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Speaking Chaos: Performativity and Speech Acts in Kae Tempest's *Let Them Eat Chaos*

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ABSTRACT

In an increasingly accelerated world, where consciousness is often constricted by the overwhelming rhythm of modern life, art that escapes rigid conventions can offer a powerful trigger for change. This dissertation explores Kae Tempest's *Let Them Eat Chaos*, a hybrid poetic work that dissolves the boundaries between music, performance and literature, as an artistic intervention capable of awakening critical consciousness in contemporary audiences. Drawing on Judith Butler's theory of performativity and John L. Austin's speech act theory, this dissertation analyses how the spoken word can operate, not only as self-expression, but also moving communities, generating emotional impact and intervening in the construction of social change.

Keywords: Kae Tempest, *Let Them Eat Chao*s, Spoken Word, Butler's theory of performativity, Austin's speech act theory

RESUMEN

En un mundo cada vez más acelerado, donde la conciencia se ve a menudo constreñida por el ritmo desbordante de la vida moderna, el arte que escapa a las convenciones rígidas puede suponer un poderoso detonante para el cambio. Este TFG explora *Let Them Eat Chaos* de Kae Tempest, una obra poética híbrida que disuelve las fronteras entre música, performance y literatura, como intervención artística capaz de despertar la toma de conciencia crítica en el público contemporáneo. Basándose en la teoría de la performatividad de género de Judith Butler y en la teoría de los actos de habla de John L. Austin, este TFG cómo el *spoken word* puede funcionar no sólo como una forma de expresión, sino movilizando colectivos, generando un impacto emocional e interviniendo en la construcción del cambio social.

Palabras clave: Kae Tempest, *Let Them Eat Chaos, spoken word*, teoría de la performatividad de J. Butler, teoría de los actos de habla de J. Austin.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Over the course of history, human beings have used art to express their perception of the world around them. Literature, as an artistic discipline, has been a tool for creating universes that have helped us understand our human condition. Its evolution has relegated it to a written language, opening up the possibility of being reinterpreted by each readership experience. For the author Kae Tempest, one of the most remarkable figures of the current UK spoken word scene, this would be only half of the poetic experience (Tempest, 2015, 2:02). That is why they[1] have breathed life into their writing, thereby elevating the aesthetic and artistic experience and endowing it with a great power to create a strong impact on the audience. This dissertation focuses on their work *Let Them Eat Chaos*, which is a long narrative poem set to music that has been published both as a book and as an album. In this case, the focus of the study will be more specifically on their performance for the BBC in 2016. If art has to be a reflection of what we are, then in this staging that combines poetry, electronic music and performance, Tempest proposes a reflection on our historical moment through voices that speak of contemporary discomfort, loneliness in cities, disconnection between people, but also the possibility of finding meaning in the context of chaos.

The purpose of this dissertation is to gain a deeper understanding of this work, supported by insights from a philosophical point of view. To that end, the analysis mainly draws on two theories: Judith Butler´s theory of performativity and John Austin´s speech act theory. Through these theories this dissertation explores how *Let Them Eat Chaos* not only tells a story, but also constructs realities through words and staging, and how this allows us to better understand certain social and emotional dynamics of our time. In order to do so, this paper first situates Kae Tempest and their work within the context of the spoken word, exploring the characteristics of this genre and how their proposal fits into it. Then, both of these philosophical theories will be presented in order to establish a framework that allows us to see how language not only describes the world, but also transforms it. Finally, these ideas will be applied to the analysis of the performance of *Let Them Eat Chaos* for the BBC. For the application of these theories to Tempest´s work, the following analysis will be structured

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[1] In order to respect gender identity, in this dissertation pronouns they/them will be used to refer to Kae Tempest, who is a non-binary person.

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around four pillars, namely: alienation and isolation; neoliberalism paradigm; anesthesia of discomfort; and aesthetic, political and social performativity of spoken word. The focus will be on some characters´speeches in the poem, where examples will be identified to help us discern the performative elements and speech acts that underpin the work and shed light on the experience of modern life.

The aim of this dissertation is to demonstrate how the philosophy of language and literature can dialogue in a revealing way, and how an artistic work such as Kae Tempest's combines literature, music and the performing arts to create a space from which we can think about the world we live in.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Theory of Performativity.

To frame the analysis, it is essential to first present the theoretical foundations that will support the reading of Tempest's work. This author, whom I will discuss below, cannot be genuinely approached without a rigorous exposition of the theory developed by the American philosopher Judith Butler. For this reason, a brief biography of the theorist is worth mentioning. Judith Butler (1956-) is a University of California philosopher and an American feminist theorist whose work has had an enormous impact on the shaping of gender today. She is also considered one of the great feminist theorists and, more specifically, of the LGBTQ+ movement, gender studies, queer theory and political philosophy. More specifically in relation to this paper, it is necessary to mention her theory of gender performativity, which is developed extensively by the author throughout her intellectual career. In order to summarise the information as succinctly as possible, I will focus on her most important works with regard to this concept of performativity. First of all, one of the texts that deserves attention is *Gender Trouble* (1990). In general terms, Butler questions the notion of a fixed identity and argues that gender is a social construction that is sustained by repeated acts. In other words, the American author intends to criticize the idea that gender identity is fixed or natural, suggesting that it is a social construction. This idea is profoundly new and original, since the most prestigious prevailing feminist philosophy, namely the philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir, considered that there is a distinction between the biological basis (1949) and the social construction of gender, whereas Judith Butler considers both gender and sex to be discursive constructions (1990). Therefore, according to Butler, gender is not an inherent essence, nor is it a biological feature, but rather the result of the repetition of acts regulated by cultural norms. Thus, gender is performative: it is not, but *is made*.

Butler's theory of performativity is therefore rooted in several works that should be developed in a more detailed way: the already mentioned *Gender Trouble* (1990), *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (1993), *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (1997), *Undoing Gender* (2004). In the following pages, I will synthetize the fundamental ideas of this theory through these works.

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In relation to this paper, it is worth highlighting Chapter 3 of *Gender Trouble* (1990) entitled "Subversive Bodily Acts". The following part moves on to describe in greater detail how Butler develops her theory of the performativity of gender, arguing that gender is not a fixed or essential identity, but the result of the repetition of acts that socially constitute it. I will elaborate on this point. Butler argues that gender is not given in an immutable and fixed way, but is a performative unfolding. The person internalizes through gestures, behaviours and discourses in a reiterative way resulting in the creation of a fixed identity illusion. Cultural narratives impose their own categories, so that the human body is regulated by norms that determine which expressions of gender are intelligible within a binary system (male/female). Since it is, according to Butler, an imposition, the logical consequence of this construction is that it can be challenged and reinterpreted. For this purpose, Butler suggests that gender identities can be modified through acts such as parody or exaggeration and open up a space for new forms of identity. By understanding it as a series of practices that can be subverted, it opens up the possibility of reworking the normative structures that determine what is legitimately accepted in identity. Another significant aspect of *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (1993) is that Butler shifts horizons and defends herself against the criticisms of her previous work. She argues for the materiality of the human body and the importance of the discourses within different normative systems. In addition, noteworthy of mention is Chapter 3: "Gender is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion" which is a rigorous analysis of drag culture and the documentary *Paris Is Burning* (Livingston, 1990), exploring the boundaries between parody and subversion in gender performativity. This particular aspect will be important in relation to the subsequent analysis of Kae Tempest as a figure in contemporary Anglophone literature.

Turning now to *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (1997), it focuses on the aspect of language and performativity. This is where the author refers to language as being capable of creating and modifying identities. In Chapter 1 "Performativity's Social Magic", she argues that language is a vehicle of thoughts in producing reality, shaping and modulating identities by reiterating social norms. In Chapter 2 "The Paradox of Address", Butler examines the duality of language. On the one hand, it regulates identity by imposing social norms, and on the other, it is capable of substituting one for another. Consequently, discourse constructs us within structures of power and, at the same time, its meaning is dynamic and open to reformulation.

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Finally, in *Undoing Gender* (2004), she applies the theory of performativity to the rights of trans and queer people, broadening her perspective on the normativity of gender. In contrast to *Gender Trouble* (1990), where she focuses on the deconstruction of the notion of gender as an essentialist category, and *Bodies That Matter* (1993), where she explores the materiality of the body and its discursive regulation, in the present work she emphasises the ethical, political and socio-cultural consequences of such constructions, analysing how gender norms affect people's lives and recognition. In Chapter 1 "Undoing Gender", Butler analyses the fact that cultural norms construct and legitimise certain gender identities. Unlike previous works, in this one Butler highlights the aspect that norms can be "*undone*", thus opening up new possibilities for the generation and shaping of non-normative identities. Butler becomes deeply philosophical in asking what it means to "be" a gender in a context where some identities are excluded from social recognition, and how these restrictions affect the lives of trans and queer people. She assumes that the human is regulated by discourses that validate some ways of life to the detriment of others. Another relevant chapter for the theoretical framework of this thesis is Chapter 4 "The Question of Social Transformation", in which Butler reflects on the political possibilities of performativity and its possible social change. Whereas in her previous works she emphasized subversion as an individual or discursive act, here she highlights the collective and political dimension of social change. A new way of shaping identities and discursive norms is possible through performativity. At this exact point there is a close connection between Butler's performativity of gender and Kae Tempest's literature. One of Tempest ´s intentions is to highlight socio-cultural issues with a tendency of giving voice to the marginalised.

2.2. Speech Act Theory.

In relation to Butler's performativity and its respective application to gender, it is worth connecting this intellectual and philosophical construct with the theory of speech acts by the British philosopher of language John Austin. Austin's central work is entitled *How to Do Things with Words* (1962), in which he presents an original thesis by clarifying the capability of the language to participate in the configuration of reality and not only to describe it. Austin's innovation consists in the fact that he introduces the distinction between constative statements and performative statements, where the former are those that describe reality and

to which an epistemic value of truth or falsehood can be applied, while the second have the power to implement a change when they are pronounced in the appropriate context. That is to say, they perform an action at the moment they are expressed. These are not likely to be true or false, but rather evaluated by the effectiveness of the elements that participate in it (1962, p.6):

> The term 'performative' will be used in a variety of cognate ways and constructions, much as the term 'imperative' is. The name is derived, of course, from 'perform', the usual verb with the noun 'action': it indicates that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action — it is not normally thought of as just saying something.

In terms of exemplarity, it is relevant to point out that constitutive utterances are those that state a fact such as: "the cat is on the carpet". Meanwhile, the statements that are essential for this dissertation are the performative ones, for which I will develop a few more examples. Austin himself refers to them in his work as follows: "I take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife", "I bet you sixpence it will rain tomorrow" (Austin, 1962, p.5). These utterances emphasise that they interfere in the world and do not merely describe it. In the first sentence, a couple begins their marriage, and in the second, a person challenges a listener to take part in a bet. In both cases, the circumstances involve reality and do not merely describe it. Austin calls the power of such utterances "illocutionary force", which is the impulse of language to generate in reality acts with social consequences. Austin refers to the fact that, for these acts to be carried out, what he calls "felicity conditions" must be accomplished. Performative utterances imply a specific situation as well as specific social conventions. In relation to the first example, the illocutionary force is such a force only if the utterance meets the institutional rules of the act of marriage.

In his pragmatic philosophy of language, Austin classifies speech acts into locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary speech acts. A locutionary act is simply the act of saying something meaningful. An illocutionary act, on the other hand, is one that performs an action by the utterance itself. Finally, since one of the intentions of this research is to study a literary work transmitted through a performance, the acts that should be highlighted in Austin's work here are the perlocutionary acts, which are those that produce an effect on the interlocutor.

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These acts are very significant because the performativity of language is not only reduced to what is said, but also to the way it is said, as well as the effects it can produce.

Having developed the link between performativity and performance, it is necessary to mention that it is in fact the potential of performative utterances what Judith Butler will take up in her philosophical system of gender. However, with a major difference: for Austin, performative acts require an explicit normative framework in order to be effective, such as the former examples about marriage or betting. Butler, however, transfers performativity to identity itself, because gender norms operate implicitly and reiteratively, without the need of an explicit enunciation.

2.3. Spoken Word.

The section that follows provides a brief overview of Spoken Word as the aim of this theoretical framework is to finally land on the work of the British artist Kae Tempest, whose work is carried out by a performance act framed within the context of the spoken word. This genre, which has its roots in the oral tradition that goes from Horace to the present day including Chaucer and the Beat Generation, is an artistic and literary movement that is experiencing a wave in current social activism thanks to the work of multiple authors, amongst whom we find Kae Tempest. Before analysing the work of this artist, it is necessary to develop the concept of spoken word. As a performative literary genre, spoken word is widely used by artists whose intention is to express their work in urban and social activist settings. In this genre there is a combination of oral poetry and live performance, in such a way that the recited word carries with it a powerful emotional value, in conjunction with rhythm and gesticulation. As a consequence, an immersive experience of the author and the spectators transcends the written text. According to Allen Ginsberg poetic vision, the performativity of spoken word has the capacity to create a direct relationship with the audience, stimulating an immediate emotional response that strengthens the poetic message.

In contemporary generations, spoken word is considered an activist tool for political and cultural vindication. In terms of approaching issues of identity, social justice and the fight

against oppression, it has proved to be a very effective vehicle. Somers-Willett (2009) argues that spoken word, particularly slam poetry, critically intervenes in the configuration of collective identities, by giving voice to individuals to share experiences that are at risk of exclusion and to resist before prevailing narratives. Likewise, individuals participating in this performative poetry have the opportunity to explore and assert their personal or collective identity. There is a collective consciousness among spoken word audiences as they watch their poets share their stories and experiences aloud. In Patricia Smith's (2015) words, slam poetry "erase the line between poet and audience". Austin and his perlocutionary acts thus have a very interesting relationship with spoken word poetry, as it has the power to mobilise communities and generate a new social mindset around different issues, as explored in Lori Walkington´s (2018) study of how spoken word can be transformative for oppressed communities.

2.4. Socio-political context of *Let Them Eat Chaos.*

Let us now turn to Kate Tempest's performative work *Let Them Eat Chaos*, which aims to offer a profound critique of contemporary socio-political structures, such as neoliberalism, consumerism and alienation. The work takes place in the city of London where people find themselves trapped in a cycle of meaningless consumerism that plunges its protagonists into deep alienation. At this point, Kae Tempest, who had conceived her work to be performed, uses the spoken word to transport the audience to those adverse circumstances experienced by certain marginalised sectors. According to this industrial and capitalist logic, in *Let Them Eat Chaos*, neoliberalism by encouraging privatisation, reveals itself as a system that takes individuals as instruments for economic purposes, reducing their dignity to a monetary value and thus promoting alienation and competitiveness. As a result, a group of characters are presented struggling in isolation, unaware that their battles are part of an unjust economic structure. In addition, consumerism is presented as an opportunity to mitigate the existential emptiness felt by the characters as their will to make sense of life collapses. People are drawn into a nihilistic cycle of buying, spending and consuming. The author expresses through their body, the cadences, the tone of the voice and a theatrical structure that support the representation of this pulse between the need for annihilated meaningfulness by capitalist consumerism.

Finally, this theoretical framework, which was born out of Butler's performativity and Austin's performance, closes with the enunciation of Kae Tempest's work, which will be dealt with in detail in the following pages of this dissertation.

3. ANALYSIS

This dissertation undertakes an exhaustive analysis of the most relevant elements of the performance of Kae Tempest's *Let Them Eat Chaos*. Such is the fecundity, originality and genius of this work that it is necessary to select some elements over others for the analysis, namely: a critique of neoliberalism, alienation and isolation, consumerism as existential anaesthesia, social and aesthetic performativity, structural protest against the system that binds the characters together in a negative way, and all this highlighting the contemporary relevance of the work and its relationship with Austin's philosophy of language and his Speech Acts as well as Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. Therefore, the following pages will be intended as a combined philosophical reflection and textual analysis.

3.1. Alienation and isolation

Firstly, it is worth mentioning the critique of neoliberalism that can be seen in a very powerful way in the work, since it points out the loss of dignity of the individual, who is relegated to being a social atom whose value is merely economic, which produces alienation and isolation. At this point, the literature of the work needs to be put into context. In it, Kae Tempest, through a contemporary narrative poem, places seven characters in a London neighborhood isolated in their apartments in the early hours of the morning. It is very interesting to note that all of them are awake, due to anxiety as a symptom of a deep unease based on routine and a profound sense of disconnection. It is a system of characters in solitude but sharing the same existential nausea. Each character represents an aspect of this collective crisis: addictions, unenthusiastic work routines, existential emptiness, fear, insomnia and hopelessness. Aesthetically, Tempest uses a rhythmic and direct language. Towards the end of the narrative, a storm breaks out, symbolizing an abrupt change, which drives the characters out of the apartment, creating a space for social cohesion and community. The work beautifully combines the power of the spoken word with a scenic force that results in the artistic production of a living and performative experience.

During the performance of this work for the BBC, we find very interesting excerpts to analyze. The first of them is where the author expresses in the part "Europe Is Lost": "We are lost, we are lost, we are lost" (Tempest, 2016, 15:44). The anaphora places us in a landscape

of anguish and worry of some characters who live in a deep vital uprooting accentuated by the uneasiness that also accompanies the others. That provokes a greater desperation and indifference in the coexistence far from feeling comforted and supported. Therefore, a city unfolds as an inhospitable and hostile frame. From a structural point of view, the characters are not aware that the problem is not produced by themselves but rather they are the unconscious actors of an economic superstructure that supports the hidden interests of the economic infrastructure of neoliberalism, in which Kae Tempest politically denounces the origin of the problems of alienation and isolation experienced by the protagonists. Neoliberalism has been responsible for dividing and isolating community ties and has also turned the social human condition into weakness. This separation is due to the fact that the interests of neoliberalism are fully satisfied with the business that generates a manageable humanity willing to consume indefinitely.

At this point, Judith Butler's theory of performativity is essentially explanatory, since this isolation can be understood as the effect of reiterated social norms that define which bodies, emotions and ways of life are normative and virtuous as models to be followed. In this sense, any identity that is a hindrance or does not fit within this set of interests remains outside of what is recognizable and, therefore, of what is liveable. One example of the effect that these normative standards have on the way the characters that do not fit on it feel is expressed by the author in "Europe is Lost": "Esther´s worried about the world tonight. She is worried all the time. In fact she don´t know how she´s supposed to put it from her mind" (Tempest, 2016, 11:20). This working-class woman represents a subjectivity that does not meet the ideals of success. But her distress is not only individual, it is structural. For this reason, some kinds of suffering are rendered invisible because they are not within the dominant narrative.

On the other hand, from John Austin's philosophy of language, the fragment mentioned before can be analyzed as a perlocutionary act, since it generates an effect in the audience from the staging of the pain and anguish of the characters. Kae Tempest does this in a very powerful way, since not only represents alienation but has such a literary strength that manages to vivify that alienation making it palpable, artistically supported by the rhythm, voice and cadence. From these poetic resources and from a not so linear language, the author manages to transmit the depth of loneliness and unhappiness in the audience. Therefore, the repetition of: "we are lost, we are lost, we are lost" (Tempest, 2016, 15:45), represents

philosophically the loss of dignity of the individual at the same time that literarily it vivifies this act in a tangible way, blending the work with a serious philosophical posture with an original and deeply expressive artistic production.

There are also many possible examples that deserve to be analyzed from this point of view. For instance, in line with the fact that loneliness is not an integral and voluntary choice but a logical consequence of the superstructure generated by neoliberalism, we can consider the following fragment: "It's a strange thing. Your face seems to fade with the changing season. For some reason it comes back more present than ever. Not your face, really more a sense of you…" (Tempest, 2016, 17:48). The author rescues from the characters their inherent but forgotten subjectivity which is eroded by disconnection and confusion. Thereby, alienation is polyhedral, because it is not only social but also becomes both perceptual and affective. In the cited lines, the memory of the other person is no longer clear or visually accessible but it resurfaces as a vague emotional trace. This suggests that, due to existential confusion, the characters do not even have the capacity to dwell in memories or in imagination. A relational disintegration follows, which is closely linked to Judith Butler's philosophy in pointing out that one of the most profound effects of cultural norms may not allow certain bodies, desires or existences to be recognizable or valid as long as it does not suit the neoliberal system (Butler, 1993).

On the other hand, it is relevant to examine the notion of intelligibility, which is central to Butler's theory of performativity and is a keystone in Kae Tempest's work. It is necessary to express that the characters live lives that are not "legible" in the normative framework. Since they neither succeed, nor are they fulfilled, nor are they joyfully consumed, they end up being invisible intra- and intersubjectively. Isolation and alienation imply an invisibility of everything that is not relevant to neoliberalism. This framework of disconnection is reinforced in "Pictures on a Screen", where it is said: "The days go past like pictures on a screen. Sometimes I feel like my life is someone else's dream." (Tempest, 2016, 30:07). This aspect is extremely interesting because it points to the digital hyperconnection that harbors the paradox of an unprecedented existential disengagement. The characters are consumers of simulated relationships within which one's intimacy becomes a product in the shape of a spectacle. The social performativity of the "connected self" is presented as an empty act, producing not community but shared solitude. Once again, John Austin's speech acts have the

potential to be perlocutionary acts, since, as in the analysis of the passage "we are lost", the author does not coldly describe loneliness but provokes it, transmits it to the body of the audience. The cadence of Tempest's voice throughout the performance, the way it lingers, the repeated use of fragmentary images, the muffled tone in certain excerpts, all of these generate a sensory experience of isolation.

In "Grubby", another character says: "Wishing for a phone call. Beep-beep. Looking through names for the one who feels the most dangerous. I can't believe you're in love again. I can't open my heart to anybody but strangers." (Tempest, 2016, 42:24). This expresses the naturalization that has taken place regarding the lack of communication to the point that it has become routine. Alienation has become invisible, and is therefore assimilated as a "normal" way of being in the world. The character reveals how distance and emotional pain can reduce communication to no more than a mechanical gesture or a desperate search for contact, even if it's dangerous. The demand for communication that indicates a frustrated desire breaks down the basic communicative function of language, which is closely related to Austin in the implication of a failure in the illocutionary dimension, since speech acts have ceased to have effectiveness in everyday life. Kae Tempest compensates by expressing what the characters cannot say poetically through the resource of silence.

To end this first point of alienation and isolation, it turns out to be enriching to put the focus on the climax of the work, when the seven characters finally leave their homes, driven by the same impulse:

> "Seven doors to seven flats open at the same time. Seven broken hearts. Seven empty faces heading out of doors. Slowly at first, tentatively, but then unhunching their shoulders. Tipping their necks back. Opening their bodies to this rain. 'Amazing!' they shout. 'Have you seen it?' they shout. As they band closer, closer. Like children drawn towards the eye of a game." (Tempest, 2016, 45:01).

This fragment is powerfully expressive and conclusive in its denunciation of alienation and isolation, constituting a performative act of the first level. Not much is said, but something is done, since the characters establish a connection for the first time, generating a double consequence: on the one hand, and from Austin's philosophy, it can be highlighted that this silent act possesses perlocutionary force by producing in the audience a hope that things will

change and turn from individual atomized isolation towards a community connection; on the other hand, from Butler's philosophy, it can be pointed out that, when isolation is broken, a subversion of the dominant norm of separation is produced and an overture towards a possible common future is generated.

3.2. Neoliberalism paradigm

In second place, in *Let Them Eat Chaos*, Kae Tempest throws a sharp criticism against the neoliberal paradigm and its hegemonic construction of the human being as an independent individual, entirely responsible for his or her destiny, self-sufficient and detached from the social structures that condition him or her. This individual, whose task is to perform, to overcome, not to complain and to compete, is disassembled in a transversal way throughout the work. One of the most emblematic verses is found in "Tunnel Vision": "The myth of the individual has left us disconnected, lost and pitiful" (Tempest, 2016, 50:42). This verse faithfully synthesizes Tempest's critical thesis that the exaltation of the individual has generated a culture of isolation, guilt and abandonment. This is, as the author says in the excerpt, a "myth," meaning a powerful narrative as part of the economic superstructure of neoliberalism. By constructing subjects as separate islands, neoliberalism dissolves the sense of commonality and deactivates the possibility of solidarity. And the individual is relegated to be consumed in his or her guilt if he or she fails to be enough and to feel well, thereby institutionalizing suffering as an experience of personal failure.

From Judith Butler's theory of performativity, this construction of the individual can be read as a culturally reiterated norm that is imposed and reproduced through extensive types of discourses, images, expectations and other superstructural elements. The conclusion would be that the person living in the neoliberalism constitutes a performative identity that is not inherent to the individual but is imposed from the outside and reproduced repeatedly in the routine of everyday life from the professional life to the exhibitive element of social networks and the shameless exposure of intimacy and private life.

In "Pictures on a Screen", one of the characters declares: "I always thought that life would mean more to me eventually. I hate to think I'll make it to 70, potentially 75. Realise I've never been alive. Spend the rest of my days regretting. Wishing I could be forgetting."

(Tempest, 2016, 31:57). This statement is strongly relevant to highlight how there is a strong tension between how one is supposed to feel according to social standards and how one actually feels. The author reveals the performative dimension of the neoliberal self. The individual pretends to be successful and motivated which ends up resulting in an exhausting and unsustainable life. Kae Tempest emphasizes the importance of living a meaningful life, since language pretends to promote the idea of the successful self. But the reality of the individuals ends up being an unbearable frustration that the author uses to express their art.

Again "Grubby" stores a very important verse where the need of belonging and to be loved takes on a self-destructive shape. The speaker confesses: "Arms outstretched for a body. Any body. Here's a body. But I wake up and I can't stand them" (Tempest, 2016, 42:12). This is where this agonizing need of belonging and approval drives the individual to conform to the toxic contradiction of being sociable and also to be aware of not wanting to be sociable at any cost. The character searches for contact, meaning approval, and it leads to moments of physical and emotional intimacy that do not imply a genuine desire, but denotes fear of isolation. This paradox ends up with the feeling that conformity is not empowering but exhausting. Thereby, the result to which the person is driven by pretending to navigate through where it is not feasible ends up generating all the alienation and existential discomfort. In another section in "Ketamine for Breakfast", Tempest deepens the criticism in a simple and brilliant way: "Stop Crying, start buying" (Tempest, 2016, 13:33). The author denounces directly the ruthless cycle of capitalist consumerism with this ironic imperative showing us that capitalism not only structures our material habits but also our emotional responses. The superstructure of neoliberal society produces desires and anxieties, and also generates unsustainable rhythms and ways of life that make it impossible to think, feel or connect. At this point, Tempest's poetic act, as a performative and perlocutionary act, is not merely philosophizing about its current historical moment, but manages to operate directly on the audience's sensibility by making its statement with an emotional and rhythmic force that seeks to move, shake and provoke.

As a potential conclusion to this second section of the analysis, it should be noted that through spoken word, oscillating tempo, vocal intensity and direct language, Tempest aims to dissolve the alienating normality of the neoliberal economic system, shaking up consciences and creating the philosophical inspirational space that, from emotion, a freer and happier

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society can be built. It should not be forgotten that the work intends to express that neoliberalism does not generate free subjects, but anxious individuals, isolated and saturated with claims that they cannot fulfill. The ego that the system promotes is a violent fiction that, unable to sustain itself, becomes a source of suffering. The work *Let Them Eat Chaos* is constituted as an act of performative resistance, deconstructing the myth of the individual poetically and from a rigorous philosophy of existence.

3.3. Anesthesia of discomfort

Thirdly, the author makes a major effort to address the phenomenon of consumerism as a compulsive mechanism followed by the individuals to try to compensate for an emptiness in their hearts. Collaterally, the critique of neoliberalism continues, since this same neoliberalism offers consumerism as an anesthetic solution to the existential nausea caused by an erratic, alienating, isolated life, far from true human nature. Anesthesia does not cure or produce changes, it only produces a temporary reduction of the discomfort as a relief to be able to continue bearing the burden. In "Europe Is Lost", Tempest states: "There´s 2x1 in the clubs, yeah, we scrubbed up well. Washed off the work and the stress" (Tempest, 2016, 12:01). This verse is very relevant because it points out the specific fact of how the superstructure is in charge of feeding the distress and, simultaneously, provides empty but addictive and toxic desires to ease it.

Once again, Judith Butler's theory of performativity is of great value in highlighting that the success of consumption is due to its reiteration and incorporation into the social mentality of the moment, thus constituting a performative act. The person is not born a consumerist but is indoctrinated from the prevailing narrative, ways of life and other types of superstructure that support consumption as an act of liberation and absolute freedom. What looks like freedom of choice is nothing but the disguise of indoctrination. The lines that follow the excerpt quoted above declare: "Now all we want is some excess. Better yet a night to remember that we´ll soon forget" (Tempest, 2016, 12:06). This line, from a performative point of view according to Austin (1962), can be analyzed as an illocutive act, not merely descriptive. It represents the logic of consumption where the desire for "excess" is not an expression of freedom but a normative form of the capitalist discourse. In *Bodies That Matter* (Butler, 1993), the American philosopher exposes how certain repetitive acts create norms under the

guise of freedom. Here, Tempest's speech simulates neoliberal performativity where the subject seems free: "all we want", but the desire has been conditioned by structures that reward excess and ephemerality: "that we'll soon forget". The criticism of this false freedom becomes even more explicit in "Europe Is Lost": "Bullshit saccharine ballads and selfies, and selfies, and selfies. And here's me outside the palace of me" (Tempest, 2016, 15:01). Here Kae Tempest generates a notoriously musicalized chain thus creating the effect of aestheticizing the absurdity upon which the individuals build their lives. At this point, the author highlights even more clearly the conversion of the subject into an object, that is, the person degraded into a product with which business is done, destroying his or her dignity. Identity is performatively based on acts that are free of consumption and exposure of personal intimacy through social networks. One of the artistic genialities of the author lies in the fact that Tempest is able to express all of this with a very beautiful musicality. When Tempest expresses consumption the voice is charged with anxiety and acceleration, the words and verses step on each other and the electronic music in the background aggravates the feeling of weariness and anguish. This musicality and these resources promote in the audience a clear perlocutionary effect, since it is the audience itself who feels within themselves the suggested emotions. In "Tunnel Vision", a character says: "Sitting in our boxes. Notching up our victories as other people's losses. Another day, another chance to turn our faces away from pain. Let's get a takeaway."(Tempest, 2016, 48:26). This sequence of ordinary acts functions as an emotional avoidance strategy. According to Austin (1962), these words are powerful not because they are descriptive but because they normalize emotional numbing through lingüistic acts. The phrase "let's get a takeaway" is not an innocent suggestion: it is an illocutionary act of elision of structural discomfort. If we rely on *Gender Trouble* (Butler, 1990), the banal repetition of certain practices acts as a performativity that constructs the neoliberal subject: apparently independent but actually trapped in a way of life that prevents him from confronting his emptiness. Therefore, this verse synthesizes in a very evident way how the neoliberal logic resides in anesthesia, since consumerism does not seek to satisfy real needs, but tries to fill a yearning deep inside the heart of the person, who is lost, confused and guilty.

Nevertheless, it is worth repeating that the author is optimistic because towards the end of the work, as has already been said, the characters go out into the street and come closer to each other, seeming to be able to create a space that breaks the curse of the captivity of isolation

and depression. It represents a performative act of another kind that opens the possibility of another language, another connection, another way of being in the world. Another way out of the Platonic cavern.

In the light of what has been developed so far, it should be noted that Kae Tempest sustains the thesis that one of the most effective mechanisms of the neoliberal system is to assume consumption as an automatic behavior, which excludes reflection. And, in the context of vivid existential problems, the solution offered is simply to consume in order to numb. This is exposed in "Europe Is Lost" where the poem says: "Your kids are dosed up on prescriptions and sedatives" (Tempest, 2016, 13:21). This fragment is extremely fruitful in pointing out the sedative culture Tempest denounces: a culture that recalls the image of a childhood and, subsequently, of a society that needs to be medicated to survive the structural terror. Sedatives represent a resource for emotional survival. Likewise, drugs, alcohol, and consumerism are presented as the only option since no other lifestyles can be conceived.

Another significant example appears in "Tunnel Vision": "Thinking we´re engaged when we´re pacified staring at the screen so we don't have to see the planet die" (Tempest, 2016, 47:08). This line accurately depicts this gesture of sensory evasion: an everyday act like looking at a screen that neutralizes the perception of all the terror we see through it. Discomfort is not repressed, but numbed. Rage and indignation could serve as revolutionary tools, but neoliberalism itself adjusts in a very precise way the extent to which anesthesia must be applied in order to maintain the situation in the same logic. This logic, which consists of a kind of comfortable anguish, mostly makes use of the digital screen as an element of entertainment. Another statement in the same section may be even more striking: "We sleep so deep, it don't matter how they shake us" (Tempest, 2016, 47:19). Here the metaphor of sleep suggests not only passivity, but a made-up insensitivity. From Austin's (1962) approach, we could consider that these lines produce a state of alarm performatively as they do not describe a literal sleeping, but rather exposes a political condition, a discursive falling asleep where language no longer shocks. The act of enunciation seeks to awaken, perlocutively, but it denounces that the subject is immunized even from the calling.

One particularly revealing line is also found in "Tunnel Vision": "I can't face the past, the past's a dark place. Can't sleep, can't wake" (Tempest, 2016, 48:26). Here the self is stuck

between fatigue and a state of no lucidity, feeling unable to digest a past in order to face the present. It seems like language itself performs this saturation, therefore, there is no satisfaction, only automatism. From Butler's theory, this can be read as an empty performativity, as that musicality of repetition brings out an emotion in the audience that the individual has no sense of purpose, so the performativity would be empty.

At this point it is worthwhile making a brief reflection for the present analysis. In Kae Tempest's work, the performative dimension is intensified through the author's recitation. In many of the verses analyzed here, the cadence becomes machine-like in a way that conveys suffocation and anguish. Likewise, the tone is flattened and the music becomes repetitive, thus producing a feeling of looping and emptiness in the audience and, consequently, results in the evocation of a deep vital dissatisfaction. It should be emphasized again that the author does not limit themself to expressing philosophically a diagnosis of society but goes beyond the exposition of dissatisfaction by provoking those corresponding emotions. This is the true perlocutionary scope of Tempest's spoken word. Towards the end of the poem, the background musical notes are repetitive and sometimes dissonant, creating along with the uncomfortable speech loaded with tough words like "abomination", "tragedy", "pain", "nightmare", "despair", "distance", "sickness", "bombs", etc, an overwhelming sensation, evoquing a machine gun shooting the last bullets after fifty one minutes of uninterrupted speech. Tempest´s aim, in the end, is to make us experience the discomfort in which we are numbly immersed without any kind of anesthesia.

3.4. Aesthetic, political and social performativity of the spoken word

In the fourth place, the present analysis will study the aesthetic, political and social performativity of the spoken word. One of the thesis of this dissertation is that Kae Tempest's work *Let Them Eat Chaos* goes beyond being a poetic and aesthetically constructed text, but achieves a very powerful originality by including the added value of representing a performative action. It is not only important what it is said and how it is said, but also the effect it generates in the audience. The spoken word is a combination of a poetic resource and a political and social tool. If we rely on Austin's work, we can say that *Let Them Eat Chaos* works as a chain of illocutionary and perlocutionary acts: it expresses things and generates effects that mobilize the spectator.

The work is filled with these elements within which it is worth citing the following verse from "Tunnel Vision," namely, "Staring at the screen so we don't have to see the planet die, What am I gonna do to wake up?" (Tempest, 2016, 47:16). What is remarkable about this verse is the manner in which it is delivered, as an urgency is given through an increasing rhythm with a tone of indignation and despair. It is a speech act powerfully endowed with emotional pressure and action. In addition, the verse captures the audience through a direct question and that is a performative way for the audience to feel even more protagonist and empathetic. In this sense even the fourth wall is broken in order to involve the audience and make a call to action. From Butler's philosophy, it should be noted that this act would mean a gesture of destabilization of the normative positions of language, since it generates a space for a new community under construction from a form of discourse.

Another verse that stands out for its rhythm and musicality at breakneck speed is in "Europe Is Lost". As in many other passages of the work, this verse is a relentless build-up toward a stifling emotional exhaustion: "The water levels rising. The animals, the elephants, the polar bears are dying. Stop Crying, start buying. But what about the oil spill, shhhh, no one likes a party- pooping spoil but masacres, masacres, masacres" (Tempest, 2016, 13:27). The chaotic accumulation of disasters represents the asphyxiation and weariness of the individuals and the audience feels that same suffocation through Tempest's urgent vocal delivery and the oppressive sonic atmosphere. There is a possible intention to create an experience of discomfort within the audience, as the chaos and nausea of existence are made vividly present. Thus we can say that this form of performance is not only aesthetic but also political and social. Once again, Kae Tempest generates a new discursive space in which political and social change can take place.

The author's objective is to express in order to move and, from that point, to mobilize new alternative means of living and being in the world. Tempest believes that the world is moved by the emotional, and by appealing to the emotional, change will be real and tangible. Otherwise, the literary work would be merely an entertainment or aesthetic delight, but, for the author, this would not be enough to make the world a more attractive and livable place. This transformative potential can be clearly seen in the following verse from "Pictures on a Screen": "My heart´s hard. I can't hardly be heard. Still I'm harping on″ (Tempest, 2016, 30:41). In this line we can perceive how Tempest turns language from being a mere vehicle

of expression into a texture of the emotional fatigue experienced by the individuals. The idea of exhaustion is mimicked through the alliteration of the /h/ sound, which imitates the sound of the gasp for air as the result of the asphyxiation of personal and social struggle. The soft electronic sound and heartbeat-like rhythm that accompanies these lines compound an aesthetic choice that reinforces the clarity of the speaker's reflections at that moment. As a contrast with the surrounding chaos we also find the following lines: "Is this real? Is this what I´m doing? I know I exist but I don´t feel a thing. " (Tempest, 2016, 30:46). Here the helplessness of Zoe who expresses that sense of disconnection stands out as a performative act. There is a use of poetic language to articulate a painful social condition of detachment from one's own life experience. Later, the character asks herself: "What am I going to do to wake up? I know it's happening but who's it happening to? Has this happened to you" (Tempest, 2016, 30:56). Through this lyrical questioning, Tempest shows that a private struggle is actually a collective one, using the same question in four different passages of the work through the voice of different characters. The aesthetics of spoken word contrasts with the expression of a silent form of alienation. An additional element that had not yet been analyzed in this dissertation deals with the corporal activation shown by the author when acting and communicating the poem. The author shows themself without makeup, choreography or any other form of spectacularity, but in a neutral style and with minimal movements. Thus, the body does not perform any identity, but constructs it in acting itself in real time. That is, the body can support the gender or, on the other hand, go against it. This is one of the most remarkable aspects of Butler's work. There are numerous quotations in which this idea can be read, of all of which the following is particularly interesting: "The body is not a 'being,' but a variable boundary, a surface whose permeability is politically regulated, a signifying practice within a cultural field of gender hierarchy" (Butler, 1990, p.139).

At the beginning of the analysis it was noted that the work of Kae Tempest is remarkable from two dimensions: the aesthetic and the political and social due to the generation of real emotions in the viewer that invite him to political and social change. This is a new challenge to the contemporary categories of art, because it is not only about literature, music or theater but rather a combination of elements that result in an original and brilliant work. An entirely core verse in the work is the one that closes it: "Wake up and love more" (Tempest, 2016, 51:16). This does not imply a moral but delivers it as a categorical existential imperative. From Austin's philosophy of language we can say that there is an illocutionary act that seeks

to be perlocutionary: it names a possibility and, by doing so, invites to its fulfillment. The aim of the work is to move in order to provoke a change, which is none other than "wake up and love more". In a brilliant way it turns the neoliberal system upside down, since in the face of "stop crying, start buying", "love more" comes up. The verb "to love" appears as a new prospect of life to replace the inert. Deep love refers to being the keystone from which we can build and rule human life. A new space radically different from the neoliberal one is on the horizon.

This landscape that is opened in the end is particularly significant as it brings us back to the very beginning of the poem. In the opening verse of the poem, Tempest invited the audience to imagine the origin of the universe and to reflect on the foundation of it: "Picture a vacuum. An endless and unmoving blackness, peace or the absence at least, of terror" (Tempest, 2016, 1:34). This is a mystical beginning that leads to a dystopic frame full of anxiety, drugs, insomnia and fear. This abrupt change is not a coincidence but Kae Tempest through this performativity shakes the audience's conscience, moving from the cosmic to the mundane, from the deep to the superficial, from peace to anxiety. The perlocutionary effect of this speech act holds within itself an impressive power as the audience feels unexpectedly confused, simulating the loss of the characters´ sense of life. And from this aspect, we find an active seek of solutions to return to the desired peace through political and social change. This is precisely one of the most remarkable powers of spoken word: its ability to unite people and generate social cohesion that neoliberalism has destroyed. This dissertation aims to highlight the thesis that art is in the service of humanity, transcending its entertaining and emotive capacity towards its power for social change and the construction of a more humane and loving world, in line with the true social nature of humanity.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation provides an analysis of an original work of contemporary literature that combines poetry, performance and political criticism based on the cultural perspective of two theories that are related to the substance of the poem, thus providing a coherent study of our current historical moment both in terms of art and thought. In order to do so, I have carried out a close reading of key fragments of the performance, connecting them with Judith Butler's theory of performativity and John Austin' speech act theory. *Let Them Eat Chaos* is not only a poetic piece: it is a critical statement in a present marked by tired souls and collective disconnection. Throughout this work Kae Tempest develops, using spoken word, a style of poetry that is not afraid to cause unease, turning it into a weapon of political interpellation. Their words are not merely a portrayal of reality; they pierce it, shake it and create the possibility for transformation.

From a philosophical perspective, the work dialogues with John L. Austin's theory of speech acts, showing how language performs, affects and produces reality. The sentences that structure the text do not describe discomfort but perform it. This dissertation has attempted to connect an important work of literature from the current British scene with a socio-cultural problem. In this sense, a line such as "Stop crying, start buying" can summarise the essence of this work, as well as suggesting to the audience new landscapes and new possibilities of a different political and cultural reality. This is particularly interesting as one of the functions of art in general and literature in particular is to explore the socio-cultural reality of a historical moment and, in the case of the present, to generate proposals for change. Once a comprehensive study of the work has been carried out, it is reasonable to argue that Kae Tempest fulfills these artistic aspirations on a broad scale. In the process of this study, Judith Butler's theory has represented a very valuable resource from which to deepen the analysis of the aforementioned, as it has allowed us to understand how the bodies that inhabit the poem are configured by norms that are repeated and sedimented, generating an obedient and anaesthetised subjectivity. As a conclusive example in relation to this dissertation, it is worth highlighting the fact that the act of consuming -be it drugs, fast food or intense physical bonds- is presented in the work as an immediate relief from a structural pain that cannot be named.

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In addition, where neoliberalism proposes *"Stop crying, start buying"*, Kae Tempest asserts the closing phrase "Wake up and love more". This holds within it an enormous perlocutionary force, since Tempest does not intend to just diagnose modern societies, but goes further by aiming to generate a vivid reaction in the spectator. John Austin´s speech act theory has provided a rigorous access to this significant point which has enormous socio-cultural consequences. A final argument in defence of the literary value of Kae Tempest's work is the added value of their staging and performance, which, by moving away from traditional formulas such as novels or theatre, not only enriches the work but also conveys a message in itself: the need to explore new ways to bring social change.

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