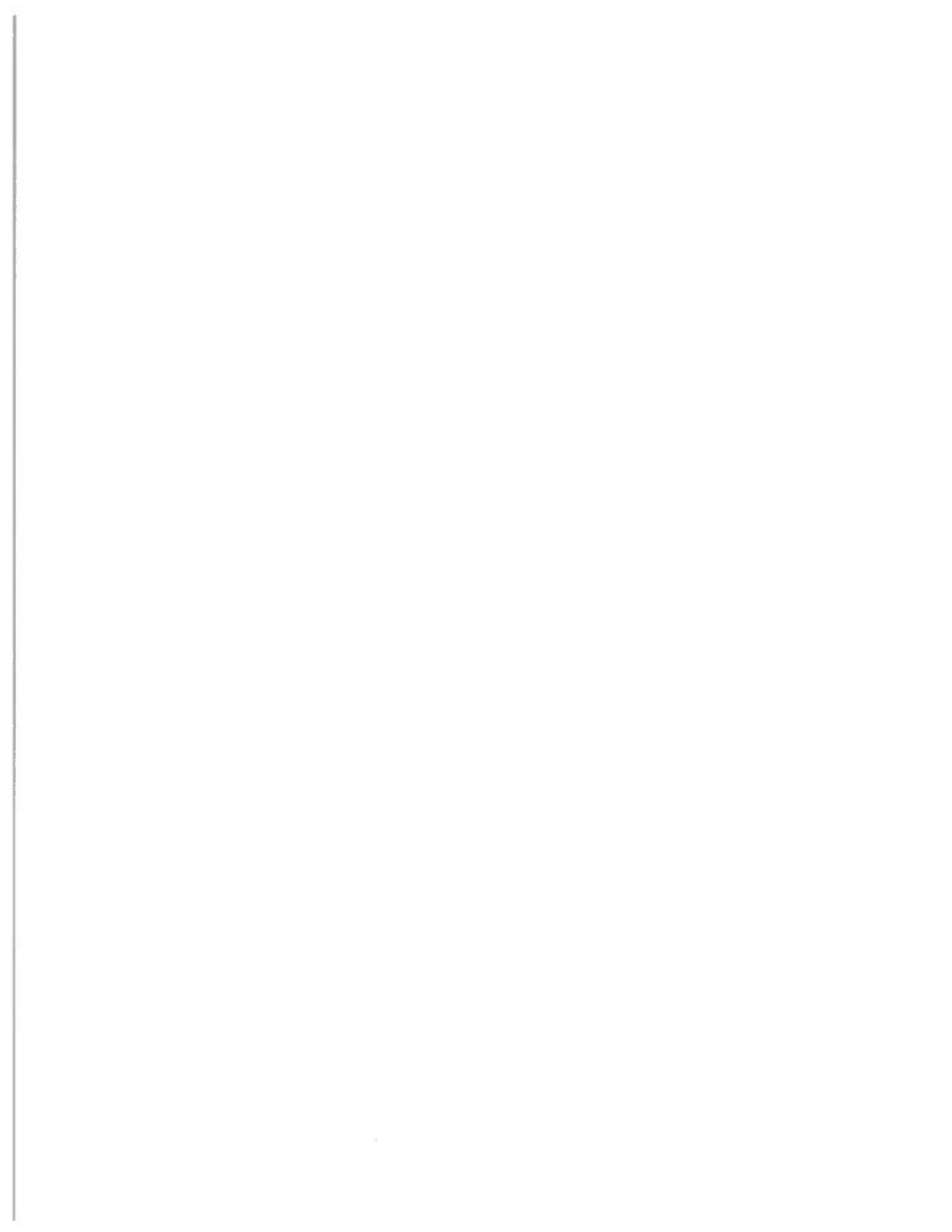


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Rosemary Hennessy

THE MATERIAL OF SEX

Rosemary Hennessy is Professor of English and Director of the Center for the Study of Women, Gender, and Sexuality at Rice University. She has authored several books including *NAFTA From Below: Maquiladora Workers, Campesinos, and Indigenous Communities Speak Back* (2006), *Materialist Feminism and the Politics of Discourse* (1993), and *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism* (2002), from which this excerpt is taken. Her scholarship encompasses feminist cultural theory, sexuality studies, and U.S.-Mexican studies.

In *Profit and Pleasure*, Hennessy examines how gender and sexual identities are shaped by forces of capitalism. In this excerpt, Hennessy critiques the post-Marxist inclination within queer theory that separates sexuality from capitalism and class. Working against what she considers the “cultural materialism” of leading queer theorists, including Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Hennessy advocates a historical materialist approach to queer theory that emphasizes the tangled histories of capitalism and queer identity formations. In doing so, Hennessy emphasizes the relevance of critiquing heterosexual marriage and family within radical queer politics. A historical analysis of marriage and family highlights the role of capitalism in the formation of family, labor, and consumption—historical formations that also shape queer identities. According to Hennessy, adding capitalism to the discourse of sexual identity “queers” the links between sexual identity and class formation.

The coming of the queer

QUEER THEORY PRESENTED itself in the late eighties as an emphatically post marxist critique of sexual identity politics. One of the defining features of queer theory is its effort to reorient a cultural and social movement based on identity politics and founded on the categories “gay” and “lesbian” in order to produce “another discursive horizon, another way of thinking the sexual” (de Lauretis 1991, iv). By the early nineties in academic theory, invoking the signifier “queer” paralleled the shift away from the terms “lesbian” and “gay” among some activists (Queer Nation, which gave the signifier “queer” national publicity,

was founded in 1990). Claiming a queer identity is an effort to speak from and to the differences that have been suppressed both by heteronorms and by the homo - hetero binary; the transsexual, bisexual, and any other ways of "experimenting" and expressing sensuality and affect that do not conform to the prevailing organization of sexuality. It is an effort to unpack the monolithic identities "lesbian" and "gay," including the intricate ways lesbian and gay sexualities are indexed by heterosexual norms, race, gender, and ethnic differences. Embracing the category used to shame and cast out sexual deviants, queer theory and politics defiantly refuse the terms of the dominant discourse, offering instead an "in your face" rejection of proper sexual identities that is both anti-assimilationist and anti-separatist. Touting queerness is a gesture of rebellion against compulsory heterosexuality's pressure to be either hetero or invisible, either confidently normal or apologetically, shamefully, quietly queer. These knowledges carry an important critical force to the extent that they denaturalize how we think about sexuality and identity. Much of this denaturalizing draws from an array of postmodern theories that see sexuality and identity not as a fact of nature or a bidinal drive but rather as an unstable symbolic construction, a cultural effect. Queer theory distances itself from lesbian and gay identity politics because it sees any identity as internally divided and therefore not an apt or effective rallying point for change. "Queer" is a mark of the instability of identity. It makes visible the ways that heterosexual functions as a normative power regime and highlights the arbitrariness of the real distinctions it enforces (between masculine and feminine, straight and gay, for example) in how sexuality and gender - and for some queer theorists race, too - come to be known. In all of these respects queer theory is a significant departure from lesbian and gay studies.

Queer theory is an ensemble of knowledges, many of them consisting knowledges. It is, in other words, a site of struggle, not a monolithic discourse. And yet, underneath the debates, there are some important ways in which the distinguishing features of queer theory share assumptions that are not new. A significant one is the fact that in most of this work capitalism remains completely invisible. Despite their diversity, knowledges that come under the signature "queer theory" invariably and at times insistently separate the primary object of their analysis - sexuality - from capitalism as a class based system of production. The most widely circulating version of queer theory now is what I will call "avant-garde queer theory." Emerging out of a decade of cultural work on several fronts, affected by new forms of political activism honored in the AIDS dominated eighties, and labored by a postmodern academic chic, avant-garde queer theory has challenged and redefined lesbian and gay studies. Some avant-garde queer theory that began to circulate in the early nineties makes no claims to a materialist analysis but remains primarily bound to a more textual approach to identity as signification. (I am thinking here of essays and books by Lee Edelman [1994], Diana Fuss [1991], Wayne Koestenbaum [1993], and Peggy Phelan [1993], for instance.) However, this variant of postmodern theories of identity is now losing credibility and is being displaced as another, more materialist avant-garde strand has become queer theory's dominant discourse. Michael Warner's "Introduction" to the collection *Fear of a Queer Planet* is an exemplary instance. Unlike versions of queer theory that have been more preoccupied with identity as an effect of language and sexuality, Warner's perspective acknowledges the social and political dimensions of sexuality. He even addresses the market mediation of lesbian and gay culture in a "structural environment" where the institutions of queer culture "have been dominated by those with capital" (xvii). We do not learn any more about how Warner understands the power dynamics of domination by capital, the distinction between those with capital and those without, or how this difference shapes queer culture and community, however, because Warner never mentions them again. While Warner hints that capitalism necessarily entails the difference between those who control and those who do not control capital and that this structure plays a determinative role in shaping queer culture, this hint is no substitute for analysis of sexuality's historical relation to capitalism as a class based system.

In fact, Warner goes on to disavow the need for any such analysis when he asserts that "class is conspicuously useless" for queer theory (xxiv). Warner's dismissive separation of class analysis from sexuality echoes the well established convention of segregating the history of sexuality from the history of capitalism. This history is most often rendered opaque by appeals to the obviousness of their irrelevance to one another. Much of queer theory now continues this tradition; the very possibility of linking the changing organizations of sexuality to capitalism remains all but unspeakable. Because this strand of queer theory claims to be materialist, the difference between its cultural materialism and marxism's historical materialism needs further clarification.

Both cultural and historical materialist approaches to sexuality call into question cultural categories (gay, straight, butch, femme), oppositions (man vs. woman; hetero vs. homo), or equations (gender = sex) upon which conventional notions of sexual identity rely. Both break from traditional notions of sexuality as a personal or civil rights issue. And both refuse a politics in which identity is understood to be represented in a self evident way through one's body or collectivity is reduced to group affiliation defined according to the standard of authentic embodiment. Cultural materialist queer theory at times acknowledges the work of materialist feminists. (Monique Wittig, for example, has been claimed by several prominent avant garde queer theorists.) But the theories of the social and the modes of critical practice offered in cultural materialist queer theory are quite at odds with historical materialism even as it has been embraced and reworked by feminists.

This queer theory of the more cultural materialist sort can be loosely characterized as post poststructuralist in that it extends poststructuralism's emphatically textual critique of humanism and empiricism to more overtly social concerns, usually framed in terms of cultural politics. (Among those developing this strand of queer theory are Judith Butler, David Halperin, Cindy Patton, Gayle Rubin, and Eve Sedgwick.) Drawing heavily on Michel Foucault's arguments that subjectivity is first of all historical and social, that identities are discursively constructed, and that these constructions are enacted through disciplinary technologies and regimes of power, this strand of queer theory, like Foucault's genealogies, is a version of materialism. But what is meant by materialism here? The answer to this question can take us on a long detour into the history of cultural materialism that is in fact an important supplement to the emergence of queer theory and its post marxist underpinnings. [. . .] Here [. . .] I want to turn to Judith Butler's work for the exemplary "queer" answer to this question it offers.

Not only has Butler acquired enormous stature in defining queer critiques of heterosexuality, but the explicit endorsement of materialism in her book *Bodies That Matter* situates her arguments squarely within the discourses of post marxism and characterizes it as a paradigmatic example of Foucauldian avant garde queer theory. The following reading of Butler is meant to explore some of the informing assumptions of this approach and to question the limits of a post marxist queer politics. Judith Butler is cited more persistently and pervasively than any other queer theorist. References to her work appear in dissertations, conference papers and journals, and new books and collections, as well as in more popular cosmopolitan venues like the *Force Literary Supplement*.¹ This attention indicates that her ideas have struck a chord in a certain sector of the public imagination of new ways of knowing sexual identity.

One of the most notable and trenchant features of Butler's analysis is her extension of feminism's theory of gender as culturally constructed to the more radical argument that the internal coherence of the identities "man" or "woman" presumes institutional heterosexuality. Much of the oppositional force of her critique lies in its insistent claim that heteronormativity is absolutely central to the bourgeois ideology of expressive and coherent selfhood. This imaginary representation, she argues, "conceals the gender discontinuities that run rampant within heterosexual, bisexual, gay, and lesbian contexts where gender does not

necessarily follow from sex, and desire or sexuality generally does not seem to follow from "gender" (1990, 135-36). From this perspective, heterosexuality, which is generally assumed to be an expression of the core of oneself, is exposed as a precarious fabrication always potentially at risk.

In *Gender Trouble* Butler draws on various poststructuralist theories of language to present sexual identification as the effect of *discourses* (acts, gestures, practices) that assemble a provisional coherence on the surface of the body (1990, 136). Her aim is to denaturalize heterosexual and gender by showing them to be performative features of identity. "Being" lesbian or gay—or straight, for that matter—is for Butler not a mark of one's essential identity but rather the effect of repeated performances of cultural signs and conventions, imitations that are always supplementary, always giving the lie to any original sexual identity. This performativity is not a matter of role playing or mere theatricality, which assumes an "I" that is already in place before the role or act is performed. Rather, identity is radically performative. It is through the repeated performance of certain significations of sex and gender that an "I" continually comes to "be."

In *Bodies That Matter* (1993) Butler extends these arguments about the performativity of identity by casting them in a much more emphatically Foucauldian materialist frame. From the opening pages of *Bodies* she asserts that she began this project trying to consider the materiality of the body, the constraints by which bodies are materialized as sexed, and how to link the materiality of the body to the performativity of gender (xi, 1). It quickly becomes clear, however, that materiality for Butler is simply a matter of norms. The materiality of the body, she argues, is inseparable from regulatory conventions that function in a performative fashion to constitute sex and to materialize the body's sex and sexual difference in the service of a heterosexual imperative (1993, 2). Norms achieve this materialization of sex through their forcible reiteration. It is through the reiteration or reiteration of already established norms that one "performs" a sexual identity. In this sense sexual identity is what Butler calls a "citational" practice rather than an ontological or natural essence. Sex is not a raw material on which gender identities are constituted, a drive, physiological configuration, or bodily sensation, but rather a set of cultural conventions by which one becomes visible at all (1993, 2). Norms regulate in part by exclusion, and [...] Butler argues that the exclusionary normative matrix by which sex is constructed requires the simultaneous production of a domain of abject categories. Any identification with these abjects is continually disavowed by the norms or laws of the dominant culture. It is that for Butler which constitutes the different citation of the law that this threatening abject puts forward as the critical space of a queer performative politics.

Several concepts are linked in Butler's critique of normative heterosexuality—discourse, materiality, performance—and all are loosely connected to history, power, and the social. Much as it is for Foucault, discourse in *Bodies That Matter* is a complex chain of social practices. These social practices are the vehicles for norms and the vectors of power. Performativity in this sense is the modality of power as discourse. For Butler, the historical force of discourse and of norms is their power over time to enact what they name (1993, 187).

Butler's emphasis on norms injects into poststructuralism's textualized understandings of identity as significant a social and historical analysis more attuned to the workings of power in language. But understanding the materiality of social life as so exclusively normative also limits social relations to the domains of culture and the law. Normative discourses are social practices that regulate action, behavior, rituals, and institutions. And in this sense, they encompass much more than language, speech acts, or signs. But a normative starting point also excludes in advance other important dimensions of social life from critical consideration. Butler has recently had to address some of the challenges to her way of understanding sexuality. In an essay tellingly entitled "Merely Cultural," which was first given as a talk in

1996 at the Rethinking Marxism Conference in Amherst, Massachusetts, she answers the “explicitly Marxist objection that the cultural focus of leftist politics has abandoned the materialist project of Marxism, failing to address questions of economic equity and redistribution, and failing as well to situate culture in terms of a *systematic* understanding of social and economic modes of production” (265). In response to the charges from what she calls an “orthodox” marxism, Butler (1997a) defends poststructuralism’s focus on culture for the interests of a queer politics. She does so by way of a rather high handed misreading of marxism as aiming for a “racially cleansed notion of class” and deploying a rhetoric of unity that domesticates and subordinates movements that formed in opposition to oppressive efforts to erase their priorities. The problem here is that Butler ignores many of the historical materialist efforts to formulate the complex ways class relations never operate “on their own” or simply “subordinate” certain kinds of social difference. At one point she refers to the need to remember the reasons why new social movements, presumably feminism, gay, and black civil rights movements, “became articulated against a hegemonic Left,” as well as against a complicitous “liberal center and a truly threatening right wing” (268). There is a problem here with Butler’s presentation of the enemy of new social movements. It obscures some of the ways power was exerted not just through certain political “wings” and “centers” but through the bourgeois ruling bloc who were able to use the repressive power of the state to suppress groups like the Black Panthers and feminists who were forging collectivities based on much more systemic and revolutionary rather than identitarian ways of thinking. It is not clear who exactly Butler includes in the new social movements she refers to, but that she uses the term “semi autonomous” is interesting. It suggests that identity based groups can maintain a link to *something*, though the something is unnamed. Is it to class relations? To the ruling bloc? Butler does not say, and the essay goes on to endorse an emphatic cultural politics, but her mention of semi autonomous political relations is suggestive and important, and I will come back to this point later. What Butler refuses to acknowledge or perhaps even to see is that insisting on the vital role of the extraction of surplus labor in capitalism does not preclude developing analyses of how this process involves highly differentiated and inter imbricated cultural processes.

It is true that the historical materialist position I am endorsing stresses that capitalism is fundamentally based on social relations of class, relations that are always mediated by other social differences. In other words, yes, class does have a certain priority in capitalism. But it is important to remember that class in this sense is a social relationship, not a reified cultural category. To see this historical materialist analysis as “subordinating” or “domesticating” identitarian interests to class is already to be thinking about class out of the very logic Butler herself disparages, a logic in which differences are “abstracted,” made falsely coherent and territorial in relation to one another.

When Butler turns to the topic of sexual difference, she protests against charges that she sees social life as “merely cultural.” She counters that, of course, sexuality is central to the functioning of political economy (270–71), then reviews some of the arguments of Marx, Engels, and socialist feminists that systemically tie “the regulation of sexuality” to the mode of production (271). For Butler, these examples serve to show that social reproduction cannot be understood without expanding the economic sphere to include the social reproduction of persons (271). But for her showing that sexuality is central to political economy finally means overwriting political economy with sexuality. The analysis has not advanced any further than the arguments of cultural feminists almost twenty years ago. The examples that she gives tell of lesbians and gays being denied rights — to freedom of assembly and speech, to family, as members of the military, as legitimate committed partners and parents. She is right to foreground that there are rules regulating relations of property and economic entitlement, and she is right to stress that this process is not about specific identities being excluded

from cultural recognition but refers rather to a "specific mode of sexual production and exchange that works to maintain the stability of gender, the heterosexuality of desire, and the naturalization of the family" (273). In the end, Butler does not explain how sexuality mediates relations of labor or has anything at all to do with exploitation. Instead she emphatically situates her analysis of economic exchange within culture, using Lévi-Strauss's concept of exchange as the lever to do so. Lévi-Strauss does indeed confound the distinction between the cultural and the economic in his analyses, but the melding of kinship relations and divisions of labor in the societies he describes has not been the prevailing form of production under capitalism. Butler's turn to anthropology allows her to substitute kinship relations—which are cultural relations—for relations of production. This is a familiar ideological shift in the history of feminist encounters with marxism. [. . .] Consequently, in the end, social production remains what it has been all along for Butler—it not "merely," then finally, cultural.

The emphasis on culture and the law in Butler's normative understanding of materiality is quite distinct from what materiality means in historical marxism, and precisely because historical marxism does not "discount the cultural," as Butler charges, the differences between the two are important to consider. Historical marxism understands social life to be historically and materially produced through relations of labor through which people make what is needed to survive. But this process does not happen without the ways of making sense, normative practices (culture-ideology), and the laws (state organization) that are part of the material production of social life. That Butler, like Foucault, entirely drops social relations of labor out of her analysis marks her claims on the material as post-marxist. Indeed, this affiliation with post-marxism is evident in her laudatory appropriation of the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. It is helpful to examine this debt to Laclau and Mouffe in sorting out what is at issue in the kind of materialism Butler's queer theory puts forth.

Butler's performative queerness and Laclau and Mouffe's radical democracy share much in common. For Laclau and Mouffe, the material is a performative discourse. In their book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985), they develop a version of materialist performativity against the traditions of economic determinism and party vanguardism within marxism. Based on their reading of divisions within marxism, Laclau and Mouffe lay claim to a concept of hegemony more linked to mass (democratic) than class (marxist) politics, a concept whose genealogy they trace through Rosa Luxembourge and Antonio Gramsci. But while their aim is to correct a construction of the class subject in marxism that they claim historically closed out any consideration of the contingent interests of the masses—women, anticolonial and antiracist, sexuality, youth, or ecology movements—their arguments against a reductive economic determinism end up excluding entirely any consideration of capitalism's relations of exploitation, accumulation, or domination in social life.² This exclusion is played out in a social theory that, like Butler's normative materialism, is premised on the notion that social organization is primarily symbolic. We see this in their understanding of class as an articulation of symbolic (subject) positions rather than as an effect of the organization of labor that infects and is in turn affected by ideology and state. Above all, we see the erasure of capitalism's fundamental relations of exploitation—the surplus labor capitalism relies on in order to function. The relationship between social differences (of sexuality, race, and gender) and capital's need for surplus labor, as well as the relationship of democratic rights to capitalism's fundamental relations of production, remains unexplained in its overridding attention to the cultural or symbolic dimensions of material life.

This distinctive post-Marxian equation of social life with the symbolic is most evident in the way Laclau and Mouffe unthine the concept of hegemony from social production, one of the basic premises of historical marxism. Laclau and Mouffe claim that it is necessary to break from historical marxism's starting point—social production—because it conveys

that "society" is a totality. Instead, they consider the openness of the social to be its constitutive ground, an openness in which "we are dealing with contingent relations whose nature we have yet to determine" (1985, 96). However, this argument against founding concepts like social production does not acknowledge that the concept of production in historical materialism is not totalizing in the Hegelian sense they imply; rather, it is a way of thinking that recognizes the historical openness of social relations. Moreover, their renunciation of foundational concepts belies that their own contingent social logic is also anchored in a founding concept, namely signification.

Laclau and Mouffe understand the historical materialist notion of production to be totalizing because they equate social production with economic production, which then becomes the Hegelian whole to which all aspects of social production are subsumed. This misreading ignores all of the efforts of contemporary marxists to address cultural practices as part of social production. Indeed, these efforts to theorize cultural production have been central to debates over the uses and limits of the base-superstructure metaphor in Marxism [. . .]. For Laclau and Mouffe, in any social formation there is always a surplus of *meaning* that threatens to interrupt any necessary fixing of the nodal points or discursive axes for identity (e.g., what it means to be a woman, a man, black, or gay). Understanding what constitutes the materiality of this surplus of meanings and the (in)secure fixing of identities refers us to Laclau and Mouffe's founding conception, signification. What establishes the excessive, unstable symbolic dimension of every social identity is for them polysemy: "[S]ociety never manages to be identical to itself, as every nodal point is constituted within an intertextuality that overflows it" (1985, 113).

Drawing on the ideas of Laclau and Mouffe, Butler, too, argues that the constitutive antagonism written into meanings—the nonclosure of definitions and identities—is assured by a contingency or provisionality that underwrites every discursive formation (Butler 1993, 193). This mobilizing incompleteness is guaranteed, she contends, by the instability in "any and all signifying practices" (Butler 1993, 193). Each of these post-marxists insists that the articulation of identities is not simply a linguistic process but pierces the entire density of a discursive formation. But founding their conceptions of materiality only in symbolic processes means that social struggle, or what they call antagonism, is anchored only in the sign—an effect of *differance*. *Differance* is the term Jacques Derrida invented for the continual subversion of any positive meaning (or identity) by the excessive proliferation of signifiers (sound images in language) that refuse to be attached to a single signified (referent or concept). Laclau and Mouffe, like Butler, contend that the neat oppositions (like heterosexual vs. homosexual or man vs. woman) underlying positive identities are, by virtue of their discursive construction, always open to deconstruction. The materiality of identities, as well as the inevitability of their deconstruction, is presented as a given feature of signification, an effect of the provisional fixing of the sign.

How are we to understand the materiality of this fixing? *Why* are meanings secured in certain ways and not others? *Why* do certain "nodal points" in a culture's logic (heterosexual, for instance) constitute the naturalized axes for identity in some social formations? These questions mark the limits of post-marxism: the unspeakable causal logic elicited by the question "Why?" However, as Althusser's conception of overdetermination suggests, causality need not be reductive, totalizing, or expressive, even as it directs us to consider that the reproduction of the means to meet human needs is never entirely subsumed by cultural or symbolic forms.

Capitalism as a mode of producing the means for survival is tellingly absent in post-marxist cultural materialist analysis. Indeed, it must be if social life is to be seen as constitutively symbolic. This symbolic openness, defined exclusively in relation to political (state) and ideological (normative) processes, is the basis for Butler's enthusiastic endorsement of

Lacan and Alouffe's radical democracy. Butler sets radical democracy against "a causal theory of historical events or social relations" (1993, 192) and insists that the basic ingredient in how we understand the social is its indeterminacy, always leaving open the possible production of new subjects (1993, 193). (One problem with this argument for openness is that it potentially endorses any even exploitative social relations, giving priority to political reform and to democratic ideals that recognize no relation between state formations, constructions of meaning, and *divisions of labor and wealth* has, of course, a long history in liberal reform movements where questions about "rights for what?" get suppressed under the impetus for equal rights *within* capitalism. If the aim for social movement is to secure democratic rights and privileges *within* capitalism, what responsibility does a radical queer politics have to confront the limits of this endeavor?)

I want to approach an answer to this question by testing out Butler's critique of heterosexual practice against the "performative" practice of marriage.¹ Although Butler doesn't treat marriage in much detail as the premier institution by which hegemonic heterosexual identity is policed, it is worthy of some consideration as such. Marriage is, of course, regulated by the state and so performed in and through the reiteration of laws. For Butler, it is these laws that secure the normative dimension of heterosexuality through a continual reworking of already operative conventions that are "grounded in no other legitimating authority than the echo chain of their own reinvocation" (1993, 107). When applied to marriage, Butler's formula of the performativity of the law suggests that marriage functions as a performative ritual just because it has always done so, and that its reach as a social practice is simply normative. But is this all that the matrimonial relation to heteronormativity is about? Marriage secures heteronormativity not only through the naturalizing discourses of heterogender but also through the overdetermined relations between gender and class. (Of course, marriage never absolutely succeeds in securing heterosexual norms. Many legally married men and women engage in same sex practices or fantasies. However, according to Butler's performative argument, the myriad everyday rituals of the heterosexual imperative in the rituals and customs for honoring married life (ranging from the use of the titles "husband" and "wife" and the required identification of one's "spouse" on a host of bureaucratic forms to expectations about coupling and public celebrations of weddings and anniversaries) belie in their reiteration the possibility that in fact marriage secures desire and affection within the heteronormative conjugal bond. Indeed, the very need to reiterate these rituals, like the monitoring of heterosexual coupling by the state and the church, betrays the insecurity of these social bonds that are in everyday practice continually thrown into crisis, fractured, loosened, or subverted.)

Under capitalism the patriarchal heteronorms that the institution of marriage helps secure do not function apart from the relations of production, but the relationship between them and class is not a necessary or really causal one. Marriage has historically helped provide a system for ensuring women's unpaid household labor, but there is not a constant, direct, and predictable relationship between marriage, women's labor in and outside the home, and capitalism. Despite the recruitment of more women into the workforce, the division of labor in the home is not being dramatically affected. In the past two decades as vast numbers of middle class married women have entered the wage labor force, some of the labor wives once provided has been supplied by consumer markets, paid domestics, and child care providers. Although women's paid employment outside the home has dramatically increased, there has been no appreciable increase in men's participation in household labor. The cleaning, marring, and planning necessary for subsistence are still invariably the labor of women, and marriage still remains a prime institution for ensuring this patriarchal heterosexual arrangement.

(Census figures reveal that the number of unmarried couples in the United States is growing steadily. The state typically takes an ambivalent stance on fluctuations in marriage,

at times fostering it, at other times fostering disincentives to marry.⁵ The U.S. federal government passed a "Defense of Marriage Act" in 1996, and is currently considering a program for rewarding states that show a decrease in the numbers of unwed women on their welfare rolls. Yet many of the state's practices in defense of marriage can be shown to be inconsistent once you look more closely at exactly which marriages it defends. The state uses marital status to sanction many direct and indirect financial supports to middle class couples. Among them are lower rates for health benefits and insurance for "partners" and their children, sick leave and parental leave care, reduced rate memberships, property tax exemptions, pension rights, and domestic violence protections (Ingraham 1999, 176). On the other hand, many tax and welfare regulations have made it more economical for the poor not to marry. For those earning minimum wages or living below poverty level, the risk is that even a working husband's earnings may mean that a family exceeds the level to qualify for social welfare programs. The 1997 census data suggest that more and more couples are living together without getting married in order to avoid losing these benefits. As Chrys Ingraham has pointed out in her groundbreaking work on the wedding industrial complex, "marriage primarily benefits groups that are not disproportionately represented among the poor and that are able to maintain goods and property" (Ingraham 1999, 32).

Historically, marriage has protected property by serving as a dense transfer point for land and inheritance, but it has also served property interests by sanctioning the privatization of the production of labor power. In order for a worker to exchange his labor power for wages, he needs to have the capacity for his labor power to be continually nurtured and reproduced. The labor of renewing labor power, that is, the labor of providing directly for subsistence needs, has taken place primarily in the home and has been naturalized as the responsibility of women. It involves preparing food and clean clothing; birthing babies and caring for the young, the sick, and the elderly; educating children; and offering comfort and affection to those who today or tomorrow will go back into the alienating grind of wage work. As the state sanctioned institution for the normative family, marriage has fostered and protected the ideological construction of this gendered division of labor. In the feudal household structure of private patriarchy, heterogender norms help legitimize and secure the father/husband's full authority over the wife, his appropriation of her labor, property, and person.⁶ To be a wife under private patriarchy is to spend blocks of time in the household preparing food, cleaning, caring, counseling, repairing—performing labor that is appropriated directly for others' use. It is just recently, and only in urban industrialized economies, that for most women there have been any alternatives to marriage as a route to subsistence, since the patriarchal household was the only place where women's economic security was protected, and the social as well as economic position of wife was often preferable to that of unmarried sister, daughter, or aunt. Across the globe, the economic security marriage continues to offer women is often an incentive to marry or for staying married. While 11 percent of households in the United States lived in poverty in 1990, 42 percent of displaced homemakers who headed households and 44 percent of single mothers were impoverished.⁷ Single mothers and "displaced homemakers" are four times more likely to live in poverty than the population as a whole, and as wage workers unmarried women are overrepresented in service jobs that offer low pay, few benefits, and part time employment with little or no job security.

As Butler would have it, women's domestic labor would be seen as a series of continual citations of judicial laws, norms, and discourses, among them naturalized heterosexuality, gender asymmetry, marital duty, motherhood, and romantic love. Under capitalism, however, these domestic activities support more than a history of law and discourses. They provide the labor power for wage work, take care of needs that are not met on the job, and nurture a systemic gendered division of labor outside the household whereby women's labor is exploited and women as a group earn considerably lower wages than men. Capitalism does

not structurally require patriarchal gender asymmetry, but historically it has made use of the institution of marriage and the heterosexual norms it regulates to reproduce gendered divisions of labor both in and outside the family. The heteronormative marriage arrangements of private patriarchy secured the bourgeois wife as a domestic worker whose labor, while not directly appropriated by the capitalist in exchange for a wage, was nonetheless essential for reproducing the physical well being, health, and know how of the workforce, and it did so through naturalized and racialized ideals of bourgeois womanhood. Throughout the nineteenth century, the heteronorms of private patriarchy also helped secure property relations through marriage and a racialized gender hierarchy required by the economic arrangements of slavery in global capitalism.

The racialized engendering of marriage had very different consequences for white and black women. White women of the elite class were viewed as the means to consolidate property through marriages of alliance, and by birthing and rearing the inheritors of that property. In the U.S. plantation economy in the nineteenth century, female heirs could inherit—sons received land, but daughters slaves (Carby 24). Clearly the slave woman was in a very different relation to the patriarch/plantation owner, as she gave birth directly to capital itself in the form of slaves (Carby 25). As Hazel Carby explains, "The sexual ideology of the period confirmed the differing material circumstances of these two groups of women and resolved the contradiction between the two reproductive positions by balancing opposing definitions of womanhood and motherhood, each dependent on the other for its existence" (25). In the U.S. Deep South where slaves were predominantly agricultural workers, "the slave woman was first a full time worker for her owner, and only incidentally a wife, mother, and homemaker" (Stamp, quoted in Davis 5). Desexed, required to be breeders, and seen as "masculine" as men in their work, black women were positioned outside white normative feminine gender codes in order to facilitate the ruthless exploitation of their labor. They enjoyed few of the benefits of the ideologies of womanhood and motherhood that organized bourgeois heteronorms (Davis 5). The (hetero)sexuality of black men was also not engendered according to the white bourgeois norm. Men and women worked alongside one another, but unlike working class white men, outside of work black men were ideologically denied the patriarchal positions of family "providers" or family "heads." (Of course, as chattel, slaves were forbidden to marry. The norms that regulated family life among slave communities also differed from those governing whites, as did the cultural value of domestic life. While the organization of heterosexual norms through the institution of marriage generally has served the interests of capital, then, it has done so differently for different groups in various social formations, depending on how they are positioned in relations of production that are ideologically organized and justified through racial and gender differences.)

Historically the accumulation of profit has relied on the cheap though socially necessary labor of reproducing labor power through women's unpaid or very low paid work in the home. However, in the past few decades, changes in the international sexual division of labor, in marriage law, and in the ideologies of gender suggest that there is no necessary relation between a domestic economy organized in terms of the heterosexual marital contract and capital's drive to accumulate wealth for the few. At the same time we acknowledge that patriarchal domestic economies are historically varied and changing, it is important to emphasize that even as more middle class women enter the paid labor force and private patriarchy's prohibitions around sex outside marriage loosen, heterosexualized social arrangements whose division of labor remain the prevailing, pervasively naturalized social arrangements whose coherence is still assumed and legitimized in law and common sense by reference to an abject homosexual other.

Sodomy remains a crime in just under half of the states in the U.S. *Bowers v. Hardwick* brought the state into private sexual spaces in order to reconfirm them as legitimately only

heterosexual. Every year thousands of gay teenagers are cast out of their families and are three times more at risk of committing suicide than their straight identified friends, and lesbian mothers still lose their children in custody battles. Still, there are signs that a transition is under way from the private patriarchy of domestic spaces where heterogender is compulsorily reiterated through the husband's appropriation of the wife's labor and person to a more public patriarchy that may rely less on marriage and heterosexuality. In several cities, local ordinances have been passed that enable hetero- and homosexual couples to register as unmarried domestic partners and to receive some of the rights of married couples.⁴⁰ Several corporations have extended insurance benefits to the partners of lesbians and gay men. Without a doubt these are important and necessary achievements of political emancipation that challenge the heterogendered definition of family and household. But it is not enough for a left sexual politics just to focus its agenda on the attainment of these sorts of civil rights within capitalism.

One of the reasons I think it is not brings me back to why a discussion of heterosexual marriage and the family is relevant to a radical queer sexual politics. Avant garde queer critiques of the arbitrariness of heterosexuality tend to keep invisible how the gendered division of labor has historically secured sexual identities to the family and consumer culture. Domestic partnerships and gay marriages that redefine sexuality only in terms of rights for gays (or straight marriage resisters) leave unquestioned or even indirectly promote capitalism's historical stake in the relations among family, labor, and consumption. The history of gay, lesbian, and queer identities is entangled in changes to the economics of patriarchal households that have accompanied the growth of capitalist consumption and an expanding middle class. Post marxism does not allow us to address this history, nor does it confront the ways the lives of many lesbians and gays have historically been supported by or involved in the labor of domestics, factory, field, and service workers.

I endorse Judith Butler's argument that repudiating heterosexuals contradicts the anti-essentialism of queer politics (1994, 111-19). It attributes a false unity to heterosexuality (and to homosexual, butch, or femme identities as well) and misses the opportunity to work the weakness in heterosexual identity and to refute its logic of mutual exclusion. Repudiating all heterosexuals is a trap because it suggests, as Butler insightfully demonstrates, that on some level identification with that which is being repudiated (heterosexuals or femmes, for instance) has already taken place and been disavowed. But the politics of repudiation is also a trap because it can keep our understanding of the "economy" of sexual identity and of the grounds for resistance to its hegemonic patriarchal formation restricted to cultural politics.

At issue here is [a] question [...] about the limits of radical democracy, limits that are implicit in how we understand the material basis on which hegemonic identities and resistance to them are formulated. If the discourses that construct identities are overdetermined by capitalism's contradictory class processes, the constitutive inability of any identity to secure its referent or to capture what it names—whether that identity be woman, homosexual, heterosexual, or queer—is not the result of an instability inherent to signification, but of the social contradictions on which capitalism is premised and which are condensed in the struggles over naming.⁴¹ Understanding the ground for queer excess so exclusively in terms of the slippages or ambivalences of signification limits the possibility of radical queer intervention to the performative renaming or resignification of norms. Claiming that the materiality of sexual identity is founded on the overdetermined relationship of racialized and gendered discourses of sexuality to class processes does not reduce the history of sexuality to class but rather extends queer politics to queer y the links between sexual identity and exploitation. From this vantage point, a radical sexual politics is more than a refusal or a resignification of the law. It is also a ruthless interruption of the often less visible relations of labor that have made use of dominant as well as counter-hegemonic sexual identities.

It's my pleasure: consuming desires

As postmodernism is fast becoming the cultural common sense of postindustrial capitalism, it brings in its wake porous, gender-flexible, and playful subjects, subjects more adequate to the complexities of multinational commodity exchange where the expressive self and transcendent morality of liberal humanism have become embarrassingly inadequate (Zavarzadeh 1991, 8). The service sectors of postindustrial economies increasingly require a high-tech systems management consciousness that knows that identity, like knowledge, is performative. This consciousness appears in many zones of postmodern culture from the classroom and boardroom to the fashion runway. Undeniably, performative play with cultural codes is a postmodern fashion statement. Challenges to naturalized notions of identity and difference emanating from Madison Avenue and Wall Street share a certain ideological affiliation with avant garde queer theory. In fact, I would go so far as to suggest that both indicate the ways in which under late capitalism liberal ambivalence on homosexuality is in the process of being transcoded from the moral and determinate terms of tolerance and disgust to the more post-modern, indeterminate forms of play and pleasure that are helping to consolidate a hegemonic postmodern culture. Postmodern incorporations of a queer "gender fuck" into commodity culture replace the binary logic of liberal moralism's vacillation with the logic of the supplement. Here identities are fluid, open to resignification and re-contextualization. The fixed polarities of liberal morality dissolve into engenderings of pleasure full erotic indeterminacy. "It is precisely the pleasure produced by the instability of these categories which sustains the various erotic practices that make me a candidate for the category [lesbian] to begin with," announces Judith Butler (1991, 14). For many avant garde queer theorists, these new cultural and sexual arrangements "occasioned by the movements and transmutations of pleasure in the social field" are not just the occasion for new forms of identity; they also serve as the ground for political organization (Tuss 1991, 5).

Since the late nineteenth century the growth of consumer culture has depended on the formation and continual retooling of a desiring subject, a subject who honors pleasures and may even see them as forces that drive one's existence or as pressing needs. Alexandra Kollontai recognized this effect of capitalism at the turn of the century when she treated the family under capitalism as a legal arrangement concerned only with consumption (Holt 225). The increasing separation of sexuality from class analysis is one component of the cultural production of this desiring subject in the late nineteenth century, as it has helped guarantee that desire take on a life of its own. The important point here is not to dismiss desire and pleasure as bourgeois inventions irrelevant to materialist analysis. Quite the contrary; if we are to understand the historical and material components of sexual identities, we also need to know the social forces out of which the desiring subject and the subject of pleasure are formed.

As it has come to be understood in Western culture, desire has had an uneasy relationship to sexual identity, serving as a labile medium for affective and sensory needs. It is a structure for consciousness that binds sexual subject to sexual object and also perversely disrupts any neatly prescribed links between them. Most theoretical attention to the desiring subject has been developed from a psychologizing/psychoanalytic frame that has been largely responsible for an individualized understanding of desire as a psychic process whose materiality is rooted in the drives and conveyed through the symbolic order. Another strand of queer theory emerges out of postmodern versions of this theoretical frame and foregrounds the disruptive face of desire for interrupting any coherent, generative agency. The effect on sexual identity is that any prescribed relation between sexual subject and sexual object is undone. One sticking point in this formulation of queer identity is how to understand the materiality of this desire.

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1983) has been embraced by many queer theorists as a monumental explanation of the materiality of desire under capitalism. Even more dramatically than Marcuse and Reich, however, Deleuze and Guattari locate desire outside of history. The libidinal energy that for Marcuse and Reich constituted a life force that is ultimately shaped by history (albeit a too mythic history) becomes for Deleuze and Guattari the very matter of life—manifest in pervasive, natural, human desiring machines. The premise of their argument in *Anti-Oedipus* is that desire in the form of energy that flows between organ-machines—or what they call “desiring production”—is the starting point of social life. No longer understood in terms of lack, desire or libido is the primary connective “labor” of desiring production. Indeed, desiring production is social production. Opposed to psychoanalytic theory and practice for the ways it tames or “territorializes” desire by anchoring it in the Oedipus complex, Deleuze and Guattari dis-organize subjectivity, unchain it from socially restrictive forces, and recode it around concepts of plurality, multiplicity, decenteredness. In their schema, desire becomes the basis of social production. Instead of being the product of history, desire is historically invariant matter. The material of desire is the primordial matter of energy flows or of things connected by energy flows—“menstrual flow, amniotic fluid spilling out of the sac; flowing hair; a flow of spittle, a flow of sperm, shit or urine” (5).

Such a premise glorifies desire and makes it impossible to treat the ways its content and the forms the desiring subject has taken change from one historical formation to another and in different phases of capitalism. The desiring subject put forward in *Anti-Oedipus* has been embraced by quite a few queer theorists precisely because this is a subject that has no fixed identity.¹¹ [. . .] For Deleuze and Guattari, the distinctions between hetero- and homosexual identities are disjunctions forced upon subjects by the Oedipus complex: “Oedipus informs us: if you don’t follow the lines of differentiation daddy-mommy-me, you will fall into the black night of the undifferentiated” (78). The Oedipus complex is the representative of a symbolic order that represses desiring production in that it requires exclusive disjunctions (between masculine and feminine terms of identification and desire). Deleuze and Guattari acknowledge that capitalism liberates the flows of desire from the clutches of an oedipalizing culture, but it does so under social conditions that continually reterritorialize the desires it unleashes in order to accrue surplus value. As they see it, desiring production is revolutionary and capable of demolishing social form. But unfortunately and predictably, the alternative it aims for is not social justice but the “body without organs”—the undifferentiated subject of self-enjoyment.

Clearly in Deleuze and Guattari’s post-marxist theories we see an intensified emphasis on desire as the motor of history and an elevation of the desiring subject as history’s agent. Despite their references to capitalism, however, here the separation of sexuality from historical and material production has become complete. Desire and the desiring subject have assumed the center stage of history, and the structures of exploitation on which capitalist production depends have completely disappeared. Indeed, production has become consumption.

To the extent that they make desire the bedrock of history, Deleuze and Guattari’s desiring production shares an affiliation with Foucault’s now infamous stance on bodies and pleasures. Foucault argues that power and pleasure in a (post)modern disciplinary regime are entangled in a perpetual relay system. Discourses have traced around bodies and sexes “perpetual spirals of power and pleasure” (Foucault 1978, 45). In the form of an array of discursive mechanisms in the nineteenth-century industrialized West, power “took charge of sexuality, set about contacting bodies, caressing them with its eyes, intensifying areas, electrifying surfaces, dramatizing troubled moments. It wrapped the sexual body in its embrace” (1978, 44). But he also contends that the rallying point for resistance to this web of power-pleasure relations is “bodies and pleasures” (1978, 157). In this much quoted assertion,

Trounau puts forward bodies and pleasures as the ground for resistance to power and in a manner that tends to set them outside their discursive construction and beyond history, much like Deleuze and Guattari's desire.

The turn to pleasure and desire as categories of experience outside culture, ideology and prior to all social production has been one of the most significant features of culture study in the late eighties (Turner 1990, 218), and Trounau's influence in this trend has been considerable. The effort to reclaim the core of identity in the form of an ahistorical pleasure (as *sauz-sance*, ritual, *chora*, or ambivalent consumer satisfaction) has been a crucial aspect of the formation of a new postmodern subject and needs to be understood in terms of the political and economic arrangements of an emerging neoliberal world order (post-cold war, post-colonial) and its effects on the historical pertinences that shape subjectivities. Recognizing that pleasure does not precede or exceed the social but is itself constituted through the often contradictory economic, political, and ideological production of social life means that its hegemonic articulation is always precarious. Like work, pleasure cannot be or mean as a basis for political affirmation outside its historical organization. But, in fact, this is often how pleasure is understood in the cultural politics of the postmodern left.

For example, in the anthology *Formations of Pleasure*, British cultural critic Colin Meyer argues that the contradictory play of ideology can no longer "be reduced to questions of meaning and truth. You can ask whether people 'believe' what they hear on the News or on *Nationwide*, but it's by no means clear what people would 'believe' in light of entertainment or comedy. (Once enjoyment and pleasure are reintroduced—those jokes in the game—we have to change the rules and go beyond the message" (85). Picking up on his comment, Tania Modleski argues that ideology is effective because it bestows pleasure on its subjects rather than simply conveying messages, "and so it cannot be combated only at the level of meaning" (Modleski 1991, 57). For this reason, she continues, "a theory and practice of the performative are crucial to a politically engaged criticism" (Modleski 1991, 57). Although her comment implies a separation between pleasures and meaning making that I think never quite occurs, she recognizes that pleasure is an important sensuous affective dimension of human life that ideology taps into.

Neither the motor of production, nor a pre-discursive matter or energy, the human capacity for sensation and affect is the basis for pleasure and it is always historically organized. It is powerfully solicited in the organization of sexual identities as well as in many other areas of culture and deployed in broad ranging ideologies (of romance, sexuality, religion, patri-otism, etc.) and practices (consumption, shaming, entertainment, education, social movement, etc.) that permeate the fabric of individual lives and collectivities. In other words, sensations (including "pleasurable" sensations) never speak for themselves but are always made sense of by the ways of knowing that circulate within a particular social organization or community; pleasures are never entirely outside the "structures of meaning making." When they are recruited by ideology, sensations and pleasures can be powerful ways to naturalize the historical social relations identities rely on. In part for this reason, they are also especially important areas of social life for a politically engaged criticism. However, to conceptualize the interface between sensation affect and meaning making as performative in the terms set forth by cultural materialists risks forfeiting the crucial connection between local and global social structures that the concept of ideology entails. In other words, associated as it is with the cultural materialist notion of discursive play and of culture as the shifting basis for social life, performativity cannot make visible the varied, complex, and uneven historical relation-ship between pleasure and profit.

Having embraced the potential of sexual pleasure, avant-garde queer theory does indeed "change the rules" by founding its politics on a notion of performance that often not only implies a division between the conceptual and the performative but dispenses interrogation

and critical analysis. Diana Fuss's assertion that the essays in the anthology *Inside/Out* "mark an important shift away from an interrogative mode and towards a performative mode" in queer theory signals just this sort of displacement of critical concepts (1991, 7).

A materialist approach to sexual identity that reclaims the attention to social totalities that constitutes the radical tradition of the Gay Left – that is, marxism's critique of capitalism and feminism's critique of patriarchy – can resist the pressure to separate sexuality off from capitalism and class relations off from sexuality and desire. It may even read this fragmentation as an ideological symptom. Such an approach to sexuality does not shrink from celebrating the human capacity for sensual pleasure even as it dares to think through—and change – the material relations among identities, norms, state power, and divisions of labor. Of course, by insisting that the more fluid boundaries of postmodern culture have not made patriarchy or capitalism any less viable, the radical sexual politics I am referring to is out of line with the post marxist mainstream. You might even consider it excessively queer. That excessiveness may well be precisely its challenge and its strength.

Notes

- 1 See, for example, Michael Warner's report on queer theory in the *Voice Literary Supplement* (1992), which highlights the attention Butler's work was getting in the early nineties as well as the controversy it initially provoked. Routledge is now preparing the tenth anniversary issue of *Gender Trouble* and anticipates record sales.
- 2 For more detailed critical readings of Laclau and Mouffe see Geras (1987); Hennessy (1993); Larsen (1990).
- 3 Eve Sedgwick's essay on queer performativity (1993) is another notable example of an argument for queer identity that sets the securing of queer identities through the performative "Shame on you!" against the performative "I do" of marriage. Because she sees both practices merely as individuating speech acts, however, Sedgwick never addresses the material relationships between institutionalized heterogender and the much more diffuse material discourses of shame, between discursive identity performances and other social relations.
- 4 Several studies support this assertion. One indicates that in recent history women who enter the paid labor force increased their total work time by 14 to 25 hours; another reveals that an overriding majority of working mothers continue to prepare dinner and clean up afterwards alone. For more detailed citations see Fraad, Resnick, and Wolff (1994, 49–50).
- 5 Associated Press. "More Americans Living out of Wedlock." *Albany Times Union*, 27 July 1998, A1.
- 6 The concept of the feudal patriarchal domestic economy is developed in Fraad, Resnick, and Wolff. The distinction between private and public patriarchy has been theorized by Ann Ferguson (1989) and also by Walby (1990).
- 7 According to the *New York Times* (20 February 1994), a study by Women Work.
- 8 See Spillers (1987) on some of the implications of this history for representations of family and incest in African American culture.
- 9 Some of these include visitation rights at hospitals and jails, unpaid leaves for a new child, or rights to the same status as married couples in qualifying for apartments or insurance benefits.
- 10 Butler alludes to this sort of economy when she addresses the ways the constitutive instability of "woman" is the effect of a dense intersection of paternal social relations (1993, 218). But her normative materiality omits the gendered division of labor from these social relations.
- 11 Guy Hocquenghem's *Homosexual Desire* extends Deleuze and Guattari's critique of the oedipal family to develop a more specific theory of homosexual oppression as part of a wider system of exploitation; in line with their thinking, he proposes "fusions of desire" as the basis for social revolution.

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