transference of the original intention, but as we have examined, such meaning includes multitude of discontinuities, and
intention is never clearly articulable. Rather, such arbitrariness makes possible the system of control under the name information. Deleuze points out that Foucault proclaimed the coming transition to the “society of control” from the disciplinary society. 30 years later now, one can definitely affirm them and say; we now live in the society of information and communication. Hopefully as Deleuze said, “work of art” carries no information in such sense, and it is also not an instrument for communication. It is rather counter-information, an act of resistance. At the fundamental level of aesthetics, work of art resists against the control on what can be seen, said, thought and done. Art doesn’t make us resist, it resists. “Every act of resistance is not a work of art, even though, in a certain way, it is. Every work of art is not an act of resistance, and yet, in a certain way, it is.”

What we make has a strong impact on perception, but despite the serious ethical question, we should not be afraid to make either. In the society of control, counter-information is needed more than ever, and there needs to be consciousness and a sense of responsibility for creating the art that resists.

In 1968, Barthes wrote the iconic essay titled “The Death of the Author”. It meant the end of communication as the transmission of original intension. The message proliferates, and the reader takes more and more responsibility in the absence of author. Ironically, this has been a parallel movement together with the transition to the society of control, where flood of information is waiting to be used as the tool of self-inscription. Now, it is evident that information literacy is required more than any other time in history, and our role as the reader is ever so important. But together with that, I would like to emphasize that the responsibility of the author became more important than before as well. Author as a modern figure of a genius creator has perhaps lost its relevance, but things are still created by someone. It could be anyone, it could even be an internet bot! Already in 2007, internet image spam took up 70 percent of the bandwidth. Majorities of data circulating around on the earth are pure-fraud trying to trick people on cheap medication or fake branded sunglasses. Is it stupid to ask bots for such integrity? Maybe, but there has to be some kind of resistance. Can we as artist resist such a ridicule with counter-information? Why do we keep our mouth shut? What is inscribed in my body? Are we resisting, or feeding the society of control? I am facing even more questions than I started with, but for now, I need to close this text.

As final remarks, I review some of the ideas I proposed so far;

A) Performatives work at the level of aesthetics, therefore it is not a matter of meaning, interpretation or communication of original intension. This aesthetic level is the foundation of thinking, therefore subjectivation primarily happens at this level, setting the limit of what can be seen and said. In this way, aesthetics intervenes with politics.
B) Silence is not innocent in any way. Behind the silence, there are a multiplicity of forces at work in every direction. To keep the silence untouchable is to put this level of power operation unthinkable. There is a need to consider if the silence is an act of resistance or feeding the reproductive power structure.

C) In this society of control, flood of mass produced information is constantly affecting us, determining what can be believed. Our reality is constructed by it. Work of art is an act of resistance, counter-information, reconfiguring our limit of perception at the frontier where aesthetics and politics intervene with each other.

10. And on...

In the last year and a half, I have been claiming “slow reading” as my artistic practice. As a daily practice, I read some text, very slowly. This practice started from considering choreography and writing in analogical relationship, and as a resistance to a normalized mode of production. I needed to take a break from being in studio for a while, to take a distance from the assumption of where I should be and what I should be doing as a dancer. And I wanted to think about what choreography does, in relation to what is inscribed in my body. It is okay to read as a dancer, and to be slow. There seems to be a rupture, jump and gap between what I read and what I create, but this is exactly why I read and create, as I wanted to approach this rupture from both sides. I think that we tend to believe that this discontinuity is something to be filled, but I imagine both end of rupture meeting at the other side of the Möbius strip. In the same way, the text I am writing here does not describe my work, but one thing that is sure, is that this reading and thinking happened simultaneously with my creation process on a continuous landscape. There is no direct coherence, since it is already continuous at the far side. So, rather than giving any quick answer for myself, I need to give myself some time for this practice. This text followed the trajectory of theoretical struggle which has been accompanying my creation, but as I close the text, it will become an object of its own. Hopefully this text will act on me, to push my process to go further, to the place the author had never imagined while writing.

Now, I will be the reader of this text.

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Notes

1 I was born in a ballet family in Japan and started ballet training when I was 4 years old. Then I left Japan when I was 18, danced as a professional ballet dancer in North America before gradually shifting my career to the field of contemporary dance in Europe.

2 The title was inspired from two of Michel Foucault’s essays. “I lie, I speak” from Foucault/Blanchot, trans. Brian Massumi (New York: Zone Books, 1987), and “Subjectivity and Truth” from The Politics of Truth, trans. Lisa Hochroth and Catherine Porter (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 1997)


4 “Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?” Ibid. 228.


6 Ibid. 206.


“techniques which permit individuals to perform, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, on their own souls, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct, and this in such a way that they transform themselves, modify themselves, and reach a certain state of perfection, of happiness, of purity, of supernatural power, and so on. Let’s call this kind of techniques a techniques or technology of the self.”

8 Foucault, Discipline and Punish, 27.


10 Ibid. 13.


13 Ibid. 38.

14 In July 2017, I created and performed a solo work in collaboration with Stockholm based Japanese choreographer Shintaro O-ue. It was a commission by the dance festival called “Dansu ga mitai! (I want to watch dance!)” in Japan, and the theme for the festival was “Swan Lake”. We immediately felt that we wanted to go against the context, so we titled the piece inspiration/delusion of SWAN LAKE hoping to come out as an irony. In the work, multiple strategies were tried to make a statement: we did not use any music, we did not mention anything about the swan lake, we announced in the work that we withdraw the title of the piece, and so on. The main concept of the work was to use binary oppositions to create contradictions, aiming to suspend meaning of the work and even of the festival context, then to dance within that rupture. After the performance, I was very shocked by an upset audience accusing us for not using Tchaikovsky music in the work. Apparently, the work had major problem, and they wanted to watch the swan lake, but this experience really reminded me how dominant the linguistic message is.

15 Barthes, Image Music Text, 40.

16 Barthes, Image Music Text, 51.

17 Barthes, Image Music Text, 47.


Austin acknowledges the difficulty to distinguish constative and performative in the lecture 8, and instead proposes the new concepts; illocutionary act and perlocutionary act. In my essay, I will stay with the concept of performativity in order to think in line with the genealogy of this concept developed by other thinkers. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 94-107.

This is interesting to think in relation to the argument of Bruno Latour, claiming that “Modern era” never existed and clear-cut dichotomy between nature and culture, or subject and object has always been a fiction. See Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1993).


Ibid. 526.


Ibid. 148.

Ibid. 154.


Ibid. 320.

Ibid. 322.

Ibid. 323.


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