AUTHENTICITY AND
PERFORMATIVITY IN SAUL
BELLOW’S HERZOG

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Central Argument

• *Herzog* can be used to explore subjectivity: the sense of “I”.
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• Some claim the subject can be grounded; others claim it does not exist.
Central Argument

Subjectivity can be grounded
Heidegger: Ontology;
Authenticity.
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Subjectivity can be grounded
Heidegger: Ontology; Authenticity.

Subjectivity an illusion
Butler: Performativity
Central Argument

- *Herzog* can be used to explore subjectivity.
- Some claim the subject can be grounded; others claim it does not exist.
- Heidegger: Authenticity.
- Butler: Performativity.
- *Herzog* shows rejection of authenticity, presents performativity as a way to explore subjectivity, and shows characters that lack stable identities.
Outline of Presentation

1. Brief summary of *Herzog*.
3. Heideggerian Authenticity.
5. Contra-Heidegger, Bellow and the ambivalent performative character.
Summary

• Moses E. Herzog.
• Jewish Canadian scholar who grew up in Chicago.
• Life falling apart; going through identity crisis.
• Reasons for his spiral downward revealed through his letter writing.
• Ends with Herzog preparing to move forward.
An analysis of the titular character (Herzog) reveals Bellow’s rejection of Heideggerian authenticity, shows Butlerian performativity as an alternative model to exploring subjectivity in the novel, and reveals Bellow’s construction of characters as entities lacking stable identities.
• *Dasein* differs from *Sein.*
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• *Dasein*- subject grounded in *Dasein*: being-there; being-in-the-world.
Heidegger and Authenticity

- Dasein differs from Sein.
- Dasein- subject grounded in Dasein: being-there; being-in-the-world.
- “Human beings are inescapably involved with worldly affairs” (Zimmerman 27).
• *Dasein* differs from *Sein*.
• *Dasein*- subject grounded in *Dasein*: being-there; being-in-the-world.
• “Human beings are inescapably involved with worldly affairs” (Zimmerman 27).
• Full integration into the world.
• Self-awareness.
Heidegger and Authenticity

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- *Dasein*- subject grounded in *Dasein*: being-there; being-in-the-world.
- “Human beings are inescapably involved with worldly affairs” (Zimmerman 27).
- Full integration into the world.
- Self-awareness.
- Transcendence
Heidegger & Authenticity (con’t)

• *Mitsein* - being-with-others; essential to *Dasein*.

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MARTIN HEIDEGGER
BEING AND TIME
A translation of SEIN UND ZEIT
by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson
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• *Mitsein*- being-with-others; essential to *Dasein*.

• Fleeing into the world, from the nothing (death).
• intentional aversion of nothingness "force[s] [one] into the public superficialities of existence" ("What is Metaphysics" 51).
Heidegger & Authenticity (con’t)

• Authenticity: balance of the qualities of *Dasein*: being-there, self aware, aware of others, and accepting mortality.
Butler and Performativity

• Subject lacks underlying essence.
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- Gender is non-essential; gender acquired.
Butler and Performativity

• Subject lacks underlying essence.

• “the mark of gender appears to ‘qualify’ bodies as human bodies” (Butler 111).

• Gender is non-essential; gender acquired.

• Subject cannot be grounded in gender.
Butler & Performativity (con’t)

- The sexed body is also constructed.
- Male/Female distinctions employed for bodily control.
- Fictive binary distinctions.
- Categorization of sex points to fragmentation, not unification.
Butler & Performativity (con’t)

- Sex and gender point to illusion.
- Political forces seek to control the body.
- To naturalize and maintain heterosexuality.
- False core.
Butler & Performativity (con’t)

• Illusion upheld through performance.
• Identity idealized through corporeal signification.
Butler & Performativity (con’t)

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• Identity idealized through corporeal signification.
• “fabrications [of identity] manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs” (136).
Butler & Performativity (con’t)

• Illusion upheld through performance.
• Identity idealized through corporeal signification.
• “fabrications [of identity] manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs” (136).
• Illusion disguises fictive construction.
Butler & Performativity (con’t)

- The subject is not real, but rather a result of performativity, which in turn is a result of political influences.
Herzog and Authenticity

• Herzog initially seeks authenticity.
Herzog and Authenticity

• “But the instinct of the people was to reject mentality and its images, ideas, perhaps mistrusting them as foreign. It preferred to put its trust in visible goods. So things go on as before with those who think a great deal and effect nothing, and those who think nothing evidently doing it all.” (Bellow 66).
Herzog and Authenticity

- Herzog sees others and himself neglecting *Dasein*, neglecting integration into the world.
Herzog and Authenticity

• Herzog sees others and himself neglecting *Dasein*.
• He values individuality.
Herzog and Authenticity

• Herzog sees others and himself neglecting *Dasein*.

• He values individuality.

• But, he sees emphasis on death as problematic.

• Herzog rejects authenticity.
Herzog and Authenticity

“The canned sauerkraut of Spengler’s ‘Prussian Socialism’, the commonplaces of the Wasteland outlook, the cheap mental stimulants of Alienation, the cant and rant of pipsqueaks about Inauthenticity and Forlornness. I can’t accept this foolish dreariness. We are talking about the whole life of mankind” (Bellow 75).
Herzog and Performativity

- Herzog cannot escape performativity.
- “no true individual has existed... Only diseased, tragic, or dismal and ludicrous fools who... hoped to achieve some ideal by fiat” (Bellow 67).
- Herzog performs as an academic/intellectual.
- “for the sake of discipline, and under a burden of guilt” (69).
- Individuality an act/performance.
Herzog & Performativity (con’t)

- Herzog’s performance affected by external forces.
- Herzog politically controlled.
- Political influence hidden through the illusion of coherence.
Conclusion

• Herzog rejects authenticity, but constantly stumbles upon performativity.
• Bellow’s characters possess fluid identities.
• Nothing is inherent about subjectivity.
Bibliography