

The need in thinking

Materiality in Theodor W. Adorno and Judith Butler

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In *Bodies That Matter*, Judith Butler attempts to deconstruct the body and matter in the same way that the self-constituting, stable, centred subject has been deconstructed in recent years.¹ In the process, Butler claims to be operating in a theoretical realm beyond the frameworks of materialism and idealism. While I concur with many things that Butler argues, I do not agree with her implication that there is no analytically meaningful distinction between matter and discourse. For the purposes of this article, I will therefore compare Butler's position with that of Theodor Adorno in his essay 'Subject and Object' and his book *Negative Dialectics*. I hope to demonstrate that one can defend the content of most of Butler's arguments from Adorno's materialist perspective, while consequently rescuing the critical potential of that materialism.

My point of departure will be Butler's most renowned argument: there is no natural sex prior to the social categories of gender. Taking inspiration from Lacan, Derrida and, in particular, Foucault, Butler advocates 'the construal of "sex" no longer as a bodily given on which the construct of gender is artificially imposed, but as a cultural norm which governs the materialization of bodies.'² Butler repeatedly contends that there are various general implications for idealism and materialism within this central argument. For example, she argues that 'the set of metaphysical oppositions between materialism and idealism embedded in received grammar ... [is] critically redefined by a poststructuralist rewriting of discursive performativity as it operates in the materialization of sex.'³ The bulk of this article will examine the ontological and epistemological implications of this 'redefinition', particularly as Butler relates it to the categories of sex. I will also briefly explore the strategic political gains Butler believes can follow from this theoretical move. As

indicated, my analysis will always be contextualized within the alternative of Adorno's materialism. I now turn to Butler's epistemological interventions.

The mediation of matter

Butler first of all insists that there is no access to matter prior to its conceptualization in thought and language. We can only perceive matter, things, reality and therefore bodies through concepts. 'Materiality [is] that which is bound up with signification from the start', states Butler.⁴ With regard to the specific categories of sex, Butler draws attention to the act of 'girthing' a baby at the moment of birth on the basis of the genitalia read as a sign of a prior natural girlhood.⁵ We see the baby through the mediating categories affixed to the external sex organs and infer that those traits have some kind of real meaning or natural status. Butler, on the contrary, argues that sexed men and women cannot be said actually to exist outside of these categories and that there is no way to ground sex in any kind of material reality.

Adorno is in partial agreement with Butler on this issue. It is central to Adorno's theories that thought or language can never equate to what it is an effort to describe, its object. The object is therefore 'non-identical' to thought in Adorno's terminology.⁶ 'That the nonidentical is not immediate', he writes, 'that it is a matter of transmission, is trivial.'⁷ This principle that knowledge of the world is mediated via thought has been accepted by materialists for a long time, according to Adorno. Despite this assertion, I think it is fair to say that utilization of this tenet has not been as radical as it perhaps could have been. Butler is therefore original in her consistent application of the principle of the mediated nature of reality to the categories of sex and sexuality.⁸

Discursive performativity

Second, and more controversially, Butler contends that not only is our perception of reality or materiality always mediated via language or thought; mediation will of necessity entail partial *formation* or *construction* of reality. She writes: 'To claim that discourse is formative ... is to claim that there is no reference to a pure body which is not at the same time a further formation of that body.'⁹ I will let a more detailed passage clarify this argument as it pertains to sex:

'sex' not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce – demarcate, circulate, differentiate – the bodies it controls. Thus, 'sex' is a regulatory ideal whose materialization is compelled, and this materialization takes place (or fails to take place) through certain highly regulated practices. In other words, 'sex' is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time. It is not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize 'sex' and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms.¹⁰

Consequently, not only do we see the baby girl in a mediated fashion; the act of 'girling' is an imposition of a form on the baby turning it into a girl and simultaneously readying 'her' for a lifetime of similar directives.¹¹ Discourse or language, therefore, is never purely ideal; it is not simply a reflection of prior reality because it will actually shape the materiality it supposedly mirrors. As already indicated, Butler does not limit her argument to the issue of the materiality of sex. At one point she calls for the conceptualization of matter in general, 'not as a site or surface, but as a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter'.¹² It seems that her consistent use of the word 'materiality' as opposed to matter is a result of this distinction between the latter as static entity and the former as the effect of a process without beginning or end. The suggestion is that this principle is a challenge to any materialism which maintains that language and ideas merely reflect a previously existing reality.

Butler's definition of discourse also incorporates a critique of idealism. She does not believe that language¹³ is purely noumenal. She repeatedly declares that it is a system intermingling phenomenal and non-phenomenal elements:

But if language is not opposed to materiality, neither can materiality be summarily collapsed into an identity with language. On the one hand, the

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. Relations, even the notion of différance, institute and require relata, terms, phenomenal signifiers. And yet what allows for a signifier to signify will never be its materiality alone; that materiality will be at once an instrumentality and deployment of a set of larger linguistic relations.¹⁴

The example of the little girl should again illuminate. Her definition as a girl unquestionably requires the material existence of the external reproductive organs. Therefore there is no 'idea' of girlness pre-existing the secondary sex traits. Language in itself, even without these material references, becomes material via its utterance or inscription. Despite these materialities, the girl's sex traits only mean something because of their relationship to the little boy's penis, and that relationship is immaterial. In other words vagina means girl because penis means boy, and vice versa. The ideas 'boy' and 'girl' are in turn connected to all of the various things it means to be a boy or a girl in our world, defined in language yet having real effects and requiring phenomena to mean anything at all.

Adorno concurs that language 'shapes' reality, but with significant qualifications. Much of *Negative Dialectics* consists of a critique of a form of idealism which Adorno labels 'identity thinking'. He argues that idealists like Hegel ultimately believed that thought could in fact correspond to its object. This entailed the corresponding tenet that the object could be reduced to or equated with the subject's knowledge of it. Hegel, according to Adorno, 'exploited the fact that the nonidentical on its part can be defined only as a concept.... [The object] was thereby removed from dialectics and brought to identity.'¹⁵ In other words, Hegel converted our inability to perceive objectivity except via concepts into the premiss that objectivity was only the concept. Because identity thinking or idealism was/is hegemonic in Adorno's eyes, it has universally been accepted that the object *is* what we define it to be. Adorno writes:

In idealism, the highly formal identity principle had, due to its formalization, an affirmative substance. This is innocently brought to light by terminology, when simple predicative sentences are called 'affirmative.' The copula says: It is so, not otherwise.¹⁶

Here, Adorno is pointing out that thought has an 'affirmative' substance, that it can constitute reality.

Adorno frequently addresses the pain that such utterances inflict, speaking in terms of the categorized object as conquered and suffering. The 'It is so' has an obvious parallel with Butler's 'It's a girl!'

Yet clearly Adorno is saying something else too. As indicated, one of his fundamental premisses is that thought cannot equal its object. Adorno wants to emphasize both the mediative nature of thought *and* the objectivity or material reality external to thought. Adorno maintains that idealists disregard the fact that the 'indirectness [of thought] must always refer to some transmitted thing, without which there would be no indirectness'.¹⁷ For Adorno, there is always something, some entity, some object beyond thought.¹⁸ Of course, Butler does not posit the existence of a constituting subject in any idealist sense of the word, and she specifically states that language requires phenomena or *relata*. However, Adorno would say that Butler, even given these distinctions, makes the Hegelian error of asserting that the object itself is nothing but what discourse claims of it. The statement 'It's a girl!' only creates the *concept* of girlhood according to Adorno's position. This is not to say that the declarative has no effect; again, identity thinking has resulted in tangible misery according to Adorno. Calling the baby a girl may make her act, think and feel like a girl; indeed, as Butler says, her personhood may be unimaginable without her girlness. That does not make her through and through a girl, however. The baby girl is always something other than what we have labelled her. In Adorno's words, 'Rather than constitutive for objectivity, the subjective mediation is a block to objectivity; it fails to absorb entity, which objectivity is in essence.'¹⁹ This insistence on the existence of prior material reality nevertheless entails the possibility that there is at least *something* true about the concept of girlhood. Adorno would not argue for any sort of essential girlness; nevertheless, according to Adorno, the girl is something, other than merely what we declare her to be.

The object margins of discourse

Butler expends considerable effort establishing that discursive practices will have relative outsides or margins that are also constitutive of reality. Materiality is therefore partly forged by what is *not* specifically uttered and by what falls outside of any category:

the point has never been that 'everything is discursively constructed'; that point, when and where it is made, belongs to a kind of discursive monism or linguisticism that refuses the constitutive force of exclusion, erasure, violent foreclosure, abjection

and its disruptive return within the very terms of discursive legitimacy.²⁰

This is one of the main ways in which Butler attempts to distinguish her position from what she variously calls 'discursive monism' or 'radical constructivism', the apparently purely idealistic conception of discourse's relationship to the world. She would undoubtedly contend that Adorno's criticism of identity thinking cannot be applied in her case for this very reason.

How does this theoretical distinction specifically play itself out in Butler's work? In the example of 'girling' provided above, while girls are frequently denigrated in relation to boys, babies who are not readily classified as either sex are utterly abject.²¹ In our world, it is not possible to be anything unless you can be classified according to sex.²² The existence of a sexually ambiguous baby or adult, furthermore, can threaten the supposedly solid ground of the 'real' boys and girls of the world.²³ Similarly, heterosexuality is defined by its relation to homosexuality and bisexuality, and the reverse is true as well. Power conditions in society dictate which margins will be more abject than others.²⁴ The main point is that the 'other' to any thought category, while lying outside of that category, is intimately connected to it. Because the outsides of a discourse do not 'fit' into any of the categories, it becomes impossible to say that everything is discursively constituted. Butler expands:

The paradox of subjectivation is precisely that the subject who would resist such norms is itself enabled, if not produced, by such norms. Although this constitutive constraint does not foreclose the possibility of agency, it does locate agency as a reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent to power, and not a relation of external opposition to power.²⁵

In other words, the man or woman who resists the norms of heterosexuality via homosexual or bisexual practice has had their rebellion defined in terms of that heterosexuality (even though they have not specifically been 'constituted' by its discourse), and not in terms of some natural or pre-discursive bisexuality or homosexuality.

Adorno similarly asserts that 'identity' thinking subjects any sign of difference to abjection. Otherness is suppressed or denied as everything is forced into reified categories. When identity thinking *is* aware of otherness, it can only imagine it in terms of absolute contradiction and hence antagonism, as everything is viewed in relation to the identical, self-same and hence non-contradictory subject.²⁶ Writing of the legal realm, Adorno observes:

The law in society is a preservative of terror, always ready to resort to terror with the aid of quotable statutes.... In law the formal principle of equivalence becomes the norm; everyone is treated alike. An equality in which differences perish secretly serves to promote inequality.... The total legal realm is one of definitions. Its systematic forbids the admission of anything that eludes their closed circle.²⁷

The thought categories of identity thinking thus deform their objects as they terrorize their margins. There are obvious similarities again between Adorno and Butler's projects.

Adorno would still criticize Butler's assertion that it is the immaterial 'outside' of a discourse that is constitutive. He would again perhaps ask, 'What is *it* precisely that does not fit into the discursive category girl or boy?' Even if the answer is 'everything that cannot be classified as girl or boy', that is still *something*. While Butler says that this 'something' is constituted in its relationship to the categories 'girls' and 'boys', Adorno would insist that the abject outside maintains a distinctness owing directly to its objectivity.

Causality and experience, or, the roast dinner

It is necessary to qualify further Butler's arguments concerning the notion of causality and construction. Even though she resorts to the language of cause and effect to make her point, Butler cautions that construction cannot mean the simple reversal of the 'subject-object' declarations of idealism. It is therefore not theoretically correct to say that 'discourse constructs the subject'. It is more precise to adopt the following formulation:

construction is neither a subject nor its act, but a process of reiteration by which both 'subject' and 'acts' come to appear at all. There is no power that acts, but only a reiterated acting that is power in its persistence and instability.²⁸

Thus, even if Butler is forced by the conventions of our language (and, undoubtedly, the desire to relate her argument forcefully) to say that sex and sexuality are discursively constituted, this important caveat should be kept in mind. Discourse is performative only as a repeated social practice. It cannot be said to originate from a specific subject, in the same way that it is not imposed upon a pre-existing subject or object. A specific act of 'girling' is successful because it is embedded in an already accepted social norm.

Adorno also has relevant criticisms of the idealist formulation of causality. He presents the somewhat

enigmatic example of a diner before a roast. Adorno contends that the mind's experience is like this diner's relation to the roast: 'experience lives by consuming the standpoint; not until the standpoint is submerged in it would there be philosophy.'²⁹ Adorno adds that 'thought does not preserve itself as an origin, and it ought not to hide the fact that it does not generate – that it merely returns what it already has as experience'.³⁰ I read these passages to mean that thought only occurs when the thinker is inside an experience. Even when you are just sitting there 'thinking', your thought cannot be said to be separated from that experience of thinking. Furthermore, your thought changes as you think it: 'reflecting on things of the mind, re-thinking them, ... turn[s] them into something else.'³¹ In the only slightly more concrete example above, one does not have an idea of roast until one is eating a roast. In eating it, you alter the roast and your thought of what it is like to eat a roast. Neither the thought nor the roast goes through the experience unchanged. Even if one has had roast in the past, Adorno warns that your idea of that taste will be different from the actual taste, and that idea will of course be different from the roast itself.

There are several opaque messages in all of this. Like Butler, Adorno wants to reformulate our notion of causality. Thought (and, therefore, language) is experience, and as such it is fully immersed in its objects. Thought cannot, of course, be said to 'originate' anything. Furthermore, the entire concept of origin or cause is deconstructed in the same manner that Adorno analyses all concepts. 'The concept "origin" ought to be stripped of its static mischief',³² writes Adorno; further, '[t]he universal dependence of all moments on all other moments makes the talk of causality obsolete.'³³ For Adorno, there is no stasis, no unrelatedness, in the world. Therefore, even the thing that supposedly comes first needs a context, something else to be aware of it. If this is the case, no single thing can be said to be the cause of any other thing. Everything is always already embedded, just like the diner and the roast.

How can Adorno's reformulation of causality be applied to the sex categories 'girl' and 'boy'? Clearly, there are similarities to Butler's ideas here, as she is careful to indicate that discourse is not a lone utterance; it is *practice* (which invokes the social) that constitutes a materiality in which it is always already immersed. Adorno would certainly concur with Butler that the 'idea' of girl does not pre-exist society. He would point out that the materiality of girlhood and its idea alter with time. This does not negate the fact that

there is a reality underlying the concept. Furthermore, each specific act of girling involves the socially constituted 'category' of girl and a particular baby, whose materiality is not exhausted by the category. This would be the case with each and every baby. Butler would probably agree with this last point, although her writings tend to focus less on the inability of a category to fully describe its object and more on the slippage between the category and its object margins. Nevertheless, Butler and Adorno are still in substantial accord.

Adorno's criticism of the idealist conception of causality is ultimately greater than this, though. In Adorno's world-view, the diner's experience of the roast is dependent on that roast in a more substantial way than the roast is dependent on the diner. For this reason, he would yet again insist that Butler succumbs to identity thinking. It is to this essential difference between Butler and Adorno that I now turn.

The heart of the matter

I will now address the central question, 'what precisely is objectivity or materiality for Butler?' Recall that Butler has already granted that language requires phenomenal objects to signify anything. In addition, she repeatedly asserts that even though discourse is partially constitutive of matter, matter is not therefore a *tabula rasa* or something upon which discourse is simply imposed. Matter should rather be thought of as 'a demand in and for language, a "that which" which prompts and occasions, ... [and] calls to be explained'.³⁴ At one point, Butler does concede that there must be an 'array of materialities' that make up the body.³⁵ However, this declaration comes with a caveat:

the undeniability of these 'materialities' in no way implies what it means to affirm them.... That each of those categories has a history and a historicity, that each of them is constituted through the boundary lines that distinguish them, and hence, by what they exclude, that relations of discourse and power produce hierarchies and overlappings among them and challenge those boundaries, implies that these are both persistent and contested regions.³⁶

Contrary to discursive monism or idealism, then, the body is not an inert object that passively receives discursive markings. However, the body's 'demand' for conceptualization cannot be translated into anything more specific for Butler because a positive description of material reality would become a statement of metaphysical primacy. The most that can be said of the body is that it has a history and is therefore subject to differing interpretations/constructions, and that it in

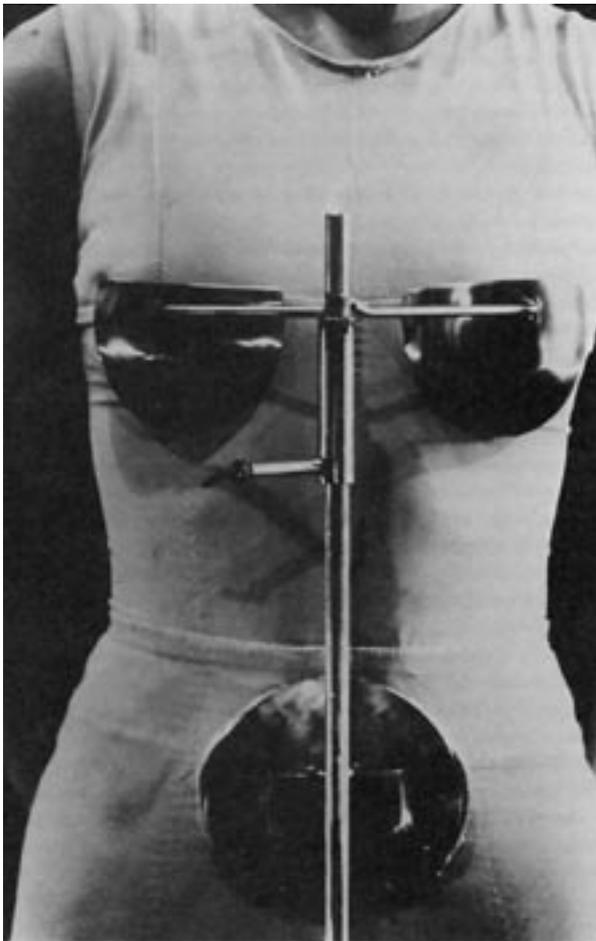
effect necessitates and comes to be via symbolization in language.³⁷

This principle needs to be examined in detail. Not only is our 'knowledge' of matter always mediated, not only is matter mutable, not only is discourse material, there is no *analytically distinct* material realm. I think it is again best to quote a passage at length, in order not to reduce Butler's argument to a simple denial of material reality:

Apart from and yet related to the materiality of the signifier is the materiality of the signified as well as the referent approached through the signified, but which remains irreducible to the signified. This radical difference between *referent* and *signified* is the site where the materiality of language and that of the world which it seeks to signify are perpetually negotiated. Although the referent cannot be said to exist apart from the signified, it nevertheless cannot be reduced to it. That referent, that abiding function of the world, is to persist as the horizon and the 'that which' which makes its demand in and to language. Language and materiality are fully embedded in each other, chiasmic in their interdependency, but never fully collapsed into one another, i.e., reduced to one another, and yet neither fully ever exceeds the other.³⁸

Along with several things that I have already discussed, Butler formulates several new ideas. First, she says that there is a 'radical difference' between the referent and the signified. Thus, the world cannot be reduced to our thought of it, the extreme idealist perspective. Note also Butler's statement that the difference between referent and signified marks a site of permanent 'negotiation' between the two. Language is in some sense a response to the world's need for a hearing. However, Butler also adds that the referent or the material cannot be said to exist apart from the signified. Again, the most we can ascribe to the material is that it is a demand for signification. In summary, Butler wants to maintain a distinction between language and materiality, yet she insists that materiality 'cannot be said to exist' apart from language.

To support further this central premiss, Butler relies heavily (yet implicitly) on Hegel's critique of the Kantian thing-in-itself. Kant argued that there were unknown essences of phenomena that placed a fixed limit on human knowledge.³⁹ Butler, like Hegel, writes that the mere mention of that limit is an attempt to say something about which you have previously insisted you can know nothing: 'To posit a materiality outside of language is still to posit that materiality, and the materiality so posited will retain that positing as its constitutive condition.'⁴⁰ There is no absolute other of discourse because we can only conceive of that outside



in relation to discourse. It is thus a constituting outside – it influences what we think about the inside – and cannot really be said to exist apart from that inside. In Butler's words,

There is an 'outside' to what is constructed by discourse, but this is not an absolute 'outside,' an ontological thereness that exceeds or counters the boundaries of discourse; as a constituting 'outside,' it is that which can only be thought – when it can – in relation to that discourse, at and as its most tenuous borders.⁴¹

The setting of a limit automatically puts some things on the other side of that limit. Most importantly for Butler's purposes, the positing of a limit is an undeniably political act. As I have discussed, in saying what a woman is in relation to a man, those who do not fit either category will be abject, other. Saying that the categories boy and girl are prior to culture sets a baseline, a limit, for the effects of culture. No matter what we do, we are implying that we can't get past that boundary, we can't change the reality of boys and girls. Yet, we are simultaneously saying that that nature is what exists beyond the level of our present knowledge. This is a logical flaw according to Butler.

Butler also contends that to posit any sort of material or natural reality outside of discourse is to negate the

possibility that we could ever know what that reality is. 'To posit a materiality outside of language, where that materiality is considered ontologically distinct from language', she contends, 'is to undermine the possibility that language might be able to indicate or correspond to that domain of radical alterity.'⁴² Butler's Hegelian roots are showing even more clearly here, as this too is Hegel's critique of the Kantian thing-in-itself. Hegel, of course, argued that we could come to absolute knowledge via *Geist* or Spirit. Butler obviously discards the concept of *Geist*, and she certainly rejects the notion of the centred and constituting subject, but she has curiously resurrected something similar to the idealist belief that thought can perhaps one day correspond to reality. This is a Hegelian synthesis of the type that Butler is critical of on most other occasions, for example when she writes:

The ideal of transforming all excluded identifications into inclusive features – of appropriating all difference into unity – would mark the return to a Hegelian synthesis which has no exterior and that, in appropriating all difference as exemplary features of itself, becomes a figure for imperialism, a figure that installs itself by way of a romantic, insidious, and all-consuming humanism.⁴³

Butler's contention thus seems to be contradictory in that, up to this point, she has insisted that there is no positivity 'behind' language other than a demand. What precisely, then, could be in 'that domain' to which language might correspond? Butler gets pushed into this inconsistency because of her reluctance to posit the existence of a prior material reality combined with her willingness to use Hegel's idealist (and, in certain respects, positivist) synthesis of objectivity and subjectivity. Thus, Butler has basically asserted that there is no distinct reality outside of discursive, social practice, yet we may one day know that reality.

Because of this seeming contradiction, it is perhaps best to summarize that Butler argues that matter is not discourse and not a blank slate. Positively, the most that can be said is that materiality is a 'demand'. Yet is there any effective difference, then, between materiality and discourse? At one point, Butler specifically affirms an analogy between the body and a social institution. She praises Foucault's investigation of the constitution of the criminal in *Discipline and Punish*, and the homosexual in *History of Sexuality*, Volume I.⁴⁴ Butler goes on to say that for the Foucault of *Discipline and Punish*, the materialization of the criminal's body is analytically equivalent to the materialization of the prison. She then refers to Foucault's mentions of 'bodies and pleasures' at certain points in his texts.

Here her tone changes, as she writes disparagingly that '[a]t times it appears that for Foucault the body has a materiality that is ontologically distinct from the power relations that take that body as a site of investments.'⁴⁵ If indeed Butler does think that the body can be materialized in exactly the same manner that a prison can, again one must ask, is there any effective difference between the body and a blank slate, or the body and discourse?

What does Adorno say about materiality and objectivity? He, like Butler, firmly believes that matter is mutable and has a history. He writes that sensations themselves 'have the character of transiency', and furthermore, that 'the idea of something immutable, something identical with itself, ... collapse[s]' when identity thinking is challenged.⁴⁶ Adorno contends that it is the idealist premiss that thought equals its objects that has misled people into believing that matter is reified and stable. 'Even the "I" of a personal history is constantly turning into another', he adds, further demonstrating the parallels between his project and that of poststructuralism.⁴⁷ Despite this, Adorno does indeed believe that there *is* a material realm existing outside discourse or language. Indeed, he accepts the materialist label. Recall once more that for Adorno, the slippage between thought and its concept marks the built-in and inevitable inability of thought ever completely to capture its object. For him, this cannot ever be taken to mean that the object represented does not exist outside of that conception. Rather, thought's shortcomings point to the fact that concepts and the subject have their grounding in non-conceptualities and objects. The subject depends on the object in a way that the object does not depend on the subject:

Not even as an idea can we conceive a subject that is not an object; but we can conceive an object that is not a subject. To be an object also is part of the meaning of subjectivity; but it is not equally part of the meaning of objectivity to be a subject.⁴⁸

Adorno's materialism therefore draws attention to 'the constitutive character of the nonconceptual in the concept'.⁴⁹

Granting the object 'primacy' is not to privilege it as superior. 'It is not the purpose of critical thought to place the object on the orphaned royal throne once occupied by the subject', declares Adorno; '[t]he purpose of critical thought is to abolish the hierarchy.'⁵⁰ Granting the object primacy *is* definitely to insist that all thought must be of something, and that that 'something' is irreducible.⁵¹ "Something" ... as a

cogitatively indispensable substrate of any concept ... is the utmost abstraction of the subject-matter that is not identical with thinking, an abstraction not to be abolished by any further thought process.'⁵² The dependence of the subject on the object must not entail a total reduction of subjectivity to objectivity, either. According to Adorno, even though thought does not generate or constitute, and even though we can conceive of objectivity without the existence of a subject, subjectivity still mediates objectivity: 'no object is determinable without the subject.'⁵³ Adorno fleshes out what subjectivity might mean if we were to refocus on the object:

Since primacy of the object requires reflection on the subject and subjective reflection, subjectivity – as distinct from primitive materialism, which really does not permit dialectics – becomes a moment that lasts. The general assurance that innervations, insights, cognitions are 'merely subjective' ceases to convince as soon as subjectivity is grasped as the object's form.⁵⁴

Thus, even if the subject is 'constructed', it has potency in the objective world. More fundamentally, awareness of the objective world could not occur without the subject.

But what does 'the primacy of the object' mean? Adorno would not, like Butler, be satisfied with proclaiming that the object or matter was merely a



demand for conceptualization. He specifically states: 'Primacy of the object can be discussed legitimately only when that primacy ... is somehow definable.'⁵⁵ Adorno illuminates his point by explicitly acknowledging the Hegelian critique of Kant's thing-in-itself. Hegel and other post-Kantian idealists criticized their predecessor for arguing that the 'thing-in-itself' was on the other side of knowledge and could therefore not be described. Hegel's alternative was, again, to grant full knowledge to the absolute subject, *Geist*.⁵⁶ Adorno's entire project is obviously critical of the Hegelian tenet that thought can one day equal its object. This is the position that Butler has endorsed in stating that thought or language could possibly correspond to materiality. Adorno instead praises Kant's anti-positivist insistence that there are some things we cannot know. For Adorno and Kant, however, this does not mean that those things do not exist. Adorno writes:

A convenient rebuke to the concept of intelligibility is that mentioning unknown causes of phenomena positively, even in extreme abstraction, is forbidden.... [But] [w]hat survives in Kant, in the alleged mistake of his apologetic for the thing-in-itself ... is the memory of the element which balks at that logic: the memory of nonidentity.⁵⁷

Adorno does not simply accept the Kantian positing of the unknown 'thing-in-itself'. Kant, according to Adorno, accepts as permanent and fixed the bounds between knowledge and the beyond of that knowledge.⁵⁸ Adorno's uniqueness comes in his emphasizing that the gap between the thought and its object is what potentially drives thought to a further, more subtle, approximation of that object.⁵⁹ 'My thought is driven ... by its own inevitable insufficiency, by my guilt of what I am thinking.'⁶⁰ The gap between thought and its object is thus the space for critical manoeuvring, while at the same time it is a recognition that there will always be something other and more than thought. Hegel states that we will ultimately know reality via *Geist* or absolute knowledge; Kant declares that we can only operate within a certain frontier of knowledge. Adorno argues that there will always be something we don't know, but the limit between subject and object, ideas and matter, is not absolute. Neither will it ever disappear. The object can exist without the subject in a way that the subject can never exist without an object. We cannot obtain absolute knowledge, nor can we say there will be some things that we will never know anything more about. Room for transformation lies in the awareness that concepts are less than their objects. Yet, thought can eternally endeavour to 'comprehend a thing itself' by 'perceiv[ing] the individual moment

in its immanent connection with others'.⁶¹ This quest will be endless, but not directionless.

How can these principles be applied to the issue of the sex categories? I think Adorno would want to say, first, that the categories 'girl' and 'boy', or 'heterosexual' and 'homosexual', misrepresent and deform their objects. Furthermore, the categories 'girl' and 'boy' are mistakenly assumed to have relevance for all aspects of a person's life. Girls and boys are falsely perceived as discrete entities: mutually exclusive categories with absolutely no realms of commonality. Adorno might say that, certainly, girls do not exist outside of their relationship to boys. Nothing exists outside of relatedness. Despite these qualifications, Adorno might want to concede that there may be some things we can specifically say that most of those we call 'girls' have in common. There would still be things we could say that they have in common with boys, too. Each particular baby would still possess characteristics that are not exhausted by the categories 'girl' or 'boy'. There is no content that can be assumed to be stable or permanent, and interpretations of materiality are always subject to error.

I would like to substantiate these postulations with a passage from Seyla Benhabib, who has been greatly influenced by Critical Theory. She writes:

How do we know whether there is sexual desire with a marked directionality which precedes 'the law of culture' or whether all human desire is essentially plastic and acquires its directionality by being impacted upon by culture? The answer is that we do not, and all theorizing about the 'origins' of desire is a form of retrospective speculation.... The important point is that there is a memory of the body and a materiality to the somatic dimension of our linguistic existence for each individual. These cannot be reduced to language and discursivity although being only [*sic*] epistemically accessible through language and other linguistically interpretable forms of expression like bodily gestures, grimaces, symptoms, symptoms, and phobias.⁶²

In this passage, Benhabib goes on to indicate that 'retrospective speculation' is not to be discouraged; nor is it to be precluded from coming up with some kind of tentative affirmative statements. This is a materialist principle that I believe would be endorsed by Adorno. In conclusion, contrary to my reading of Butler, there are indeed things we can affirm about 'girls' and 'boys', but with all of the many caveats outlined above.

This issue lies at the heart of my objection to Butler's position. For this reason, I will clarify my argument. Butler has been attacked repeatedly by critics asking, 'What about the materiality of the body?'⁶³

On at least two occasions (one referred to above), Butler writes that 'surely there is' some necessity to the 'primary and irrefutable experiences' of eating, sleeping, feeling pain and pleasure, enduring illness, and other bodily events. However, her immediate reply is that the irrefutability of these experiences 'in no way implies what it might mean to affirm them'.⁶⁴ The implication is again that any affirmation of a specific bodily experience will have the political repercussions of boundary setting and exclusion. Positive statements will be performative, with the consequences Butler details throughout her writings. She also indicates that 'the options for theory are not exhausted by *presuming* materiality, on the one hand, and *negating* materiality, on the other.'⁶⁵ However, this new theoretical terrain cannot, by Butler's own definition, be given any specific content.

My contention is that Butler does not allow for the possibility that there may be different levels of materiality, or that some things may be less constituted than others. I propose that not all affirmations of materiality are equally performative. On one occasion, Butler seems to recognize this, but the implications of this concession do not enter her work. My basis for making this claim comes from a footnote, where Butler cites Althusser approvingly:

an ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices. This existence is material.... Of course, the material existence of the ideology in an apparatus and its practices does not have the same modality as the material existence of a paving-stone or a rifle. But, at the risk of being taken for a Neo-Aristotelian ... I shall say that 'matter is discussed in many senses', or rather that it exists in different modalities, all rooted in the last instance in 'physical' matter.⁶⁶

In citing Althusser in this fashion, Butler would appear to be granting that a stone has a materiality of a different 'modality' than that of an ideology, or perhaps that a prison's materiality is not identical to that of the body. As demonstrated in this article, however, Butler has explicitly ruled out such a distinction. I would like to suggest that this conception of differing modalities of materiality be taken seriously, and that the sexed body could sit, albeit uncomfortably, on a level somewhere between the materiality of a paving stone and that of a prison. A prison is a social institution, the paving stone is a rock, and the body is a living entity interpreted in a variety of ways, but with an undeniable materiality that exceeds discourse. Although Adorno does not technically incorporate this notion of 'modalities' of materiality into his writings, his recognition of an ontological reality in excess of

discourse is necessary to the overall coherence of the position. Thus, I repeat that some positive statements about the sexed body can be made without the violent performative consequences that are the topic of much of Butler's writings. This is my theoretical position with regards to Butler; I now turn to the various political interventions proposed by Butler and Adorno.

Strategic interventions and implications

It is extremely likely that Butler's reluctance to posit a materiality prior to discourse is motivated in large part by strategic concerns. Butler makes comments such as the following to this effect:

To problematize the matter of bodies may entail an initial loss of epistemological certainty, but a loss of certainty is not the same as political nihilism. On the contrary, such a loss may well indicate a significant and promising shift in political thinking. This unsettling of 'matter' can be understood as initiating new possibilities, new ways for bodies to matter.⁶⁷

Butler concedes that it may on occasion be necessary and desirable to refer to some sort of collective subject grounded in the category of sex.⁶⁸ The general implication of Butler's work, however, is that it may be counterproductive to the agendas of feminism and other social movements to make declarations regarding the distinctness and priority of the material. Butler's politics instead emphasize the prospects for social change presented by the threat that the abject 'other' poses to the allegedly natural categories of sex and sexuality. She also tentatively raises the possibility of a reconfiguration of discourse.

As discussed above, Butler claims that the formation of any category necessitates the creation of an 'other-than' realm which is always intimately related to that category. Again, boy implies girl and both imply not-boy, not-girl. Now, however, Butler focuses on the challenge that the 'other-than' extends to the category: 'this disavowed abjection ... threaten[s] to expose the self-grounding presumptions of the sexed subject, grounded as that subject is in a repudiation whose consequences it cannot fully control.'⁶⁹ The naturalness of the category woman, for example, can be questioned if a natural 'woman' can appear to be sexually ambiguous, or if a 'natural' man can convincingly present himself as a woman. One person's confusing sex status could force others to rethink the femaleness and heterosexuality they previously accepted as natural. Butler writes that sex ambiguity 'is subversive to the extent that it reflects on the imitative structure by which hegemonic gender is

itself produced and disputes heterosexuality's claim on naturalness and originality.⁷⁰ If sex ambiguity became common, the norms of gender and sexuality could loosen their hold on individuals, and different ways to be and think could become culturally acceptable. Butler is careful to note that parody may not be an adequate strategy to displace the dominant norms of sex and that it can put the performer at the risk of violence or even death.⁷¹

Butler also advocates a rethinking of identity so that it no longer entails a fixed, static wholeness and the corresponding rejection of what that identity purportedly does not include. A 'reworking of that logic of non-contradiction by which one identification is always and only purchased at the expense of another', is proposed.⁷² In other words, Butler is hoping that we could begin thinking of ourselves in a way that did not absolutely exclude whatever it is that we are allegedly not. Although she does not go into much detail, she indicates that this can perhaps be accomplished by 'tracing the ways in which identification is implicated in what it excludes, and ... follow[ing] the lines of that implication for the map of future community that it might yield'.⁷³

This last refrain should remind the reader of Adorno yet again. Adorno is, of course, interested in the very same 'reworking of that logic of non-contradiction' that Butler outlines. Adorno claims that if we were to emphasize the otherness of the object without losing sight of our connection to it, we could possibly transform our relationship to our own self and to others. Adorno poetically describes the possibilities for a new way of thinking and being as follows: 'Utopia would be above identity and above contradiction; it would be a togetherness of diversity.'⁷⁴ Although this proposal is undertheorized (or perhaps more accurately, under-applied) in both Adorno and Butler, the point is that a similar strategy is reached by both, and that thus far neither of their positions grants an unassailable political advantage.

Adorno's privileging of the object also redirects philosophical attention to the social totality in which all practice is embedded, even though he never claims to know all aspects of that totality. This is a point of substantial difference between Adorno's materialism and Butler's poststructuralism. Recall that Adorno's materialism insists that there is an objective reality existing outside of language, discourse, or thought. Adorno's privileging of the object allows him to say that, while there is no absolute truth that we as humans can ever fully grasp, some things are relatively true within a specific historical context. He argues that

idealism's equation of objective knowledge with the subject negates the difference between essence and appearance, as everything is reduced to the latter and essence is categorically denied.⁷⁵ As with the other binary categories Adorno discusses, his version of 'truth' is a combination of both sides of the equation. He explains:

Essence can no longer be hypostatized as the pure, spiritual being-in-itself. Rather, essence passes into that which lies concealed beneath the facade of immediacy, of the supposed facts, and which makes the facts what they are.⁷⁶

This means again that the object will never be only what we claim it is. Once more, this doesn't imply that the object is some stable or permanent thing. The maintenance of a distinction between appearance and essence allows Adorno to argue that there are 'laws' of society that govern everyone's behaviour. The laws that are of primary concern to Adorno are the laws of the capitalist economy.⁷⁷ He writes of these laws that 'they are more real than the facts in which they appear, the facts which deceive us about them... [b]ut they discard the traditional attributes of essence.'⁷⁸ Adorno can incorporate a critique of social structures into his work by insisting that what is claimed about capitalism's fulfilment of human needs is untrue.⁷⁹ The basis for making a judgement about a truth claim can only come through practice or experience.⁸⁰ Again, arguing that one interpretation is ideological need not imply that what is instead proposed is the absolute truth. Rather, for Adorno, it is simply truer than the ideology.

This is a form of critique that some poststructuralism has disavowed almost entirely. I am not suggesting that there can be some sort of simple linkage between sexual inequality and capitalism. Furthermore, Butler has acknowledged that her brand of poststructuralism does not address all worthy political goals:

It is clear that in order to set political goals, it is necessary to assert normative judgements. In a sense, my own work has been concerned to expose produced and differentiated. I concede that this is not the only goal, and that there are questions of social and economic justice which are not primarily concerned with questions of subject-formation. To this end it is crucial to rethink the domain of power-relations, and to develop a way of adjudicating political norms without forgetting that such an adjudication will also always be a struggle of power.⁸¹

It is my contention, however, that Butler *cannot* address social and economic injustice without the addition of materialism to her paradigm. For example, Butler

could not utilize her theoretical framework to criticize a society in which only some people, even if they were of a variety of shapes and colours, performed domestic and/or other types of either socially abject, low-paying, or dangerous labour. Adorno's materialism, with its insistence that some interpretations of material reality are truer than others within a given historical context, provides many of the tools of poststructuralism while maintaining the grounding I think is necessary to engage in an analysis of various aspects of the division of labour. The *basis* for making a critique of the division of labour lies in the ontological ground of the material; the *content* of that critique is neither fixed nor static and is open to debate.

But should Butler be criticized for a failure to analyse absolutely everything? Adorno's maintenance of the primacy of the object has one final political implication that I think answers this question. If all thought depends on an irreducible objectivity, there is an undeniably real component to human sensations: 'the somatic moment as the not purely cognitive part of cognition is irreducible.'⁸² Adorno therefore argues that human pain and suffering have a real basis. We are physical, objective creatures, and our subjectivity, however derivative, is a gauge of our sensual well-being. Adorno wants us to heed these subjective impressions of objective suffering. Given the real basis of suffering,

Conscious unhappiness is not a delusion of the mind's vanity but something inherent in the mind, the one authentic dignity it has received in its separation from the body.... The physical moment tells our knowledge that suffering ought not to be, that things should be different. Hence the convergence of specific materialism with criticism, with social change in practice.⁸³

Adorno does not mean to imply that there is some final state of happiness; he explicitly states that unhappiness is only recognized as such in comparison to happiness. Therefore happiness or unhappiness are interdependent concepts, as are all concepts and entities according to Adorno.⁸⁴ The presence of unhappiness tells us that happiness is a possibility. In fact, the human need for happiness is present in all thinking. Adorno writes that 'the need in thinking is what makes us think'.⁸⁵ Social criticism cannot give up the wish for happiness; correspondingly, unhappiness must be taken as the grounding of any critique.

There is no similar component in Butler's writings, and I think that this has political implications for her feminism. I will offer as illustration two medical conditions that have received press coverage in recent years. I am not suggesting that Adorno's 'pain' need

always be interpreted in quite so literal a fashion, but on occasion I think it is advisable to acquaint oneself with the mundane realities of physical suffering. It has been observed that Japanese women going through menopause are much less likely than North American women to experience 'hot flushes'. The typical interpretation of this until recently has been that Japanese culture appreciates its elders more than does North American culture. Therefore, there is a stigma attached to ageing North American women, which is reflected in their feeling more discomfort throughout menopause. Now, however, it has been reported that Japanese women may be less likely to experience hot flushes because of their diet. The second example is that presented by the illness commonly known as Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. When this disease first began to be diagnosed, it was typically argued that it was the latest form of female hysteria. This explanation is still promoted in some quarters. An increasing number of studies alternatively indicate that there is a cluster of real neurological/muscular/immune symptoms shared by most sufferers of CFS.

It is likely that Butler would want to agree that diet can decrease the likelihood of experiencing hot flushes, and that there are real symptoms and causes of CFS. However, I do not think her theory could allow her to do so consistently. I cannot see what is gained by Butler's supposed third ground beyond materialism and idealism, other than the statement that disease is interpreted differently by different cultures and even different individuals, and that it cannot therefore be said to exist outside of those interpretations. Whereas Butler states that nothing is lost in her move away from materialism, I counter that her brand of poststructuralism could be potentially harmful in the instances I have just discussed. The insistence that there can be no positive statements regarding material reality does remove the grounds for science, despite Butler's protestations to the contrary. This is not to say that cultural factors are unimportant in the experience of disease by individuals. However, Adorno's reminder that there is an objective reality prior to any interpretation of that reality, that some interpretations are therefore truer than others, and that the human experience of pain makes plausible truth statements about objective reality, provides a better framework for the interpretation of physical suffering.⁸⁶

Furthermore, while some sufferers of CFS (and perhaps even hot flushes?) are men, explanatory power is gained by the observation that most afflicted with the disease are women. For example, it is felt that the female body's tendency to produce yeast under some

conditions may hamper the immune system; antibiotics increasing the likelihood of that production may therefore harm women more than men. Recall that Butler has granted that on occasion, it may be useful to employ the terms ‘men’ and ‘women’.⁸⁷ What could be the basis for such a deployment given Butler’s paradigm, however? She might simply repeat that what we call women are not women in any objectively real way. She would perhaps further argue that if the categories men and women did not in large part organize our existence, we would just observe that CFS seemed likely to strike one or more varieties of individuals as opposed to others. This might indeed involve a categorization that is less violent and exclusive than the binary man/woman, and this is an important contention. I do not think that it *necessarily* has more emancipatory potential than the contention that what we call women are more likely to suffer from CFS. In fact, I think that this instance demonstrates that at times, it will be necessary to fight for the recognition that some things are indeed rooted in a sexed material reality. I want to maintain that the creatures we call women do share some material ground even as they share other ground with the creatures we call men. This partially shared reality of most women (and, correspondingly, most men) should not have to colour all aspects of our lives as it does presently. However, it is a reality, open to interpretation and misinterpretation, and never finally resolved.

Notes

1. Butler’s earlier book, *Gender Trouble*, engaged in a similar project. Because she seems to have modified her position somewhat with the publication of *Bodies That Matter*, I have chosen to discuss the latter only.
2. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, Routledge, New York, 1993, pp. 2–3.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
6. Adorno prefers to employ the language of ‘subject’ and ‘object’ in his writings. It is perhaps not absolutely correct to equate Adorno’s objectivity with Butler’s materiality, but I see enough parallels to be comfortable with this comparison.
7. Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, Continuum, New York, 1992, p. 120.
8. There are, of course, other feminists who have argued that the sex categories are just as social as gender. Monique Wittig’s ‘The Category of Sex’, *Feminist Issues*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 63–9, provides one such example. Less well-known is Suzanne J. Kessler and Wendy McKenna, *Gender*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1978, a text written from an anthropological/psychological perspective.
9. Butler, *Bodies*, p. 10.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 1–2.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 7–8.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
13. I am aware that discourse and language cannot be simply equated; however, Butler’s writings employ both terms, and the slippage (both hers and mine) does not seem of vital concern to this article.
14. Butler, *Bodies*, p. 68. Note Butler’s careful use of language: Relations ‘institute and require’ relate. She does not want to attribute any sort of priority to either the phenomenal or the noumenal.
15. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 119.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 147.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 171.
18. For Adorno, entity or object does not have to mean ‘existent’; it is identity thinking that has forced reality to be that which is purely physical. Therefore, according to Adorno, the subject of idealism is always an object, and not strictly in the sense of a physical creature. Even thinking becomes phenomenal as soon as there is a thought. See *Negative Dialectics*, p. 80.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 185.
20. Butler, *Bodies*, p. 8.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
23. Several studies show that people become very uncomfortable when they meet someone who cannot readily be classed as ‘man’ or ‘woman’. See Candace West and Don Zimmerman, ‘Doing Gender’, *Gender and Society*, 18, 1987, pp. 125–51; also Kessler and McKenna, *Gender*.
24. Butler, *Bodies*, p. 107. Butler acknowledges that not all utterances have performative capacity; effective performatives must have some form of social power supporting them. The connection between the discursive and extra-discursive realms, between micro- and macro-power, is undertheorized in the writings of Butler, but it is not my intention to explore this issue here.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
26. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, pp. 26–7, 142, 193.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 309.
28. Butler, *Bodies*, p. 9.
29. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 30.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 155.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 267. Certainly, as will be seen shortly, Adorno wants to talk about structural causes. It is perhaps best, therefore, to read this statement as a rejection of the notion of uncaused ‘first causes’ or ‘origins’.
34. Butler, *Bodies*, p. 67.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 67. Technically, Butler is quite careless here. The full text runs as follows:

It must be possible to concede and affirm an array of ‘materialities’ that pertain to the body, that which is signified by the domains of biology, anatomy, physiology, hormonal and chemical composition, illness, age, weight, metabolism, life and death. None of this can be denied. But the undeniability of these ‘materialities’ in no way implies what it means to affirm them, indeed, what interpretive matrices condition, enable and limit that necessary affirmation.

What concerns me is that Butler declares, on the one hand, that it must be possible to ‘concede and affirm an array of materialities’, but on the other hand that ‘the undeniability of these “materialities” in no way implies what it means to affirm them.’ Thus, she has effectively

said that we must affirm materiality but we cannot affirm materiality. Saying what ‘it’ is, furthermore, would automatically be an effort to describe what you claim you cannot know. Thus, Butler must say things like the body is a ‘demand’, etc. Here she is caught in a clear ambiguity, however, and she should not blame people for finding in her writings an attempt to deny some kind of extra-discursive otherness.

37. At times, Butler seems to be arguing that certain materialisms, or at least certain contemporary empiricisms, can also be accused of positing a static, atemporal material reality. But she praises some forms of ancient materialism, and says that Marx was on track when he conceived of matter as ‘transformative activity itself’ (*Bodies*, p. 250 n5). Butler at one point even says that she is arguing for a ‘return to the notion of matter, not as site or surface, but as a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter’ (*Bodies*, p. 9). The notion of a qualified return indicates that Butler does not think that all materialism assumes a static eternal materiality. However, I would argue that serious materialist philosophers have taken the concept of matter in motion and flux as one of their first principles since ancient times. Butler perhaps thinks that some materialist feminists will disagree with her contention. I instead argue that materialist feminists do agree with Butler here, but disagree with her fundamentally on another point, which I will elucidate shortly.
38. Butler, *Bodies*, pp. 68–9.
39. Although Kant discusses the thing-in-itself many times in his writings, a prime example is found in the division entitled ‘Transcendental Analytic’, Book II, chapter 3 of *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith, Macmillan, London, 1933.
- Kant’s writings indicate that the limit he ascribes to our knowledge is perhaps not as all-encompassing as Hegel (and Adorno) suggests. For example, Kant writes:
- Through observation and analysis of appearances we penetrate to nature’s inner recesses, and no one can say how far this knowledge may in time extend. But with all this knowledge, and even if the whole of nature were revealed to us, we should still never be able to answer those transcendental questions which go beyond nature. The reason of this is that it is not given to us to observe our own mind with any other intuition than that of inner sense; and that it is precisely in the mind that the secret of the source of our sensibility is located. (*Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 287)
- Rather than intending the limit to apply to all human knowledge, Kant indicates that it pertains only to very specific transcendental questions.
40. Butler, *Bodies*, pp. 67–8. One of Hegel’s critiques of the Kantian notion of the limit to knowledge is found in his *Logic*, trans. William Wallace, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1975, §§92–5.
41. Butler, *Bodies*, p. 8.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 116.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 33. See Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*, Volume I, Vintage Books, New York, 1990, pp. 152–3.
46. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 137.
47. *Ibid.*

48. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 181.
51. Adorno does not think that we can escape from conceptual thinking, a point on which many people disagree. For Adorno, thought must always be of something, although not necessarily an entity. If content cannot be affixed to a thought, the thought truly is of nothing at all.
52. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 135.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
54. Theodor Adorno, ‘Subject and Object’, in Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt, eds, *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, Continuum, New York, 1990, p. 504.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 503.
56. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 283.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 290.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 382; but see note 39 above.
59. Butler has similarly attributed to thought and language a ‘drive’ to express material reality. However, as established, this ‘drive’ cannot be further elaborated in Butler’s world-view.
60. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 5.
61. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
62. Seyla Benhabib, ‘Subjectivity, Historiography, and Politics’, in *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange*, New York, Routledge, 1995, p. 121 n5. At the end of this footnote, Benhabib indicates that Butler is coming to the same conclusion. I disagree, based on the analysis in this article.
63. Butler, *Bodies*, p. ix. Butler begins her book with a recollection of the many incredulous comments she has received upon the presentation of her ideas.
64. *Ibid.*, p. xi.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
66. Louis Althusser, ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)’, in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1971, p. 166. Cited in Butler, *Bodies*, p. 252 n13.
67. Butler, *Bodies*, p. 30.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 123.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
70. *Ibid.*, p. 125.
71. *Ibid.*, pp. 125, 133.
72. *Ibid.*, p. 118.
73. *Ibid.*, p. 119.
74. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 150.
75. *Ibid.*, p. 112.
76. *Ibid.*, p. 167.
77. Lest it be thought that Adorno is a simple advocate of global theory, he cautions that one must not lose site of the need to engage with a *specific* object. Recall that the thought of the roast after dinner differs from the taste of the roast. In Adorno’s words, ‘Without recourse to the material, no ought could issue from reason; yet once compelled to acknowledge its material in the abstract, as a condition of its own possibility, reason must not cut off its reflection on the specific material’ (*Negative Dialectics*, p. 242). Adorno is warning, albeit obscurely, both that theory needs to be related to practice ‘in the abstract’ and that theory cannot be allowed to ignore the particularity of the ‘specific material’ that always exceeds it.
78. *Ibid.*, pp. 168–9.
79. *Ibid.*, pp. 203, 378.

80. But this does not mean that Adorno has a pragmatic definition of truth – Adorno’s relative truths are *really* truer than their false counterparts. The critique is an immanent one, but fully grounded in material reality.
81. Judith Butler, ‘For a Careful Reading’, in *Feminist Contentions*, p. 141.
82. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 193.
83. *Ibid.*, p. 203.
84. *Ibid.*, p. 377.
85. *Ibid.*, p. 408.
86. I would argue that Adorno and Butler fall short in their efforts to concretize their theoretical positions. Other components of my research deal with more explicit ramifications of the materiality of the body.
87. Butler, *Bodies*, p. 123.

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