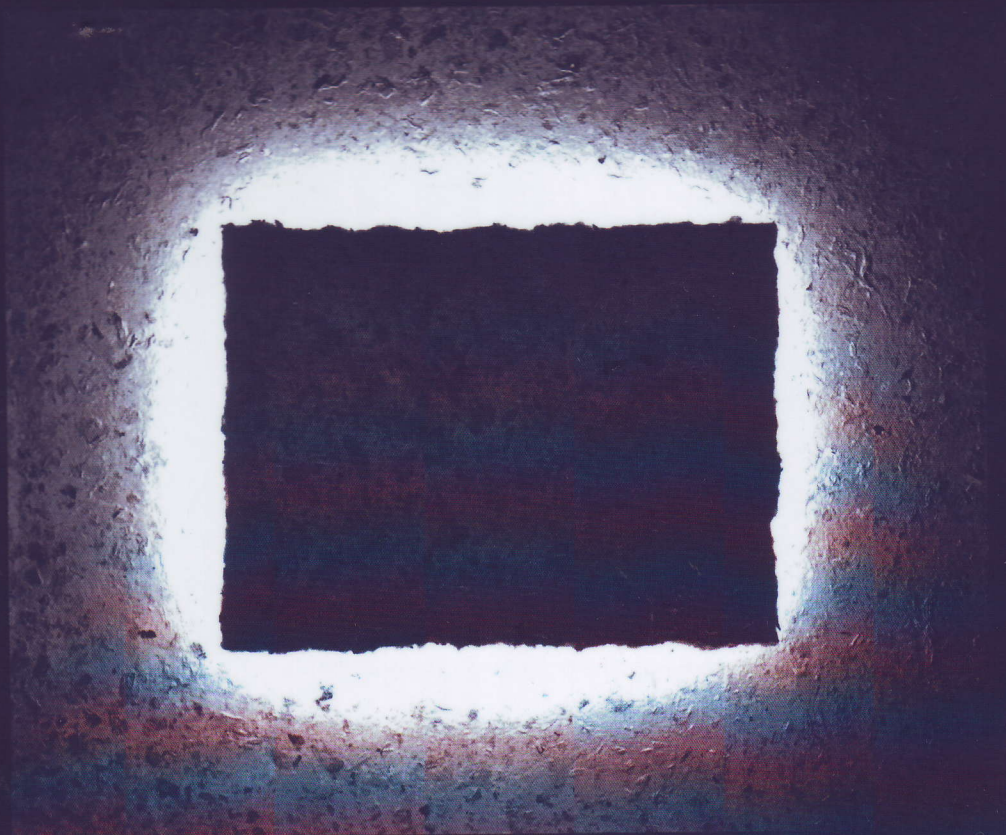


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GENDER, DIVERSITY, AND DIFFERENCE

VOLUME 25



Edited by John R. Rowan

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Preface

The North American Society for Social Philosophy (NASSP) brings together philosophers, legal theorists, political scientists, and social scientists to discuss important contemporary social issues. This is accomplished through its international conferences, its contributions to the programs of other learned societies, and its publication program, including *The Journal of Social Philosophy* and the *Social Philosophy Today* series. All of the essays in this volume, number 25 of *Social Philosophy Today*, were selected by peer referees from among the best papers presented at the Twenty-fifth International Social Philosophy Conference, held in July, 2008, at the University of Portland.

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John Rowan, Purdue University Calumet

The Im-Possibility of a Feminist Subject

CLAUDIA LEEB

Abstract: It is widely acknowledged that the notion of a stable feminist subject, which refers to the category "woman" as a shared identity for *all* women, has led to the exclusion of all those women who do not fit neatly into its boundaries. Against the giving up of the subject or the invoking of the feminist subject as a pragmatic strategy, as suggested by Judith Butler, this paper suggests that we need a feminist subject-in-outline for an emancipatory feminist politics. Such a subject emerges in what Jacques Lacan has termed the moment of the real, the remainder or the gap in the total signifier "woman." It is in this moment where all those women who have been rendered invisible and without a proper place in the feminist community can become subjects and transform its boundaries.

1. Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that the notion of a stable feminist subject, which refers to the category "woman" as a shared identity for *all* women, leads to the exclusion of all those women who do not fit neatly into its boundaries, such as women of color, transsexuals and queer women.¹ Given the politics of exclusion that the notion of a feminist subject-in-outline for an emancipatory feminist politics? The American feminist philosopher Judith Butler suggests that we should do away with the feminist subject, and instead, we "will affirm identities that are not subject to the purpose at hand."² Pragmatic feminist politics, in which we relinquish and relinquish a specific purpose, does not lead to an emancipatory politics, in which we institute or relinquish a specific purpose, does not lead to an emancipatory politics is in danger of affirming subject for an emancipatory politics. The concept of the real, coined by philosopher Jacques Lacan, allows such a rethinking. "woman," interrupts the remainder in the total signifier "woman," rendered invisible and without a proper place in the

unity of the feminist subject to step forward and rearticulate the meaning of the signifier differently.

The real provides, then, a philosophical grounding for a feminist politics, which challenges the notion of a unified subject of feminism without giving up on such a subject or invoking her merely as a pragmatic strategy. Although the real is always there to interrupt any totality, it is crucial for an emancipatory feminist politics to incorporate this concept in its theory and practice to articulate what I call a feminist subject-in-outline. Only a feminist subject-in-outline is in a position to invite those into the project of feminism who, in the name of unity, had to remain outside. Only a feminist subject-in-outline can challenge in its own community what it aims at challenging in the larger society: a politics of exclusion.

At the core of Butler's philosophical project is a rethinking of the notion of the subject. However, her rethinking is fraught with difficulties, as she rejects Lacan's notion of the real and similar theoretical concepts, such as the notion of the non-identical in Adorno. Although Butler introduces Freud into her theory of the subject, especially in her later works, she deals with Lacan only marginally, and then in a rather critical way and based upon secondary literature.³ However, there are central parallels between Butler's and Lacan's theories of the subject, which have so far not been elaborated in the secondary literature on Butler or Lacan.⁴ Moreover, Lacan's notion of the real allows us to address the difficulties in Butler's own thinking about the feminist subject and its possibility of resisting the status quo.⁵

The second section of this paper, "Imaginary Identifications and Resistance," shows the parallels and differences between Butler's and Lacan's theory of the subject. The third section, "Symbolic Rearticulations of the Law," explains that Butler situates resistance in the moment of reiteration of the signifier. In contrast, Lacan situates resistance in the gaps of the signifier itself. The fourth section, "Critical De-Subjectivation as a Site of Resistance?" evinces that Butler's rejection of the real leads to her problematic solution of de-subjectivation as a site of resistance. The final section, "The Im-Possibility of a Feminist Subject," argues for a feminist subject-in-outline to effect change and to counter a politics of exclusion.

II. Imaginary Identifications and Resistance

At the core of Butler's theory of the subject, as she elaborated it in *The Psychic Life of Power*, is what she calls "the double aspect of subjection,"⁶ which implies both the moment of subordination to power and the process of becoming a subject. "If, following Foucault," Butler argues, "we understand power as *forming* the subject as well, as providing the very condition of its existence . . . then power is not simply what we oppose but also, in a strong sense, depend on for our existence."⁷ Butler's "double aspect of subjection" comes close to what Lacan calls the "double function of the signifier" at the root of the subject.

The signifier or the category, which is part of what Lacan calls the symbolic domain, "functions as a signifier only to reduce the subject in question to no more than a signifier, to petrify the subject in the same movement in which it calls the subject to function, to speak, as subject."⁸ The signifier wields a power that not only subjects or petrifies the subject; it, at the same time, allows the subject to emerge as subject. Butler's assertion that the Lacanian symbolic domain does not address the productive aspect of power is then misguided.⁹

Although we find in Lacan's theory of the subject a parlance about power not as central as in Butler (and Foucault), the double function of the signifier implies power's productive side as it both petrifies *and* forms subjects. Like Butler, Lacan argues that the signifier "woman" petrifies women. The androcentric character of the symbolic domain is for him unacceptable, because "women are entirely subjected to it no less than the men."¹⁰ However, in the same movement as this signifier petrifies, it calls individuals to function as women, to emerge as female subjects, which refers to power's productive side.

Moreover, both authors argue that the subject is a result of language. In Lacan's thought, the subject becomes a subject through the signifier in the symbolic domain, which is the domain of language. Similar to Lacan, Butler argues that the subject is "a linguistic category . . . Individuals come to occupy the site of the subject."¹¹ However, there are crucial differences in their assertions how individuals come to occupy the side of the subject. Whereas for Butler, the subject emerges at the moment when it identifies with the signifier, it is for Lacan precisely at the moment when this *identification fails*, where what I call the subject-in-outline emerges.

Butler obtains the notion of identification from her reading of Lacan. "Identification," she argues, "is the assimilating passion by which an ego first emerges."¹² Butler uses the notions of subject and ego interchangeably. In contrast, Lacan distinguishes between the subject and the ego. Whereas the ego is the result of identification with the other with a small *o* (*autre*, symbolized as *a*) in the imaginary domain, the Lacanian subject emerges in the gaps of the big Other (*Autre*, symbolized as *A*), the symbolic domain. The ego is the result of the individual's repeated identifications with an idealized "whole" image of an other, which is both the subject's own image in the mirror and the image of a fellow human being.

Since the ego is the result of a foreign idealized whole image, Lacan asserts that any unity achieved on the imaginary plane is precarious and escapes the ego at every moment.¹³ Butler draws on this aspect of Lacan's thought in her thinking about resistance. For her the ego as the "permanently unstable site"¹⁴ bears the possibility of resistance,¹⁵ because it has to repeatedly identify with the other for its coherence. In the moment of repetition, or iteration, lies for Butler the possibility of resistance—if Lacan, according to her, would not radically separate the imaginary from the symbolic.

Foucault remains then for Butler the one who allows us best to think about resistance: "Where Lacan restricts the notion of social power to the symbolic domain

and delegates resistance to the imaginary," she asserts, "Foucault recasts the symbolic as relations of power and understands resistance as an effect of power."¹⁵ However, Lacan does not make a sharp distinction between the imaginary and the symbolic. He argues that "one doesn't distinguish easily" between these dimensions, and this is why explaining these concepts is a difficult task.¹⁶

Moreover, and most importantly, Lacan is far from delegating resistance to the imaginary. On the contrary, the ego's fundamental instability renders the imaginary as the site where the status quo is reinforced instead of resisted. Since the ego's existence is constantly threatened, the ego anxiously aims to shore up its fragile unity through repeated identifications with (or recognition of) the ideal other. These identifications lead to a rigid ego that violently destroys everything that is different from the ideal whole it defends and identifies with.

The ego's repeated identification with the other, or in Butler's parlance, the "compulsion to repeat," does not lead to a subversion of the law. Rather, reiteration leads to the reinforcement of the power of the law.¹⁷ Whenever we find ourselves in the imaginary domain, any repetition fails to become the place of subversion. The moment of repetition becomes here the untruth of the ego that reinforces, rather than subverts the status quo. Feminist applications of Judith Butler's notion of repeated identifications (or performance) of the signifier are then in danger to perpetuate rather than subvert the status quo.

It is *not* so much the practice of repetition that opens up the gaps and fissures in the law or the signifier. Rather, for Lacan, it is the gaps in the signifier itself which allow the subject to step forward and contest the symbolic order's power. It is then not, as Butler suggests, that "perverse reiterations produce unconventional formulations of universality that expose the limited and exclusionary features of the former."¹⁸ Rather, Lacan shows us that it is the limited and exclusionary features in any universality itself that allow subjects-in-outline, who are in a position to subvert the law, to emerge.

Although there are central parallels between Lacan's and Butler's theory of the subject, insofar as both underline the double aspect of subjection through language, Butler does not, like Lacan, make a distinction between the ego and the subject, which leads to her problematic conclusion that the ego's instability can be the basis for resistance. Lacan's objection to Butler's suggestion of the ego as a site of resistance marks his difference to Butler and implies a critical stance towards postmodernism, which runs as follows: wherever we have fundamental instability, there is no possibility for resistance.

III. Symbolic Rearticulations of the Law

For Lacan, resistance is situated in that which marks the symbolic domain's limit: the domain of the real. The real refers to the cracks and the gaps in the power

structure of the symbolic domain. The moment of the real tells us that there is "a fault, a hole" in the big Other, in the symbolic order and its signifiers.¹⁹ Although the signifier brings the subject into being, it fails to fully determine the subject, because of the signifier's own non-wholeness. It is the gap in the signifier, the moment beyond identification, which allows the subject-in-outline to emerge and contest the authority of the signifier and the symbolic domain.

As an example, men have to subject themselves to the dominant signifier "man" to become male subjects. Since the dominant signifier "man" implies traits such as "violence and authority," it renders all those men who are pacifist and non-authoritarian as non-subjects and without a proper place in the symbolic domain. However, it is in the gaps of the signifier where those men can emerge as subjects and contest the dominant signifier "man." Similar to Lacan, Butler argues that while the "term [or signifier] cannot offer ultimate recognition, it may be that the affirmation of that slippage, that failure of identification, is itself the point of departure for a more democratizing affirmation of internal difference."²⁰

Although that "slippage" refers to something like the Lacanian real, she rejects this aspect of Lacan's thought, because in her reading, the real (like the imaginary) is located outside the symbolic domain and as such is not in a position to rearticulate its law.²¹ However, the moment of the real is *not*, as Butler argues, "outside all argumentation."²² Although it is the element in the symbolic that resists absolute symbolization, it is *immanent* in the signifier and the symbolic order itself. As the mark of the symbolic order's limit, it is the site where contesting the symbolic order becomes possible. Lacan, much like Butler, situates resistance not outside but *within* the symbolic domain. The Lacanian symbolic order does not then, as Butler suggests, "survive every and any contestation of its authority."²³

The symbolic does *not* survive every contestation, because the real opens up the space for the subject-in-outline to emerge and contest the symbolic order. The real as the mark of the symbolic order's limit is the site where contesting the symbolic order becomes possible.²⁴ Moreover, the real is not, as Butler claims, something we cannot and should not touch. Although it points at that which remains beyond symbolization, Lacan makes clear that this does not mean that we should leave the real untouched. On the contrary, he argues that we need to symbolize the real even though we can never completely grasp it.²⁵

Butler's rejection of the real leads to difficulties in her theory of the subject, evident in what she calls the "vicious circle" of the double aspect of subjection, where the becoming of the subject is *always* bound up with subordination. Vicki Kirby is right that Butler reintroduces power in *The Psychic Life of Power* as a repressive force, which Foucault rejected.²⁶ However, this move in Butler's thought is not so much, as Kirby suggests, a result of Butler's turning away from Foucault to Lacan in this book. Rather, it is the result of Butler's *not enough* turning away from Foucault and her rejection of one of the more promising aspects of Lacan's thought—the real.

Lacan goes beyond Foucault, because the real allows us to think about a subject-in-outline, which is never completely determined by language. Butler's holding on to Foucault leads to a "sorry bind" in her theory of the subject. "If the terms by which we gain social recognition for ourselves are those by which we are regulated *and* gain social existence," she argues, "then to affirm one's existence is to capitulate to one's subordination—a sorry bind."²⁷ For Butler then, only if we identify with or subordinate ourselves to an alienating Other, are we in a position to resist power.²⁸ In contrast to Butler, for Lacan, the becoming of the subject or resistance is not necessarily bound up with subordination. Subjectivation only leads to subordination if we disregard the fractures within the power that the signifier wields over the subject.

It is in the moment of the real where we are not offered a signifier to identify with—one that affirms our already carved out place in the symbolic domain, where the possibility emerges of the creation of new identities and signifiers that challenge the dominant ones.²⁹ Butler's rejection of the real makes her assume a certain unity of the law and the signifier itself that can only be contested through the practice of repetition.³⁰ With that she is unable to consider the possibility that the rearticulation of the signifier is already at work *within* the signifier itself. Since the signifier itself is always non-whole, the subject remains what Lacan calls "a subject-with-holes (*subject troué*)."³¹

If the subject aims at wholeness and dismisses the moment of the real, then it becomes a site of subordination. Subordination is then linked with the ego, but not the subject. Imaginary identification implies what Butler calls an *exploitable desire*, which leads to a scenario where subjects exist in subordination rather than not exist at all.³² However, this *desire* is not, as Butler explains, a desire for existence as such. Rather, it is the desire for wholeness and the anxiety that such wholeness is impossible, which the moment of confrontation with the fundamental non-wholeness of the signifier incites.³³ For the subject to be in a position to rearticulate the law of the symbolic domain, it needs to deal with such desires and anxieties and acknowledge the holes in the signifiers and one's own subjectivity. Only such a dealing can lead to a symbolic order, where subjection is not bound up with subordination.

IV. Critical De-Subjectivation as a Site of Resistance?

Butler aims to provide us with a theory of the subject that does not assume a "subject-position" as the moment of politics or one that dismisses the subject altogether, which "underestimates the linguistic requirements for entering sociality at all."³⁴ However, in *The Psychic Life of Power*, she comes exactly to that latter conclusion, namely that we need to do away with the subject, in order to escape the lure of identity. Here she argues that resistance to the law "demands the willingness not

to be—a critical desubjectivation—in order to expose the law as less powerful than it seems."³⁵ The notion of "desubjectivation," which remains unclear in Butler's thought and which I read as the getting rid of the subject altogether, does not imply a critical force to contest the power of the law.

Desubjectivation leads to nothing else but an ego that is the least capable to resist the power of the law. We do not need desubjectivation but perhaps something like de-egoisation for resistance to occur. In order to resist the lure of identity, we need to proceed via a subject. However, such a subject needs to emerge at the moment beyond identification, in the gaps of the power structure itself. Moreover, such a subject needs to remain an *outline* and with that accept that she can never become whole. Only a subject-in-outline is capable to resist power structures. Without a subject, or a subject that "critically desubjectivizes" itself, resistance is not possible.

Butler comes to that problematic conclusion of de-subjectivation because she does not accept the theoretical notion of the real or similar theoretical accounts, such as Adorno's notion of the non-identical, which Carrie Hull elaborates in detail in her discussion of Butler with Adorno.³⁶ Since for Butler there is no hole in the symbolic order and its signifiers, the moment of subjection can *only* appear as subordination, which we can only escape through "critical" de-subjectivation. However, in order to contest the law it is crucial to look at the cracks and the gaps in its power structure. Lacan tries to point at these cracks with the moment of the real, where the subject-in-outline, who is in a position to contest the authority of the law, emerges.

Butler's suggestion of de-subjectivation is the result of her not distinguishing between the ego and the subject. Since for her the subject *is* the ego, which is the result of imaginary identification, it is not surprising that the only way out for Butler is to de-subjectivize. Since the ego, as Lacan shows us, is always bound up with subordination, the only apparent way to escape subordination is to get rid of the subject altogether. However, de-subjectivation, however critical it might be, does not lead to a political practice of transformation. To contest the authority of the law we need a subject; however, such a subject does not emerge by subjecting itself to or identifying itself with the dominant signifier. Rather, it emerges precisely at the moment of the gap in the dominant signifier.

However, any rearticulation of the dominant signifier needs, like the subject herself, to remain an *outline* to counter the violence characteristic of imaginary identification. If a rearticulation of the signifier fails to accept the moment of non-wholeness and strives towards totality, then it leads to nothing else but a subordination for those future individuals who remain invisible or without a place in the symbolic order, because they do not fit into its boundaries. If we aim to gloss over the hole in the whole signifier, we fail to fully determine the signifier, because the real is always there as a critical force to interrupt any totality. However, a political

practice of transformation needs to make an effort to incorporate that moment of the real in its reformulations.

Moreover, Lacan makes the claim that it is in the unconscious, which emerges as a result of double function of the signifier, where the moment of resistance to the symbolic lies: "There [in this double movement of the signifier], strictly speaking," argues Lacan "is the temporal pulsation in which is established that which is the characteristic of the departure of the unconscious as such—the closing."³⁷ At the moment when the ego emerges, the unconscious makes its appearance as that which could not be made present in the subject, because the signifier *forecloses* it. For Lacan the subject is bound up with the unconscious, as it is in the moment of the opening of the signifier where both the subject-in-outline and the unconscious emerges.³⁸

For Lacan, it is in the *unconscious* discourse between the subject and the big Other, where something like *full speech*, that can rearticulate the dominant terms of productive power, becomes possible. Like Lacan, Butler links the emergence of the unconscious to the double aspect of subjection: "If the effect of autonomy is conditioned by subordination and that founding subordination, or dependency is rigorously repressed," she argues "the subject emerges in tandem with the unconscious."³⁹ However, Butler is hesitant to acknowledge the liberating potential of the return of what Lacan calls full speech. For her, the unconscious, although it points at the "unsocialized remainder" in the subject, remains unable to rearticulate the symbolic law, because (like the real and the imaginary) it is again outside the symbolic domain.

However, for Lacan the unconscious is not something that we find in opposition to or outside of the symbolic domain. Rather, it is a critical force *within* the symbolic domain. Lacan underlines this with the statement that the unconscious is the discourse of the big Other, the symbolic domain. It is in this unconscious discourse with the Other, where the "speaking out one's own speech, which is quite the opposite of saying *yes*, *yes* to the speech of one's neighbor,"⁴⁰ becomes possible. In full speech, the subject reveals the truth about herself, which she aims to hide in the discourse with the other, which contains nothing else but *empty speech*. Whenever full speech, and thus the opening of the unconscious, becomes possible, the ego enters and interrupts its passage. However, full speech "insists" to return until it has said its final word.⁴¹

Both authors, Butler and Lacan, locate resistance to power within the symbolic domain. Whereas for Butler resistance is situated as a result of the subjects' reiteration of the signifiers, Lacan situates resistance in the non-wholeness and the gaps of the signifier itself. It is in the gaps of the power structure where the (unconscious) subject-in-outline, who is in a position to contest the authority of the law, emerges. Butler's rejection of the notion of the real leads to the problematic assumption of a certain unity of power, which can only be challenged through the practice of repetition and the notion of desubjectivation as a critical practice. However, an ego,

which is bound up with imaginary identification, does not lead to resistance. Only a subject-in-outline that emerges beyond identification, the gaps of the signifier, can lead to a transformative politics.

V. The Im-Possibility of a Feminist Subject

"Women," argues Butler in *Gender Trouble*, "even in the plural, has become a troublesome term, a site of contest, a cause of anxiety."⁴² The theory of the subject as put forward by Lacan explains why the signifier woman *could* become a site of contestation and why anxiety is involved here. The moment of the real, which is the hole in any total signifier, interrupted its totality and assisted all those women, such as women of color, poor, immigrant and queer women to step forward and rearticulate its meaning. However, the contestation of the signifier "woman" was not a result of, as Butler would argue, excluded women's repeated performance, and with that recognition, of the signifier.

Such a notion of resistance would imply that the signifier had some sort of wholeness to begin with. There was no original unity, which has been challenged through the practice of repetition. Rather, it is in the hole in the unity, which was there from the beginning that allowed these excluded women to step forward and rearticulate the signifier "woman" *differently*. It is then not, as Butler would argue, by virtue of this reiteration that gaps and fissures are opened up as the constitutive instabilities,⁴³ where the possibility of resistance is located. Rather, it is in the instability of the signifier itself, which created the space for its progressive reification.

Moreover, the signifier "woman" has become a site of anxiety, because feminism, although it desired to gloss over the holes in the signifier, was confronted with the impossibility of doing so. Such anxiety led to a feminist politics of the ego, which succumbed to the lure of identity to shore up its fragile ego. With that it excluded all those women who departed from the ideal whole it defended. Such feminist politics, despite its attempt to create a better world for *all* women, has often merely succeeded in creating a world that has only become (somewhat) more hospitable for white, affluent women and not for the rest of their "sisters." Such a politics contributed to the affirmation of the status quo, rather than resistance to it.

Given the fact that the notion of a feminist subject led to a politics of exclusions, should and can we do away with the feminist subject for an emancipatory feminist politics? The feminist politics I propose differs from Butler's feminist politics, as it does *not* draw on the notion of "woman" or the feminist subject as some sort of pragmatic strategy. If there is no subject or one that is merely invoked pragmatically, then we are confronted with a politics of the ego or violent exclusions. A feminist politics as suggested in this paper evinces the *necessity* of a subject-in-outline, to get out of (and not fall back into) the imaginary delusion of false wholes.

Perhaps the weakness of the current feminist movement, which largely fails to appeal to and is alienated from younger women, is a result of a politics of the ego, as expressed in narrow conceptions of what being a "feminist" means. For the feminist movement to invite younger women in and strengthen itself, it is crucial to seek a politics beyond identification. Only a feminist politics of a subject-in-outline in a position to challenge the notion of a unified subject of feminism, without giving up on such a subject or invoking her merely as a pragmatic strategy. It is only in the cracks within the symbolic domain where the subject-in-outline, who in a position to contest the status quo, emerges.

If there is no subject or one that is merely invoked pragmatically, then we are confronted with a politics of the ego, which, in its compulsion to achieve identity, enforces the status quo. If feminist politics is situated in the imaginary domain, then its attempts of rearticulating the signifier differently lead to nothing else but violent reinscription of the signifier. A feminist politics of the ego becomes an oppressive force, because it is not in a position to include those who differ from the ideal whole it defends into its projects. The feminist politics as I propose it here comes close to Butler's own feminist politics, insofar as it "acknowledges its contradictions and takes action with those contradictions intact."⁴⁴

However, it differs from Butler's feminist politics, as it does *not* draw on the notion of "woman" or the feminist subject as some sort of pragmatic strategy to achieve change. I disagree then with Butler's notion of constantly "shifting identifications," as the basis for feminist politics.⁴⁵ This notion of a permanent instability of the feminist subject does not imply a potential for contesting the symbolic order. Lacan shows us, permanent instability leads to anxiety, which leads to a desire for wholeness that generates exclusions. A feminist politics of the ego is in danger of excluding all those that depart from the whole image of "the feminist" it desires to shore up its fragility.

A feminist politics needs then to function on the level of the symbolic and the subject, as it is here where the feminist subject obtains a certain stability, which enables it to resist power structures. However, for the feminist subject to *not* become total and exclusionary, it needs to acknowledge its inherent non-completion or its remaining an outline. It needs then to deal with desires and fears that the moment the real incites.⁴⁶ The only way for feminist political theorizing to contribute to an emancipatory politics is in the symbolic domain, with the assistance of a feminist subject-in-outline.

This means that feminist politics approaches its subject—women—from different angles of contextual perspectives, without ever fully understanding what women are all about. The insight that feminist politics can only encircle the subjects of feminism without ever fully capturing their meaning does not mean that we should do away with the feminist subject altogether. Rather, it implies that our attempts to symbolize the feminist subject can never once and for all come

to an end. A politics of a subject-in-outline means that the signifier woman (and also feminist) is permanently open to contestation, which implies that in it is a politicized subject.

Butler comes to the same conclusion—that the signifier woman and with that the feminist subject needs to be permanently open to contestation—through a Foucaultian route. In contrast, I arrive at this conclusion through a Lacanian route. The Lacanian route is more helpful to rethink feminist politics than a Foucaultian route, because it distinguishes between the ego and the subject. Moreover, whereas Butler (via Foucault) supposes a necessity of iteration, which is for her the condition of both possibility for an identity but also its impossibility of closure, Lacan assumes an emptiness (the real) at the bottom of his system.

Butler's rejection of the real and her not distinguishing between the ego and the subject leads to her problematic conclusion of repetition (or recognition) of the dominant signifier as the basis of resistance. Moreover, it leads to her suggestions of de-subjectivation and the feminist subject as a pragmatic strategy as sites of resistance. However, Butler's holding onto Foucault leads to a politics of the ego, which generates exclusions. With Lacan we become aware that repetition, pragmatism and de-subjectivation are not options in a world where injustice reigns. In order to better think about resistance it is crucial that we grasp the centrality of the gap in the symbolic order, as it is in this gap where the feminist subject-in-outline emerges. Only such a subject, if it deals with the anxieties that its non-wholeness incites, can challenge power structures and remain open to continuing contestations.

A politics of a subject-in-outline also has crucial implication for democratic theory in general. A democratic theory, which is based on a politics of the ego, is in danger of eliminating what is most fruitful in democratic politics: an ambiguity at the heart of democratic politics. Instead of emerging and sustaining itself in the fractures of the Other, such a "democratic politics" seeks to cover up any holes through violently excluding all those that fall outside its "whole" image of democracy. The violence implied in a politics of the ego has become and continues to be painfully evident in the US-politics of aggression towards those countries that fail to live up to its ideal whole of democracy.

Only a feminist and democratic politics, which emerges in the holes, points of fracture that appear in the unification has the necessary openness that allows those in a political community, that have been rendered invisible and without a proper place to step forward and rearticulate the boundaries of that community. Such a politics does not base itself on the ego, which aims to cover over its non-wholeness through fantastic constructs of unity. Rather, it bases itself on a political subject-in-outline, which articulates its politics with an effort to remain open. Such a politics deals moreover with desires and fears that the holes in the Other and itself incite. If such passions are cast aside, democratic politics is in danger of restoring a politics of the ego.

If feminist and democratic theories presuppose the Other as some sort of unified totality, any contestation or transformation of the socio-political order become impossible. Such theories fail to grasp that it is the identification with the Other that brings total closure in a political community. Such a closed community leads to the violent exclusion of all those that do not neatly fit into its boundaries. In order to *not* eliminate difference, we need a democratic politics *beyond* identification. A politics of a subject-in-outline does not aim to fix the meaning of the political subject; it realizes that those excluded from the political community can only emerge in the fractures of the signifier itself.

It is these points of fracture in the Other which make a democratic politics of inclusion possible. Even if feminist and democratic theories opt for politics of the ego, the real is ready to interrupt any totality. However, a transformative politics of inclusion makes an effort to graft its ethics on the real. With that it opts for a politics of the subject-in-outline, since it is only such a politics that promises to alleviate the suffering present in current world politics.

Claudia Leeb, Roanoke College

Notes

1. I would like to thank Amy Allen, Jay Bernstein and David Plotke for their comments on an earlier version of the essay.
2. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 22.
3. Butler's early reading of Lacan in *Gender Trouble* is almost entirely based on Irigaray and Kristeva and the few texts of *Encore* published in *Feminine Sexuality* (see especially chapter 2). Also in her more recent work, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 46, she critiques Lacan without engaging with his work in a substantive manner. Her most sustained discussion of the real in *Bodies that Matter* is entirely based on Slavoj Žižek's reading of this concept. See "Arguing with the Real," in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 187–222.
4. Although I draw in this discussion on the commonalities and differences between Butler and Lacan in Butler's *Gender Trouble*, *Bodies that Matter*, and *Undoing Gender*, the main focus will be on her *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories of Subjection* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), since it is in this book where her attempt to reformulate a theory of the subject is at the center.
5. Although there are attempts to establish a connection between Butler and Lacan via Laclau's and Žižek's reading of Lacan, in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality* (London and New York: Verso, 2000), this paper is the first attempt to bring Lacan in a direct conversation with Butler.
6. Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 12.

7. *Ibid.*, 2.
8. Jacques Lacan, *Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1973, 1977), 207.
9. Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 99.
10. Jacques Lacan, *Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954–1955*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978, 1991), 262.
11. Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 11.
12. Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 13.
13. Jacques Lacan, *Book II*, 166. See also Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002), 20.
14. Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 76.
15. Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 98–9.
16. Jacques Lacan, *Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique, 1953–1954*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. John Forrester (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975, 1991), 86.
17. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 145.
18. Butler, Laclau and Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, 40.
19. Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge*, *Book XX: Encore/1972–1973*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink (New York/London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), 28.
20. Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 219.
21. This argument is again based on secondary literature, more precisely on Maden Dolari's reading of Lacan with Althusser's notion of interpellation. Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 121. We find the same argument in *Bodies that Matter*, this time based on Žižek's appropriation of the real, 207.
22. Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 21.
23. Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 27.
24. *Ibid.*
25. The symbolizing of the real cannot take place outside of language or the symbolic order. We have no means of apprehending this real," argues Lacan, "except via the go-between of the symbolic." Lacan, *Book II*, 97.
26. Vicky Kirby, *Judith Butler: Live Theory* (London/New York: Continuum, 2006), 41.
27. Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 79.
28. "If there is agency," Butler argues, "it is to be found, paradoxically, in the possibilities opened up in and by that constrained appropriation of the regulatory law." Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 12.
29. It is crucial that the subject-in-outline does not strive to receive whole recognition from the Other (or the other) for its new signifiers. The subject-in-outline accepts the non-

wholeness of its signifiers and realizes that any efforts of identification lead to a perturbation of future subjects.

30. Catherine Mills rightly detects the assumption of the unity or sovereignty of the law in Butler's discussion of hate speech. However, Butler comes to the problematic conclusion that hate speech should not be regulated by the law, not because she departs from Foucault's notion of the "materiality of power" but because she draws on the Foucaultian notion of power, which is all-encompassing. Catherine Mills, "Contesting the Political: Butler and Foucault on Power and Resistance" *Journal of Political Philosophy* 11 (Sept. 2003): 233-44, 265.
31. For the Real in relation to trauma see Lacan, *Book XI*, 55.
32. Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 20.
33. Lacan, *Book II*, 164.
34. Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 29.
35. *Ibid.*, 130.
36. Carrie L. Hull, "Materiality in Theodor W. Adorno and Judith Butler," *Radical Philosophy* 84 (1997): 22-35.
37. Lacan, *Book XI*, 207.
38. For Lacan then the subject is situated in the unconscious. This is the reason Lacan introduces the homonymy between "Es" (the Freudian signifier of the unconscious) and the initial letter of the word "subject" (S), which reads as "Es." For a further explanation on this topic see Jane Gallop, *Reading Lacan* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), 97.
39. Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 7.
40. Jacques Lacan, *Book III: The Psychoses, 1955-1956*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1981, 1993), 251.
41. Lacan, *Book III*, 242.
42. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 6.
43. Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 10.
44. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 20.
45. Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 118.
46. In her more recent work, Butler addresses the importance of acknowledging the manner of desire and anxiety that such incompleteness incites to counter an oppressive feminine politics. Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 180.

Part II: DIVERSITY AND DIFFERENCE

YOUNG FEMINISM