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Fashionable Subjects: On Judith Butler and the Causal Idioms of Postmodern Feminist Theory

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What conception of causality is presupposed when the discursive constitution of identity is affirmed? Is the subject of late modernity "Produced?" "Generated?" "Inscribed?" "Constructed?" "Defined?" "Formed?" Indiscriminately employed in much recent feminist theory, these terms evoke quite different understandings of causal efficacy, and hence quite different accounts of how specifically gendered identities are fashioned. To indicate what is at stake here, I explore arguments advanced by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* and, more recently, in *Bodies That Matter*. In the former, Butler's unrecognized reliance on a mechanistic idiom of causality vitiates her genealogical critique of the humanist subject. In the latter, more elliptically than conclusively, Butler proposes a critical reappropriation of the Aristotelian idiom of form and matter. Building on this suggestion, I argue that an organic idiom of causality, although not without problems, is better equipped than is its Cartesian counterpart to make sense of the body's immanent implication in the processes by which it becomes a gendered subject. In closing, I ask about the implications of these two idioms of causality for our understanding of political agency.

The humanist subject has fallen on hard times. Originally defined by the perfect freedom of his will, his standing as an uncaused cause, today, this exemplar of the Enlightenment appears more creature than creator. Demeaned by Weberians who expose his incarceration within the iron cage, mocked by

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Freudians who impugn his pretensions to transparent rationality, spurned by feminists who find little more than a gender-specific fantasy in his ideal of autonomy, this once proud hero of modernity is now a shadow of his former self. His emasculation achieves its ironic consummation when, as in much postmodern scholarship, his capacity for agency is itself shown to be an artifact of the webs of power in which he is enmeshed and by which he is called into being. Such, I take it, is the troublesome conclusion of that literature which affirms what is typically referred to as the "discursive constitution of identity. "

But what exactly does this phrase mean? How, more specifically, are we to think about the causal relationship between the agencies of such constitution, the beings they fashion, and the capacity of these beings to act? To explore these questions, I turn to the work of Judith Butler. However, before doing that, I want to establish a more comprehensive context for my argument, one whose relevance to Butler's reflections will only become fully apparent as my argument unfolds.

Idioms of Causality

Any effort to think one's way through the issue of causality and its relationship to human agency cannot help but embed the inquirer within the jumbled history we honorifically call "the Western philosophical tradition." The sense of any argument concerning the discursive constitution of identity is, in other words, simultaneously enabled and constrained by a conceptual inheritance we grasp incompletely at best. Accordingly, and as she would be the first to concede, it is not for Butler unilaterally to dictate the meaning of the words she employs; to believe that she is the autonomous author of their sense is to reinstall precisely the conception of subjectivity she means to contest. Part of my task, therefore, is to show how Butler's words sometimes take her places she would rather not be, and another part is to show how her words sometimes open up possibilities she does not fully exploit.

Truth, Nietzsche somewhere suggests, is so much dead metaphor masquerading as ontology. Like all discourse, philosophical talk about causality is essentially metaphorical. At the risk of gross oversimplification, and absent virtually all of the argumentation necessary to sustain this claim, I want to suggest that our most common ways of talking about causality have been informed by two distinct metaphorical clusters, each of which is teased out of a different sort of craft. My phenomenological presupposition here is that beings to whom things merely happen, i.e., beings who undergo events in a state of qualitative immediacy, will never articulate a conception of causality. Consider, for example, the guinea pig unhappily caged in my basement. That mammal is a participant in a wide variety of causal interactions, the most

visible relating to the consumption of food and the excretion of waste products. But never, I am confident, will that being articulate an intelligible account of these interactions. Although perhaps not the only way, human beings are unlike guinea pigs in their capacity to alter causal sequences which they would otherwise simply endure; and such intervention, I am persuaded, is an indispensable condition of any discourse about the causal relations between this and that.

If this contention has any merit, then it seems not unreasonable to speculate that dissimilar forms of technical intervention will spawn dissimilar vocabularies of causality. To see the point, consider the pre-Socratics. When their thinking located its metaphorical seeds in analogical extrapolation of meanings wrought from specifically agrarian practice, the result was an organic conception of causality. Such, for example, was the case with the Milesians who explained the segregation of specific realms of being from an original state of undifferentiated chaos through reference to one or more seminal agencies endowed with the capacity for self-movement qua generation and maturation; think, in this regard, of Anaximander who understands the formation of the world through reference to a primordial germ (*gonimon*) capable of begetting heat and cold. On such an account, the cosmos is a teleological order whose vital changes, like those of any growing plant, are directed toward predetermined ends by causal forces immanent within the distinct beings comprising the species of which they are members.

By way of contrast, as is especially apparent in the fragments of Leucippus and Democritus, when a vocabulary of causality was fashioned via analogical extrapolation of meanings teased from nonagrarian forms of work (e.g., leatherwork, pottery-making, metalwork), the material roots underlying all change were characteristically pictured not as qualitatively distinct elements, but as homogeneous structural units. Should such units assume new forms, that event is to be explained by their capacity to be stretched, hammered, molded, twisted, etc., by an extrinsic source of agency. On this account, the process of change takes shape not as generation and growth, but as quantitative separation and aggregation of compositional parts whose mechanical motions are typically conceived after the analogy of things falling through space; and the termini of causal sequences are said to consist not of differentiated substances gifted with the power of self-action, but of the forms assumed by recalcitrant matter when it is reshaped in accordance with antecedently formulated and externally imposed designs.

For my purposes, the empirical adequacy of these speculations is irrelevant. What does matter is the plausibility of my contention that much of "the tradition" can be read in terms of the contest between, and sometimes the miscegenation of, these two metaphorically rooted idioms of causality. To

establish that claim's credibility, I offer a few familiar illustrations. Think of Plato who, in the *Timaeus*, represents the geometrically patterned structure of the cosmos as a product of divine artisanal design and who, in the *Republic*, represents the fashioning of a just *polis* as the work of a quasi-divine sculptor whose primary materials consist of so many recalcitrant human bodies. Now think of Aristotle. Arguably, some of the more fundamental differences between Plato and his wayward student stem from the latter's reliance on organic metaphors in discussing causality and cosmology. Rejecting Plato's ontology of transcendent form and stubborn matter, which ultimately owes its origins to the mechanical crafts, Aristotle returns to the domain of the agrarian when he affirms the essential interdependence of form and matter in accounting for the movement of all things from potentiality to actuality.

To claim that most discussions of causality, including Butler's, draw much of their sense from these metaphorical clusters is not to claim that they have remained static through time. Perhaps the best way to indicate their malleability, but also their stubborn persistence, is to note how these two idioms changed in conjunction with, indeed as a necessary condition of, the emergence of early modern natural science. As a complement to that science's rejection of Aristotle's teleology and its affirmation of the exclusive reality of efficient causes, there appears a resurgence of the mechanical metaphors which had largely disappeared in the high Scholasticism of Aquinas. However, with early modern science's aggressive assault upon the residues of pantheism present within the ancient and medieval notion of ensouled matter, the stuff on which causality worked came to be regarded as so much lifeless matter capable of rectilinear motion alone. Thus, while the reigning metaphors remained much the same, their specific import underwent a marked reformulation as Enlightenment science elaborated its distinctively modern disjunctions between the animate and the inanimate, the rational and the nonrational, the soul and the body.

Much of modern political theory can be located within these idiomatic confines, as a nod toward Hobbes and Hegel will suggest. Although residues of agrarian-based idioms of causality are secreted within his discussion of the body politic's procreation and nutrition, on the whole, Hobbes thinks like an artisan when he explains how to fashion the "forme" of a commonwealth from its recalcitrant "matter," "which is Man." Here, a distinctively Cartesian conception of matter is folded into an account of causality derived from the arts of fabrication. By way of contrast, Hegel thinks like a farmer when he represents the state as an internally differentiated unity which grows out of, and so encompasses within its organic totality, the less mature forms of life that are the family and civil society. His opposition to those who, like Hobbes, regard political order as a mere aggregation of externally related atomic units is con-

ceptually impossible absent his reworking of Aristotelian teleology which, in turn, is predicated on causal understandings derived from reflection on the birth, maturation, and death of living things.

To bring this preface to a close, let me note that the humanist subject's present woes stem, at least in part, from his standing as an uneasy compromise between these two idioms. On the one hand, much like a rose reaching toward full bloom, he is ascribed a capacity for self-directed agency. On the other hand, much like a pocket watch, he is a creature whose perfectly predictable motions are dictated by the design antecedently conceived and imposed by his divine maker. Kant's resolution of this Cartesian construction, i.e., his too neat bifurcation of the noumenal and the phenomenal, is strained to the breaking point when, as Butler and others maintain, the spiritual capacity of human beings to act autonomously is itself taken to be an heteronomous effect caused by the profane body's discursive constitution.

The Art(ifact) of Sex

Gender Trouble opens with the following question: "What happens to the subject and to the stability of gender categories when the epistemic regime of presumptive heterosexuality is unmasked as that which produces and reifies these ostensible categories of ontology?" (Butler 1990: viii). Butler's aim is to criticize all arguments which suggest that representations of gender identity can be said to be true or authentic in virtue of their accurate correspondence to, or expression of, some extradiscursive reality. In part, she directs this criticism against those who assume the naturalness of binary heterosexual identities and so the unproblematic congruity of anatomy, gender identification, and sexual desire. However, a still more substantial portion of Butler's argument is directed against those who would ground critiques of, as well as resistance to, compulsory heterosexuality in appeals to the repressed reality of extradiscursive sexuality and its subterranean promptings.

Butler's quarrel with arguments of this latter stripe can be illustrated by considering her reading of Julia Kristeva. Kristeva's appeal to the "semiotic" is an appeal to the primacy of heterogeneous libidinal drives allegedly rooted in the extradiscursive reality of the maternal body. To say that such drives are extradiscursive is not, however, to say that these drives must remain mute. Rather, Kristeva insists, it is to say that they cannot be afforded expression via the reified forms of language which, following Lacan, she calls "the Symbolic." Recovery of these drives from the Symbolic is possible only via the polysemic language of poetry. Subversion of the law of the father, that is, can occur only via appropriation of linguistic modes which cannot help but prove hopelessly ambiguous, even unintelligible, to those ill-conceived phallic subjects who only speak prose.

To this argument, Butler offers a deceptively simple counter: "[I]f we can attribute meaning only to that which is representable in language, then to attribute meanings to drives prior to their emergence in language is impossible" (Butler 1990: 88). Any account of "extradiscursive" reality, however imagined, must itself be elaborated in the terms of an existing language game; only within language can we articulate the significant reality of that which is said to stand behind, before, or beyond language. But if that is so, then language can never be true to its subject, and this is so in two different ways. First, because the extradiscursive can never be isolated from our discursive practices so as to function as a standard for determining the accurate correspondence of the latter with the former, we can never be sure that language truly re-presents that about which it allegedly speaks. Second, and more fundamentally, we can never truly speak of this unspeakable reality, for the mere act of doing so transforms "it" into something other than what, allegedly, it extradiscursively is.

To this point, Butler's argument is conceptual in character; its aim is to demonstrate the logical fallacy involved in affirming the reality of the unrepresentable via the representations of language. But that does not exhaust Butler's project. Her more controversial aim is to show that the drives to which Kristeva appeals are actually *creatures* of their linguistic formulation. In other words, Butler supplements her conceptual criticism with a claim concerning the power of discourse to produce effects which, in time, are taken to be independent causes. To make this argument, she draws on Foucault. In his introductory volume to *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault criticizes those who appeal to the power of primordial sexuality, however construed, as an antidote to the "unnatural" agencies of bourgeois repression. That we have come to believe in such a power, as when we assert that emancipatory politics should free us from the "artificial" constraints now imposed on sexuality, says nothing about the "nature" of sexuality but everything about the power of discourse to fashion a world in its own image. Understood genealogically, "sex" is a fictitious unity, a hypostatized noun, which secures its apparent reality only via its chronic discursive iteration.

Kristeva, Butler insists, is taken in by a similar trick of grammar when she contends that the archaic desire to give birth is the paradigmatic drive resident within the maternal body: "Insofar as Kristeva conceptualizes this maternal instinct as having an ontological status prior to the paternal law, she fails to consider the way in which that very law might well be the *cause* of the very desire it is said to *repress* . . . [W]hat Kristeva claims to discover in the prediscursive maternal body is itself a production of a given historical discourse, an *effect* of culture rather than its secret and primary cause" (Butler 1990: 90, 80-81). Standing Kristeva on her head, Butler argues that when

maternality is regarded as the essence of being woman, and when that essence is located in the extradiscursive reality of the female body, the result is to occlude those sociopolitical forces which conspire to oppress women via their representation as beings whose destiny is to make babies. However unwittingly, Kristeva thereby plays into the hands of those who affirm the exclusive legitimacy of heterosexual desire and procreative sex.

The route delineated by Butler's critique of Kristeva dictates the path of her own counterargument. If the maternal instinct Kristeva discovers in the body of the natural woman is indeed a cultural artifact, then the appropriate remedy is to "reverse the very order of this causality" (Butler 1990: 91). To think genealogically is to come to see that Kristeva's maternal instinct, masquerading as an uncaused cause, is in fact an heteronomous effect. Applied to gender more generally, what is to be reversed is the conviction that the brute fact of anatomical structure, i.e., one's "sex," is somehow the cause of one's "true" gender identity as well as of the disposition of erotic energies along heterosexual lines; here, critical inquiry will demonstrate that the "production of sex *as* the prediscursive ought to be understood as the effect of the apparatus of cultural construction designated by *gender*" (Butler 1990: 7). Applied to questions of subjectivity still more generally, what is to be reversed is our confident assurance that the humanist self is the rational creator of the cultural forms it inhabits; here, inquiry will investigate "the political stakes in designating as an *origin* and *cause* those identity categories that are in fact the *effects* of institutions, practices, discourses with multiple and diffuse points of origin" (Butler 1990: ix).

So, Butler's aim is to turn round the arrow of causation such that what was once labeled "effect" comes to be labeled "cause," and vice versa. But to redirect that sign is not in and of itself to explain what sort of causal agencies that arrow specifies. To compress a complex argument into a formula, Butler does so by appealing to the overlapping concepts of "reiteration" and "performativity. "

By "reiteration," Butler refers to incessant repetition of those grammatical forms which in time generate the stable appearance of the autonomous agent: "[T]o understand identity as a *practice,* and as a signifying practice, is to understand culturally intelligible subjects as the resulting effects of a rule-bound discourse that inserts itself in the pervasive and mundane signifying acts of linguistic life" (Butler 1990: 145). These rules—think of those which regulate coherent employment of the personal pronoun "I"—are constitutive of, but also invisible to, the subject. They are constitutive insofar as the very possibility of being an intelligible self, which includes the imperative that one be a determinate gender, presupposes their invocation. They are simultaneously invisible insofar as, like your eyes, they define the place from which you see but are never themselves seen.

Reiteration's self-fashioning work is complemented by that of performativity. To understand this second causal agency, it is important to note that Butler, again following Foucault, means the term "discourse" to be more inclusive than that of "language," narrowly construed. The "discourse of gender," for example, refers to all of the institutions and norms which reproduce, enforce, and legitimate the ritualized forms of intelligible conduct constitutive of compulsory heterosexuality. So construed, this discourse includes conventions of sex-specific dress, relations of rule within the traditional nuclear family, the spatial segregation of work into private and public spheres, the commodification of heterosexual desire, partitioning of the body into erogenous and non-erogenous zones, the sentimentalization of adolescent heterosexual love, etc. All of this and more enters into the network of powers whose efficacy compels the embodied performances which, in conjunction with the grammatical forms whose reiteration fashions the illusion of the self-subsistent "I," come to be normalized as the effect we (mis)takenly designate as the extradiscursive cause called "sex."

What's the Matter with Gender Trouble?

At this point, I want to pose three questions about Butler's argument in *Gender Trouble*. The first concerns the ambiguous metaphorics embedded within Butler's talk of causation; the second her representation of genealogical inquiry as a sort of "reversal"; and the third her account of the relationship between fashionable human bodies and the agencies of their discursive constitution.

As do many others, Butler employs an array of verbs in speaking about the process of discursive constitution. Consider, for example, the following: "[T]he subjects regulated by such structures [reiteration and performativity] are, by virtue of being subjected to them, formed, defined, and reproduced in accordance with the requirements of those structures" (Butler 1990: 2). Elsewhere, muddying the waters still more, she uses the terms "produce," "establish," "constitute," and "construct" to specify how subjects are made (Butler 1990: ix, xi, 147). That she is inattentive to the differential import of these verbs seems apparent when she presents them as synonyms for one another: "Paradoxically, the reconceptualization of identity as an *effect*, that is, as *produced* or *generated*, opens up possibilities of 'agency' that are insidiously foreclosed by positions that take identity categories as foundational and fixed" (Butler 1990: 147).

The different verbs employed by Butler draw their sense from historically burdened idioms of causality which, although often confused in practice, are nonetheless conceptually distinguishable. For example, when drawn from the domain of biological beings, the term "reproduce" typically implies causality

in an agrarian and/or procreative guise. In contrast, when teased out of the sphere of fabrication, the verb "construct" typically implies causality in the guise of artisanal manufacture. Whereas the former suggests that the workings of causal forces are in some sense internal to the being undergoing their efficacy (as in the case of a pregnant woman), the latter suggests that those workings are externally impressed upon that being (as in the case of a metalworker shaping silver into a goblet). Whereas the former assumes that reproducer and reproduced are of the same species of being (as in mother and child), the latter assumes that maker and made are of different kind (as in the case of metalworker and silver ore). Whereas the former implies that the intelligibility of that which is created is immanently but not consciously present as the unfolding power of maturation (as in a child who grows to adulthood), the latter implies that the creature's intelligibility is contingent upon the antecedent design which informs the creator's fabrication (as in the artisan who envisions the finished form of an artifact prior to the onset of work). Because Butler's verbs gesture toward such divergent conceptions of creation, her terminology raises at least as many questions about the conduct of discursive constitution as it answers.

My second question concerns Butler's call to "reverse" the causal arrow conventionally drawn between sex and gender or, more generally, between subjectivity and discourse: Is a simple reversal of received terms, an inversion of accustomed polarities, adequate to her (or our) purposes? This question cannot be answered definitively until the ambiguities resident within Butler's metaphorics of causality are cleared up. Be that as it may, in the absence of such clarification, I wish to suggest, first, that *Gender Trouble* is inclined toward a nonagrarian conception of causality, i.e., one which presupposes the externality of cause and effect as well as the mechanical character of their conjunction; and, second, that this conception is at odds with Butler's attempt to dismantle the humanist subject.

That Butler is so inclined can be suggested by the following argument: Consider the causal line drawn in orthodox discourse between anatomy and sexual orientation. As conventionally understood, the former dictates the latter in an altogether unmediated manner. The fact that my body is equipped with a penis is taken to be the antecedent and discrete cause of my brute desire to have intercourse with women which, in turn, is taken to be the unambiguous mark of my clear and distinct identity as a heterosexual. In and of itself, Butler's call to reverse the direction of the causal arrow pointing from my member to my membership in the company of heterosexuals does not throw into question the character of the causal linkage signified by that arrow; it is only to place what we now take to be an effect in the spot presently occupied by what we now take to be a cause, and vice versa. Such, I take it, is

intimated when Butler contends that "sanctioned heterosexuality and transgressive homosexuality . . . are indeed *effects, temporally and ontologically later than the law itself,* and the illusion of a sexuality before the law is itself the creation of that law" (Butler 1990: 74; emphasis added).

The problem inherent in Butler's call for a reversal, so construed, can be indicated by returning to the father of genealogical inquiry. Butler's argument, I wish to suggest, is predicated on an incomplete appreciation of Nietzsche's contention, advanced in the *Genealogy of Morals*, that "there is no 'being' behind doing, effecting, becoming; 'the doer' is merely a fiction added to the deed—the deed is everything" (Nietzsche 1967: 45). Quoting this passage with approval, Butler makes the analogous argument: "[T]here is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler 1990: 25). But Butler's extrapolation of Nietzsche's deconstruction of the subject to the specifically gendered subject falls short of its mark because it is informed by a conception of causality which presupposes the neat distinguishability of, as well as the linear relationship between, cause and effect. The humanist subject cannot be dispatched with a weapon, i.e., a conception of causality, which merely reproduces in the domain of logic the illusions of that same subject.

To compress Nietzsche's complex argument into yet another formula, on his account, all existents exist in a condition of perpetual becoming, and the interconnections each sustains with others are essential to the character of all. Nothing in the world has any intrinsic features, for all existents are thoroughly constituted by their interrelations with, and differences from, everything else. Every existent, in other words, is an event, and every event's distinguishing features are inseparable from those other events which condition and articulate those features. What an existent is, in short, is the dynamic confluence of events in which "it" participates.

Because all existents are so constituted, it is only through an act of suspect abstraction that any one "thing" is unambiguously distinguished from the other events to which "it" is related. What we call a "thing," in other words, is a fiction invented by human beings in order to serve as a foundation, a ground, for what we then take to be the essential attributes of this substantial being, including its capacity to produce effects on other "things." However, if each thing is merely "the sum of its effects" (Nietzsche 1967: 296), then there is no good reason to posit its separate existence as the antecedent substance which produces those same effects. "The properties of a thing are effects on other 'things': if one removes other 'things,' then a thing has no properties, i.e., there is no thing without other things, i.e., there is no 'thing-in-itself'" (Nietzsche 1967: 302). But if there is indeed no "thing-in-itself," then to con-

sider any one thing as the isolable cause of some other discrete thing is to layer fiction upon fiction. In sum, for Nietzsche, there is no ontological distinction between cause and effect—or, more carefully, no distinction that can be grasped apart from discursive construction of that distinction in light of some particular purpose.

To illustrate, Nietzsche offers the example of lightning. Our conventional understanding of causality is implicit when we exclaim: "Look at the lightning flash!" On this account, lightning is taken to be the cause of the flash; the flash qua effect follows the lightning qua cause. To oppose this construction, Nietzsche might (but does not) write: "Look at the lightning-flash," where the hyphen signifies not the discrimination of cause from effect, but rather a concurrent configuration of events within which no one substantial thing can be unambiguously discriminated from the other as cause or as effect. We imagine that we can engage in such a discrimination only because we abstract from this multiplicity of events those that happen to concern us at present, and then treat the sum of those effects as the cause of the property that is the flash. But, Nietzsche insists, there is no lightning behind the flash; "it" is that flash, that mobile configuration of events, nothing more and nothing less. "The popular mind in fact doubles the deed: it posits the same event first as cause and then a second time as its effect. Scientists do no better when they say 'force moves,' 'force causes,' and the like—all its coolness, its freedom from emotion notwithstanding, our entire science still lies under the misleading influence of language and has not disposed of that little changeling, the 'subject' (the atom, for example, is such a changeling, as is the Kantian 'thing-in-itself')" (Nietzsche 1989: 45).

To account for our belief in self-subsistent causes whose effects we think we trace through linear time, Nietzsche offers two interrelated explanations. First, this conviction is a product of grammatical structures which, in accordance with the logic of subject and predicate, impel us to speak not merely of effects and their configurations, but also of "things" that produce effects. Second, our belief in such causes is the epistemological correlate of the substantive subject who, allegedly standing apart from the totality of its deeds, is the *sine qua non* of slave morality. If "the metaphysics of the hangman" (Nietzsche 1964: 42) is to prove coherent, there must exist autonomous selves who can be deemed responsible and so punishable for the crimes and sins they commit. The ethic of the Judeo-Christian tradition, in other words, must presuppose the reality of self-sufficient subjects capable of freely willing the blameworthy effects whose enduring causes they are taken to be. When such subjects are metaphorically extrapolated into "nature," the result is our misguided notion of cause: "Our 'understanding of an event' has consisted in our inventing a subject which was made responsible for something that happens

and for how it happens. We have combined our feeling of will, our feeling of 'freedom,' our feeling of responsibility and our intention to perform an act, into the concept 'cause" (Nietzsche 1967: 296).

The problem with *Gender Trouble* is not, as some have contended, that it dissolves the material world into so many immaterial creatures of discourse. Rather, the problem is that its uncritical call to "reverse" the poles of received causal explanations entails postulation of an independent subject which, no matter how resolutely material, must stand apart from the effects it is said to cause; only then, after all, can the former's efficacy with respect to the latter be identified as such. The logic of this exhortation requires, first, that Butler abstract something called "discourse" from the heterogeneous web in which it is constitutively implicated; second, that she ascribe unilinear efficacy to this hypostatized entity; and, third, that she treat this self-subsistent entity as the external cause of identity, now relegated to the domain of dependent effects. Butler, in sum, retains a conception of causality which is at odds with her effort to deconstruct the autonomous subject who freely chooses his gender identity as well as that phantasm's parasitic twin, i.e., the heteronomous subject whose identity is simply given by the imperatives of her senseless anatomy.

My third question concerns Butler's representation of the body in *Gender Trouble*. If gender identity is a creature of the work done by the agencies of discursive constitution, what exactly is the character of that work and how are we to conceive of that on which those agencies operate? Metaphorically put, given the preceding argument, we should expect the conduct of such causation to appear more akin to a hammer beating silver than to a seed sprouting from moist soil. That *Gender Trouble* does in fact presuppose some such representation is intimated by its account of performativity and reiteration. Each appears to do its work through so many acts of blunt repetition; "all signification takes place within the orbit of the compulsion to repeat" (Butler 1990: 145). Dress me in petticoats every day, and my body will become a curtseying machine. Call me a "girl" often enough, and "I" will come to think of myself as one who belongs by nature in the company of little women. How such ritualized invocations and mandated performances come to be significantly incorporated, i.e., transformed into embodied semantic structures capable of navigating subjects through a present always spilling into an uncertain future, is a question which cannot be answered so long as Butler remains wedded to a mechanistic model of causation.

As to the question of the "what" on which discursive constitution works, let me begin by indicating three answers that will not do. First, given Butler's critique of Kristeva, no longer can we entertain the illusion of a true body beyond the "law," i.e., that teleological figure whose essential nature, once released from the crust of convention, will march us down the path to perfect

freedom. Second, no longer can we think of the body as that sometimes churlish but always mindless servant to an immaterial "I" whose relationship to its own embodiment is purely contingent; Descartes's self-contained "sum," we now understand, is itself an appearance created and sustained by the body's discursive constitution. Third, and finally, we must refuse Foucault's body as well. Sometimes, as Butler rightly notes, the body of Foucault looks not unlike that of Kristeva. This is the disciplined body, and what discipline has straitened is a prediscursive riot of erotically charged energies blessed with latent emancipatory import. On other occasions, more akin to Descartes, Foucault's body appears as the necessary material presupposition of its acquisition of intelligible form, i.e., as a "passive medium that is signified by an inscription from a cultural source figured as 'external' to that body" (Butler 1990: 129). Both of Foucault's bodies, however, smuggle in a fictional entity under the cover of extradiscursive reality, and so both ultimately fall prey to the Fallacy of Kristeva.

If "the body" must always appear in quotation marks, i.e., if "it" is an unspeakable thing until discursively constituted, then "it" cannot be said to have any reality absent such constitution. To contend otherwise is to engage in a sort of ontological legerdemain and, thereby, to render the always historically specific body immune to genealogical inquiry. Pressed to its logical conclusion, then, Butler's exhortation to deconstruct "the body" into its constitutive acts, as these are performed in accordance with the rituals of compulsory heterosexuality, cannot help but make the body disappear as a possible object of inquiry—except, of course, insofar as that inquiry is inquiry into these same acts and nothing else: "That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality" (Butler 1990: 136).

But this conclusion proves troublesome when juxtaposed to the answer I provided to my second question. Butler's contention that the body has no reality independent of the acts by which it is constituted coexists uneasily with her call to reverse the causal lines conventionally drawn between the body and its gendered identity. If the body cannot be said to antecede its discursive constitution, then what is it upon which the agencies of such constitution do their work? The answer, I presume, can only be nothing. But if that is the case, then operation of the mechanisms of discursive constitution must bring into being that which they were earlier said to affect; and, strictly speaking, that operation, like God's performative utterances in the beginning, must be a *creatio ex nihilo*. However, if that is the case, i.e., if the effects of discursive constitution are indistinguishable from its causes, then it is not clear how one can employ a linear category of causality, let alone call for a reversal of the lines conventionally drawn between cause and effect. Absent

the prior existence of some thing susceptible to causal efficacy, i.e., that which is subject to such efficacy, there can exist only so many causes (or, alternatively, so many effects). Yet if the world is populated exclusively by causes which, at one and the same time, are so many effects, then either the category of causality is superfluous, or it must be rethought in a way Butler does not. At the end of the road paved with Butler's reflections on the body, we might say, stands the incorrigible author of the gay science.

Our Bodies/Our Selves

Although *Bodies That Matter* is presented as a response to *Gender Trouble's* critics, it is at least as much an exercise in autocritique. Perhaps unwittingly, Butler reveals some sense of *Gender Trouble's* difficulties when, in *Bodies That Matter*, she chides those who posit the existence of a determinate discursive matrix which

> acts in a singular and deterministic way to produce a subject as its effect. That is to install the "matrix" in the subject-position with a grammatical formulation which itself needs to be rethought. Indeed, the propositional form "Discourse constructs the subject" retains the subject-position of the grammatical formulation even as it reverses the place of subject and discourse. Construction must mean more than such a simple reversal of terms. (Butler 1993: 8-9)

So long as our speech is governed by this formulation, debate will shuffle back and forth between all too familiar poles. At one end stand those for whom discursive "construction has taken the place of a godlike agency which not only causes but composes everything which is its object" (Butler 1993: 6). At the other end stand those who insist that construction presupposes a constructing agent, a voluntarist subject who is not himself a creature of discourse. Does language speak us, or do we speak it?

In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler seeks to step beyond this unhappy question. Just how to do so is a tricky matter, indeed. In order to escape the insatiable maw of monistic idealism, she must reject—or at least qualify—the claim that language "goes all the way down. " But she cannot mark the limits of language by positing some extradiscursive reality, for any such postulation will itself be articulated in terms of this or that language. To further complicate matters, Butler wants to retain her contention that "discourse" exercises some sort of efficacy in its relationship to "the body. " Yet she now appears to recognize that *Gender Trouble's* call to reverse conventional causal polarities will not do.

To maneuver through these straits, Butler tentatively proposes a reworking of the Aristotelian vocabulary of form and matter. Such efforts at conceptual reconfiguration are unavoidable, since thinking can never begin *de novo*, but they are also treacherous. Because the form/matter opposition is part and

parcel of a conceptual tradition whose intelligibility turns on affirmation of an extradiscursive reality, of a realm of nature independent of culture, of a domain where women (but not men) are peculiarly at home, no matter how nuanced, its contemporary reappropriation may simply bolster the cause of those who would render patriarchal and heterosexist practices immune from critical inquiry.

To appreciate the exact cause for concern here, recall the etymological link between "matter" and "*mater*," which in turn recalls the conceptual relationship between materiality and femininity. Although Butler explores this connection via a consideration of Irigaray's reading of Plato's *Timaeus*, of more obvious relevance is Aristotle's account of reproduction. Deploying mechanical metaphors in order to disparage female procreative power, that account holds that women contribute the passive matter of generation, whereas men bestow the immaterial but active principle that shapes matter to intelligible form, and so actualizes what otherwise remains so much potentiality:

> The female always provides the material, the male provides that which fashions the material into shape; this, in our view, is the specific characteristic of each of the sexes: that is what it means to be male or to be female. Hence, necessity requires that the female should provide the physical part, i.e., a quantity of material, but not that the male should do so, since necessity does not require that the tools should reside in the product that is being made, nor that the agent which uses them should do so. Thus the physical part, the body, comes from the female, and the Soul from the male, since the Soul is the essence of a particular body. (Aristotle 1943: 738b22–30)

Just as the master of the household brings its otherwise inchoate materials to rational form, so does his soulful tool cause matter's transition from undifferentiated stuff to the shaped entity that is an embryo. Reason thus confirms Apollo's declaration that the true parent, the source of a child's legitimate identity, is he who mounts.

Whether the prophylaxis of genealogical inquiry is sufficient to overcome this unsavory baggage cannot be answered a priori. Why, then, does Butler decide that this is a gamble worth taking? Much of the answer has to do with a nagging philosophical itch. "The linguistic categories that are understood to 'denote' the materiality of the body are themselves troubled by a referent that is never fully or permanently resolved or contained by any given signified" (Butler 1993: 67). The concept of "matter" matters because it responds to our persistent desire to acknowledge the palpable reality of that which is shaped to significant form *in* (as opposed to *by*) discourse. To confess to this desire is not to claim that this reality can be accurately captured in representationalist discourse. "To posit by way of language a materiality outside of language is

still to posit that materiality, and the materiality so posited will retain that positing as its constitutive condition" (Butler 1993: 30). But it is to affirm that discourse, however conceived, does not exhaust the being *of* that of which it speaks and, hence, to overcome the monistic conclusion that discourse's work is a *creatio ex nihilo* from which no exit is possible.

But why ask Aristotle, of all people, to scratch this itch? Butler's rehabilitation of the Aristotelian notion of matter is extremely attenuated, and so much of what I say here is speculative extrapolation. Be that as it may, for Butler, the, principal virtue of the Aristotelian concept of matter, the stuff of which discursively articulated realities are made, appears to be that it is not Cartesian. Granted, at first blush, it might appear that the passivity of Aristotelian matter renders it indistinguishable from its Cartesian counterpart. But that is not quite right. The inquiry of early modern science is predicated on affirmation of the existence of so many inert and homogeneous atoms whose interactions are altogether exoteric and mechanical, whereas Aristotelian inquiry ascribes to matter the distinctly unCartesian properties of temporality and potentiality:

> In both the Latin and the Greek, matter *(materia* and *hyle)* is neither a simple, brute positivity or referent nor a blank surface or slate awaiting an external signification, but is always in some sense temporalized. This is true for Marx as well, when "matter" is understood as a principle of *transformation,* presuming and inducing a future. . . . Insofar as matter appears in these cases to be invested with a certain capacity to originate and to compose that for which it also supplies the principle of intelligibility, then matter is clearly defined by a certain power of creation and rationality that is for the most part divested from the more modern empirical deployment of the term. (Butler 1993: 31–32)

To assure the father's singular claim to determine the identity of his child, Aristotle construes the female as a principle which, although animate, is unreal in the sense that it does not substantively participate in constituting the essence of that which form teases from it. To assure the omnipotence of that father, now posturing as the autonomous subject, Descartes drains the lifeforce from Aristotle's matter. Refusing ancient and modern patriarch alike, Butler injects into Descartes's dead matter a fix of revivifying blood, and assigns to Aristotle's passive matter a capacity to "presume and induce" its own assumption of intelligible form. Doing so, Judith Butler materializes as the Victor Frankenstein of postmodernity.

The temporality Butler ascribes to matter is more akin to that of a seed than that of a stone. For Descartes, time is a matter of moving from one discrete moment to the next through so many equidistant points in so much undifferentiated space. For Butler, following Aristotle, matter's temporal ar-

ticulation entails what I will call its qualitative conservation. What I mean by this can be understood by considering any grown living thing—a tree, an adult woman—in which one can intelligibly affirm that its differentiated histories remain incarnate within, indeed constitutive of, this later formation. "Hence, it is important to underscore the effect of sedimentation that the temporality of construction implies. Here what are called 'moments' are not distinct and equivalent units of time, for the 'past' will be the accumulation and congealing of such 'moments' to the point of their indistinguishability" (Butler 1993: 245 n#8). Because they *are* so many temporal articulations, discursively constituted realities can never escape the burden of the past (and so they will never achieve the sovereign autonomy guaranteed by Enlightenment humanism). But, precisely because the passage of time continually reshapes that into which its events are organically incorporated, these beings are capable of transformations which are something other than mere mechanical repetitions of what has already transpired (and so they will never degenerate into so many unenlightened automatons).

It is when Butler's account of matter's temporality is folded into an account of its potentiality that the resuscitation of Aristotle becomes a dicier affair. Aristotle typically represents matter as a sort of neutral (but not lifeless) substratum. "For my definition of matter is just this—the primary substratum of each thing, from which it comes to be without qualification and which persists in the result" (Aristotle 1969: 192a31–32). An essential property of matter, on this account, is its potentiality, where potentiality is taken to be a more or less indeterminate capacity for assuming various actualizations in time. But how exactly are we to conceive of the relationship between potential and actual? We know that Butler cannot adopt the Cartesian contention that matter's ends are exclusively imposed by unconstrained human egos; to do that is to rehabilitate the gendered notion of subjectivity she means to contest. But nor can she endorse the Aristotelian conviction that matter's ends are somehow located in and dictated by nature; to do that is to abandon her insistence that there is no reality which is not a creature of its discursive constitution.

Butler's response to this conundrum, it seems clear, must turn on how she understands the relationship of matter to form. In this regard, although Butler does not do so, it is helpful to recall that the Latin *forma* effectively replaced two Greek words: *morphē* and *eidos*. Typically, the former was employed in speaking of the palpable appearance or shape of some thing, i.e., the arrangement of its visible parts, functionally defined, in this way rather than that. The latter, in its distinctively Aristotelian sense, designates the teleological essence of some thing, i.e., the invisible purpose common to it and all other members of the same class. When these two notions are categorically opposed to one

another, as they are in much post-Platonic philosophy, they all too readily spawn the facile disjunctions between idealism and materialism, reality and appearance, intelligibility and perceptibility, etc. To forestall all such antinomies, Butler urges us to recall the sense of the Aristotelian term *schema*: "*Schema* means form, shape, figure, appearance, dress, gesture, figure of a syllogism, and grammatical form. If matter never appears without its *schema*, that means that it only appears under a certain grammatical form and the principle of its recognizability, its characteristic gesture and usual dress, is indissoluble from what constitutes its matter" (Butler 1993: 33). Note how this quotation productively muddies the distinction between the arrangement of some thing's parts into a palpable shape (its material morphology) and its intangible principle of intelligibility (its eidetic form). No more, the term *schema* intimates, can matter be discovered apart from some realized actuality than can form be discovered apart from its embodiment in matter. To think otherwise, i.e., to think that form and matter are ontologically distinct realities, is to fall prey once again to those grammatical tropes which induce us to believe in the hypostatized reality of concepts abstracted from that which, absent either the matter of which it is formed or the form of which it is the matter, cannot be.

With this argument in place, Butler can now respond to one of *Gender Trouble*'s worries. If neither form nor matter can be labeled the antecedent cause of the other, while that other is relegated to the status of mere "effect," then Butler need not, indeed cannot, simply "reverse" the representationalist account of discourse's relationship to materiality by affirming an equally one-sided logocentric account:

> [T]he process of signification is always material; signs work *by appearing* (visibly, aurally), and appearing through material means, although what appears only signifies by virtue of those non-phenomenal relations, i.e., relations of differentiation, that tacitly structure and propel signification itself . . . Hence, it is not that one cannot get outside of language in order to grasp materiality in and of itself; rather, every effort to refer to materiality takes place though a signifying process which, in its phenomenality, is always already material. (Butler 1993: 68)

To acknowledge that "(l)anguage and materiality are fully embedded in each other, chiasmic in their interdependency, but never fully collapsed into one another" (Butler 1993: 69) is to find it unnecessary to presuppose matter as discourse's extradiscursive "outside" or, alternatively, to abjure its existence altogether. Denying that there exists a body knowable apart from discourse, while at the same time affirming that the body is not merely a creature of discourse, Butler can now say what she could not in *Gender Trouble*.

But is this declaration of the interconstitution of form and matter, effected via the term *schema*, sufficient to satisfy Butler's theoretical ambitions? The

answer, I think, must be no. To affirm that form and matter are dynamically interwoven in the constitution of things that matter, where "matter" refers to a thing's intelligibility as well as its assumption of a determinate palpable shape, is not to show *how* they come to be so connected. Hence this solution fails to do what was accomplished in *Gender Trouble* via Butler's call for a reversal of our conventional understanding of cause and effect. Unless she is willing to forgo all claims concerning efficacy, she must inquire into the notion of causality implied by a critical reappropriation of the Aristotelian vocabulary of form and matter; and that requires a rethinking of Aristotle's organicist contention that the ends of things are not imposed from without, but arise from within.

From Aristotle's essentialist teleology, Butler seeks to extract the claim that what is transformed is what in some sense already possesses the capacity to be so transformed. This, I believe, is what Butler is getting at when she speaks of matter's capacity to "presume and induce" its future incorporations. Folding the past into its present, this ambiguous but never formless stuff serves as a vital ingredient, indeed an essential condition, of the transformational conduct through which it comes to be something other than what it was. Think, by way of illustration, of a meticulously sculpted bonsai tree. Is its present shape the fruit of nature or of artifice, of internal drives or of external coercion? Predicated on a misguided opposition, this question should itself be rejected. Clearly, that tree's palpable form embodies the labor of the hands which twisted its roots and branches this way rather than that. Yet, just as clearly, that shape would be impossible absent the capacity of its woody tissues to be so shaped, absent the pulsing energies obscured by time's organic sedimentation within this obdurate reality.

Actualization of matter's latent *potentialities* is, on this account, at one and the same time an actualization *of potencies* immanent but, till now, unrealized. The powers made real at any given moment, however, are never exhaustive of matter's residual possibilities. To make this point, Butler gives the term *schema* one last twist: "We might historicize the Aristotelian notion of the *schema* in terms of culturally variable principles of formativity and intelligibility" (Butler 1993: 33). The fashioning of real things is a matter of their "materialization," where this term refers to the contingent processes through which always-already-formed matter is re-formed via its incorporation of specific configurations of discursive power, the schema, that constitute it as an intelligible exemplar of this or that sort of shaped thing. To illustrate, Butler cites Foucault's account of the relationship between soul and body in *Discipline and Punish*. In her neoAristotelian vocabulary, the "normative and normalizing ideal" that is the humanist soul, given its most perfect articulation in the routines, rituals, and rules of the modern penitentiary, is the "power-laden schema" which "forms

and frames the body, stamps it, and in stamping it, brings it into being" (Butler 1993: 33-34). As with the bonsai tree, the body thus fashioned is not well-understood as an inert effect of causes operating externally and mechanically. Rather, that body is simultaneously a creature of the power relations it incorporates as well as an essential participant in their realization.

But what exactly does Butler mean when she affirms that the schema of the penitent soul "brings into being" the body thought to house it? Does she thereby recapitulate *Gender Trouble*'s problematic representation of discursive construction as a *creatio ex nihilo* which, in turn, would appear to contradict the very point of her rehabilitation of Aristotle's vocabulary of form and matter? A response is implicit, I think, in her contention that the term "being" must always be placed "in quotation marks, for ontological weight is not presumed, but always conferred" (Butler 1993: 34). The term "weight" hints that "being" and "not-being" are not exhaustive of our ontological possibilities. Significant realities can "weigh" more or less, depending on the degree of their materialization, i.e., the extent of their incorporation of the power-laden schema within which intelligible things are fashioned. What weighs most, ontologically speaking, are those beings which display the most perfect, i.e., the least remarkable, union of eidetic form and material morphology. Those which are "heaviest," in other words, are those matter-of-fact things which are most resistant to (but also most in need of) genealogical scrutiny:

> Insofar as power operates successfully by constituting an object domain, a field of intelligibility, as a taken-for-granted ontology, its material effects are taken as material data or primary givens. These material positivities appear *outside* discourse and power, as its incontestable referents, its transcendental signifieds. But this appearance is precisely the moment in which the power/discourse regime is most fully dissimulated and most insidiously effective. (Butler 1993: 34–35)

In order to complete the vocabulary spun out of a postmodernized Aristotle, to the terms "schema" and "materialization," we must now add that of "materiality." If this vocabulary's concern is the "*process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter*" (Butler 1993: 9), then the term "materiality" will designate materialization's capacity to cover its tracks by representing the realized fruits of its transformative work as so many unquestionable realities. To take such ponderous beings as so many facts akin to those "found" in nature, as positivist social science would have us do, is simply to cede the field of critical inquiry as well as the terrain of political conflict to the powers that be.

What the terminology I have teased from Butler might accomplish can be suggested by returning briefly to the sex/gender relationship. No longer, on this account, should we ask whether the cultural construction of gender iden-

tity is an accurate reflection of the nondiscursive reality of sex. Nor should we ask whether "sex" is an illusion whose appearance of reality will disappear once we recognize that "it" has no existence apart from its extrinsic cause, i.e., the discursive construction of gender identity. Instead, we should ask: "What are the constraints by which bodies are materialized as 'sexed,' and how are we to understand the 'matter' of sex, and of bodies more generally?" (Butler 1993: xi–xii). The sexed body, we can now reply, is a creature of the differentiation and organization of its various parts via so many acts of functional specification and boundary definition. Within the historically contingent schema of Enlightenment modernism, the character of these acts is dictated by the imperatives of compulsory heterosexuality, and their product is a body whose sexual organs are these but not those, a subject who can imagine erotic pleasures deriving from this place but not that, an agent who knows that this part is to be inserted here but not there. So fashioned, the body *is* an ongoing border project, and its politics consist of so many efforts to police the boundaries that designate the transgressions in terms of which its heterosexual integrity is defined. When the power relations invested within that body successfully hide themselves beneath the veneer of its facticity, when the norms and roles constitutive of gender identity are deemed inviolable because mandated by the "nature" of the sexed body, we can say that the materiality of sex, i.e., the unity of eidetic form and material morphology, has been accomplished. But, once again, the "sex" so materialized is neither an extradiscursive given, nor a lie we should unmask. True, it is a fiction in the sense that it is a thing contingently generated rather than given in the nature of things. But it is a necessary fiction, and this for two reasons. First, "sex" is the discursive means with which we acknowledge the obdurate reality of the materialized body. Second, when opposed to the category of "gender," "sex" is the discursive means with which we remind ourselves that the significant possibilities of materialized bodies always outstrip their appearance of stubborn self-evidence.

Having hinted at what the vocabulary of materialization might do in a single domain, let me bring this section to a close by noting in more general terms what it cannot do. On this account, genealogical inquiry emerges as a more modest enterprise than we, in the best of all possible worlds, might want it to be. While such inquiry's aim is still to show how things come to appear real, no longer can it advance the sort of strong causal claims encouraged by *Gender Trouble*'s metaphysical residues. "The production of material effects is the formative or constitutive workings of power, a production that cannot be construed as a unilateral movement from cause to effect" (Butler 1993: 251 n#12). It cannot be so construed because the terms "form" and "matter" must now be read not as discrete nouns, but as co-constitutive verbs. While our grammar tempts us to say that form shapes matter, or that matter

acquires form, we should say neither. For form *is* the patterned concurrence of materializing events happening within boundaries specified with more or less fixity and always subject to rearticulation, and matter *is* so much temporalized trans-form-ative activity. Moreover, as Nietzsche's critique of fetishistic understanding of causality reminds us, the sense of the terms "form" and "matter" is derivative upon their semantic differential, not upon either's representation of some antecedent reality. This distinction is, therefore, functional rather than ontological, and so what we now identify as form may for other purposes be identified as matter, and vice versa. In sum, the distinction between form and matter is neither one of substance, nor of temporal priority. Rather, it is an analytic distinction between two interrelated moments within the comprehensive processes that eventuate in appearance of the materialized things which we, under the hangman's spell, abstract from this mobile configuration in order to satisfy our desire to locate discrete agencies which/who may be held responsible for causing this or that effect.

The neoAristotelian terminology proposed here, especially when tempered by a dose of Nietzschean pragmatism, suggests a sort of causal efficacy which is quite unlike that imagined when metaphors drawn from mechanical *technai* are wedded either to a Platonic theology which regards creation as the demiurgic imposition of ideal form on recalcitrant matter, or to a Cartesian theology which, in order to remain assured of God's omnipotence, ascribes to Him not merely the capacity to shape but to create matter as well. Each of these more confident understandings is informed by the metaphysics of a subject who remains persuaded that he is not a creature of power's transformative work. When that creature's pretension to autonomy is displaced, then so goes that creature's capacity to discover analogues to such autonomy in the domain of causality. To paraphrase Foucault, now that we have cut off the head of the monarch, we must decapitate his counterpart in the domain of causality as well.

Do Bodies Make Sense?

In closing, I want to ask what implications the terminology recommended here might hold for our understanding of political agency. To get at that question, let me first explain why I believe the form/matter idiom, if pressed hard enough, will undermine a Cartesian residue running through *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter* alike. While much changes in the space between these two texts, I do not think Butler ever abandons the claim, first articulated in her critique of Kristeva, that "we can attribute meaning only to that which is representable in language" (Butler 1990: 88). Never, that is, does she retreat from her contention that whatever is not discursively articulable is by definition unintelligible. The idiom of form/matter suggests not an outright rejection but, rather, a more nuanced formulation of that claim.

When we abandon *Gender Trouble*'s idiom of linear causal imposition, we deprive ourselves of certain ways of speaking which, it must be admitted, are not without political utility. As we have seen, when the conduct of discursive constitution is understood in such terms, the body is typically regarded as an antecedently existent blank surface. When the agencies of that body's constitution are located external to it, as hands are external to the clay they shape into a vase, their efficacy is taken to be a matter of so much literal as well as figurative manipulation. Conjuring up connotations of coercion and constraint, such imagery invites a representation of subjects—e.g., the subjects we call "women"—as so many heteronomous effects manufactured by causes not of their own making, and that in turn justifies a politics of outrage. Feeding off liberal understandings of what it is to be an autonomous self capable of meaningful consent, that outrage furnishes the foundation for rhetorically effective claims concerning the injustice of such victimization.

The issue grows more complex, however, when we shift to an organic idiom of causality. As noted earlier, when joined to Butler's ascription of the qualities of temporality and potentiality to matter, the form/matter idiom brings the body back from its Cartesian grave. If, moreover, neither materiality nor signification is the independent cause of the other, if their relationship is indeed one of immanent interconstitution, then the embodied beings designated as women must in some sense participate in the processes by which they are discursively formed as intelligible subjects. Their bodies are not, on this account, so many chunks of inert Galilean matter hammered into shape by incessant blows of the patriarchal tool. Rather, their bodies are the already shaped sites where discursive form, which is neither unambiguously within nor without those sites, achieves more or less complete, i.e., ontologically weighty, materialization. Neither her own autonomous cause, nor a purely heteronomous effect, each woman is therefore a materializing emergent: "Subjected to gender, but subjectivated by gender, the 'I' neither precedes nor follows the process of this gendering, but emerges only within and as the matrix of gender relations themselves" (Butler 1993: 7).

If that be so, then identification of a clear and distinct villain to animate feminist politics, a distinguishable first cause of women's oppression. is a deeply problematic, perhaps even impossible, endeavor. What is lost on this strategic front may, however, be gained on another. Granted, it smacks of blaming the victim to claim that because bodies actively participate in the processes by which they are discursively constituted, the creatures known as women are in some sense complicitous in their own subordination. But to contend that the body vitally incorporates the form by which it materializes also entails ascribing to it a sort of agency which is absent when that body is taken to be an inert thing wholly determined by external forces. And if the body does indeed

exercise such agency, might "it" also occasionally play a role in contesting the processes by which it is intelligibly informed? Here I do not mean to affirm the existence of an extradiscursive guarantor of resistance's eventual emergence. But once I, following Butler, have conceded that the resources of resistance are always internal to the regimes within which subjects are constituted, must I also conclude that all such wellsprings are necessarily discursively articulable? Might the mutually exclusive opposition between discursive and extradiscursive represent one last vestige of Cartesianism in Butler's thought? Were we to shed this last vestige, might it then prove possible to contend that bodies sometimes harbor extradiscursive but nonetheless meaningful sources of resistance?

Butler has various explanations for the possibility of resistance to the norms of compulsory heterosexuality. All build on her contention that "the constituted character of the subject is the very precondition of its agency" (Butler 1995: 46). For example, the process of drawing boundaries around the regime of compulsory heterosexuality necessarily entails specification of a constitutive "outside," i.e., those forms of abjected subjectivity which, although very much creatures of this same discursive order, subvert its own claim to naturalness and universality. Moreover, the imperatives of discursive constitution are never monolithic or noncontradictory; the multiplicity of their injunctions—e.g., the demand that a women be simultaneously sexually alluring and chaste—renders their fulfillment an intrinsically impossible ideal. Finally, the very fact that incessant repetition is essential to the success of performativity demonstrates that hegemonic subordination to the prevailing norms of gender identity is never perfectly or finally achieved.

While perhaps sufficient to account for the conceptual possibility of agency, can these explanations tell us when and why this potentiality is sometimes actualized? The relentlessness of performativity and reiteration may explain why women and men so often act as they "should." But does conceptualization of resistance as the "possibility of a variation on that repetition" (Butler 1990: 145) account for how and when they do not? The notion of abjection may account for the production of those "deviant" identities which contest established notions of normalcy. But can it explain why these identities sometimes become the stuff of which political resistance is fashioned, whereas at other times they become the matter of which suicides and incarcerations are made? The inconsistent demands of discursive constitution may account for the impossibility of achieving a seamless self-identity. But can they explain why the working out of these contradictions sometimes "enables a purposive and significant reconfiguration of cultural and political relations" (Butler 1995: 46), whereas at other times it spawns ever more desperate denials of their discordance?

Although I cannot develop the point adequately here, it is my suspicion that any adequate account of the actualization of potential resistance must make reference to sources which are extradiscursive in the sense that they cannot be formulated in language without transforming them into something other than what they "really" are. Although on treacherous terrain here, I am inclined to argue that any such account must incorporate some discussion of embodied feelings which make sense, even though that sense is neither subject to, nor a creature of, discursive articulation. Feminist theory will continue to suffer from hypertheoretical accounts of the "causes" of resistance so long as it fails to acknowledge the intelligible existence of amorphous presentiments which, although not fully materialized, are not for that reason unreal. The idiom of form/matter is of value in this regard precisely because it enables us to speak of things that are more or less completely materialized, and so makes it possible for us to acknowledge such pregnant spurs to action without falling headlong into the Fallacy of Kristeva.

The conduct of making sense is an internally complex process which proceeds on many levels simultaneously, some of which are so deeply sedimented within the body's habits that they resist express formulation. In time, to cite but one example, the materializing body acquires ways of fashioning sense which are better called "kinesthetic" than "discursive." To compel such somatic conditions of meaningful experience to disappear because the work they do problematizes totalizing affirmations of the discursive constitution of reality is to leave the agencies of that constitution groundless, without a home in the inarticulate sensibilities of fashionable bodies. Granted, what Butler calls the "resignification" of received discursive resources is a vital moment in the effective animation of resistance. But unless such resignifying work is rooted in the indistinct reality of felt oppression, unless that work is joined to some inchoate hint of unrealized possibility, it cannot help but be stillborn. To hold otherwise is an intellectual conceit which confuses the work of discursive resignification with the rage and resentment, the disappointment and depression, that renders such work a lived imperative. In sum, should we heed Butler's exhortation to explore the "*modalities* of materialization" (Butler 1993: 35), i.e., the many ways in which the in-formed body becomes both a significant thing as well as a source of sense-making agency, we will reject the lingering Cartesianism implicit in her contention that all things, if not discursively intelligible, are so much nonsense.

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