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dispossession: the performative in the political

Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2013, 240 pp.,
ISBN: 978-0-7456-5380-8, £50.00 (Hbk)/£14.99 (Pbk)

In *Dispossession*, Butler and Athanasiou aim to 'think about dispossession outside the logic of possession' (p. 7), considering dispossession in both negative and affirmative terms, without resorting to the logic of possession that focuses, instead, on more proprietary frameworks of ownership and subsequently on loss. The authors work towards conceptualising being dispossessed as potential, while recognising and working against repressive forms of dispossession such as settler colonialism and land theft. Written at the time of the Egyptian revolution and the Greek uprising and politics of austerity, which the authors often refer to and use as contextualising lived examples of their conceptual analysis, the book moves on to discuss various related themes including agency, interpellation, precarity, public protest, performativity and land rights.

The book is written in the form of a conversation between the two authors, and was completed mostly via email. While the conversational style allows the authors to develop one another's points easily and in a fluid way, there is little divergence between the two and the conversation often ends up being a discussion of Butler's earlier work. The style also works to disorient at times. The reader is often left wanting more, wanting a greater development of specific points and statements that are left behind in the flow of the conversation.

The authors discuss a number of different themes and ideas. From a feminist perspective, however, some key themes jump out. The concept of agency is discussed in depth throughout, both explicitly and implicitly, developing on Butler's previous work. Complex and in-depth discussions on the meaning and impact of agency, both as a stand-alone concept and in the context of dispossession, are included. The authors also note the necessity for nuance in understandings of agency, considering agency as situated within complex power structures while also discussing it in affirmative terms, as a useful site of focus and as being impacted by relation and connection too, in a 'non-sovereign account of agency' (p. ix). The debate and nuance here are interesting and will prove useful for those looking at agency within their own work, particularly those wishing to conceptualise agency beyond liberal frameworks.

Relationality and connection form a more general theme throughout the book too, as the authors try to challenge the idea of a unified subject, looking

towards what this means at a political and ethical level. Dispossession is therefore discussed in terms of social connectivity, as potential, in terms of a dispossession of the sovereign — that is, bounded, individual, autonomous, liberal humanist — self, and looking towards dispossession as a form of responsiveness, a way of acting together to create change. However, dispossession, the authors note, has two faces. While it may allow for greater connection and the development of social bonds, dispossession can also be a form and place of suffering for many, including the displaced, the colonised, those who are homeless and the unemployed. Interesting conversations around precarity and vulnerability inevitably ensue and the discussion of these themes is one of the strongest aspects of the book. The two faces of dispossession are described, not necessarily as opposing or even distinct; it is also noted, for example, that dispossession of the sovereign self may allow for a collective struggle against negative forms of dispossession that disallow connectivity. The authors thus note the necessity of discussing all forms of dispossession, allowing for potential to be noted within real, lived limitations. *Dispossession* therefore makes a thoughtful read for those who are interested in de-centring the subject whilst retaining and holding onto embodiment, both within the context of dispossession and more broadly, though the book seeks more to open up debates around these issues and develop discussion further, rather than to resolve them.

Butler and Athanasiou often refer to lived examples and material conditions to contextualise and ground their points. While this helps the reader to better understand the complex philosophical arguments being made, the narratives told are sometimes limited. For example, when referencing the 'riots in the UK' (p. 196), Butler talks of the poverty and unemployment of the rioters, and thus their dispossession in this sense, without accounting for the important factor of race, the London riots having occurred as a response to a police shooting of a young black man. This therefore leaves the reader with further questions and sometimes a feeling of misrepresentation.

Overall, *Dispossession* makes for a productive read and develops and discusses many key themes that cross disciplinary boundaries. The book will therefore prove useful to various readers. However, it reads more as a preliminary conversation prior to a bigger project and does not have a discernable focus. In covering many topics and themes, the book remains open and useful for many, but limited in its development and depth.

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doi:10.1057/fr.2014.52