



Heterosexism, Misrecognition, and Capitalism: A Response to Judith Butler

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Heterosexism, Misrecognition, and Capitalism

A RESPONSE TO JUDITH BUTLER

Nancy Fraser

Judith Butler's essay is welcome on several counts. It returns us to deep and important questions in social theory that have gone undiscussed for some time. And it links a reflection on such questions to a diagnosis of the troubled state of the Left in the current political conjuncture. Most important, however, is Butler's commitment in this essay to identifying, and retrieving, the genuinely valuable aspects of Marxism and the socialist feminism of the 1970s, which current intellectual and political fashions conspire to repress. Also exemplary is her interest in integrating the best insights of those paradigms with defensible strands of more recent paradigms, including discourse analysis, cultural studies, and poststructuralism, in order to understand contemporary capitalism. These are commitments I wholeheartedly share.

Nevertheless, Butler and I disagree. Our most important disagreements—and the most fruitful for discussion—turn on how precisely to realize this shared project of reclamation and integration. We hold divergent views of what precisely constitutes the enduring legacy of Marxism and the still relevant insights of socialist feminism. We also diverge in our respective assessments of the merits of various poststructuralist currents and in our respective views of how these can best inform social theorizing that retains a materialist dimension. Finally, we disagree about the nature of contemporary capitalism.

In order to clear the way for a fruitful discussion of these issues, I want to begin by disposing quickly of what I take to be the red herrings. Butler conjoins her discussion of my book, *Justice Interruptus*, to a critique of a group of unnamed interlocutors whom she calls “neoconservative Marxists.” Whatever the merits of her critique of this group—a question I shall return to later—her strategy of using it to frame a discussion of me is unfortunate. Despite her disclaimers to the contrary, readers could draw the erroneous conclusion that I share the “neoconservative Marxist” dismissal of the oppression of gays and lesbians as “merely cultural,” hence as secondary, derivative, or even trivial. They might assume that I see sexual oppression as less fundamental, material, and real than class oppression and that I wish to subordinate struggles against heterosexism to struggles against workers' exploitation. Finding me thus lumped together with “sexually conservative orthodox” Marxists, readers could even con-

clude that I view gay and lesbian movements as unjustified particularisms that have split the Left and on whom I wish forcibly to impose Left unity.

I, of course, believe nothing of the sort. On the contrary, in *Justice Interruptus* I have analyzed the current decoupling of so-called identity politics from class politics, the cultural Left from the social Left, as a constitutive feature of the “postsocialist” condition.¹ Seeking to overcome these splits and to articulate the basis for a united front of the Left, I have proposed a theoretical framework that eschews orthodox distinctions between “base” and “superstructure,” “primary” and “secondary” oppressions, and that challenges the primacy of the economic. In the process, I have theorized the conceptual irreducibility of heterosexist oppression and the moral legitimacy of gay and lesbian claims.

Central to my framework is a normative distinction between injustices of distribution and injustices of recognition. Far from derogating the latter as “merely cultural,” the point is to conceptualize two equally primary, serious, and real kinds of harm that any morally defensible social order must eradicate. To be misrecognized, in my view, is not simply to be thought ill of, looked down on, or devalued in others’ conscious attitudes or mental beliefs. It is rather to be denied the status of a *full partner* in social interaction and prevented from *participating as a peer* in social life—not as a consequence of a distributive inequity (such as failing to receive one’s fair share of resources or “primary goods”), but rather as a consequence of *institutionalized* patterns of interpretation and evaluation that constitute one as comparatively unworthy of respect or esteem. When such patterns of disrespect and disesteem are institutionalized, for example, in law, social welfare, medicine, and/or popular culture, they impede parity of participation, just as surely as do distributive inequities. The resulting harm is in either case all too real.

In my conception, therefore, misrecognition is an institutionalized social relation, not a psychological state. In essence a status injury, it is analytically distinct from, and conceptually irreducible to, the injustice of maldistribution, although it *may* be accompanied by the latter. Whether misrecognition converts into maldistribution, and vice versa, depends on the nature of the social formation in question. In precapitalist, pre-state societies, for example, where status simply *is* the overarching principle of distribution and where the status order and the class hierarchy are therefore fused, misrecognition simply entails maldistribution. In capitalist societies, in contrast, where the institutionalization of specialized economic relations permits the relative uncoupling of economic distribution from structures of prestige, and where status and class can therefore diverge, misrecognition and maldistribution are not fully mutually convertible. Whether and to what extent they coincide today is a question I shall consider below.

Normatively, however, the key point is this: misrecognition constitutes a fundamental injustice, whether accompanied by maldistribution or not. And the point has political consequences. It is not necessary to show that a given instance of misrecognition brings with it maldistribution in order to certify the claim to redress it as a genuine claim for social justice. The point holds for heterosexist misrecognition, which involves the institutionalization of sexual norms and interpretations that deny participatory parity to gays and lesbians. Opponents of heterosexism need not labor to translate claims of sexual status injury into claims of class deprivation in order to vindicate the former. Nor need they show that their struggles threaten capitalism in order to prove they are just.

In my account, then, injustices of misrecognition are fully as serious as distributive injustices. And they cannot be reduced to the latter. Thus, far from claiming that cultural harms are superstructural reflections of economic harms, I have proposed an analysis in which the two sorts of harms are cofundamental and conceptually irreducible. From my perspective, therefore, it makes no sense to say that heterosexist misrecognition is “merely cultural.” That locution presupposes the very sort of base-superstructure model, the very sort of economistic monism, that my framework aims to displace.

Butler, in sum, has mistaken what is actually a quasi-Weberian dualism of status and class for an orthodox Marxian economistic monism. Erroneously assuming that to distinguish redistribution from recognition is necessarily to devalue recognition, she treats my normative distinction as a “tactic” aimed at derogating gay and lesbian struggles and imposing a new “orthodoxy.” Contra Butler, I mean to defend the distinction, while disclaiming the tactic. To get at the real issues between us, therefore, requires decoupling two questions that are too closely identified in her discussion. The first is a political question concerning the depth and seriousness of heterosexist oppression; on this, I have argued, we do not disagree. The second is a theoretical question concerning the conceptual status of what Butler misleadingly calls “the material/cultural distinction” as it relates to the analysis of heterosexism and the nature of capitalist society; here lie our real disagreements.²

Let me begin unpacking these real disagreements by schematically recapping Butler’s critique. As I read it, she offers three principal theoretical arguments against my redistribution/recognition framework. First, she contends that because gays and lesbians suffer material, economic harms, their oppression is not properly categorized as misrecognition. Second, invoking the important 1970s socialist-feminist insight that the family is part of the mode of production, she contends that the heteronormative regulation of sexuality is “central to the functioning of the political economy” and that contemporary struggles against that regula-

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tion “threaten the workability” of the capitalist system. Third, after revisiting anthropological accounts of precapitalist exchange, she contends that the distinction between the material and the cultural is “unstable,” a “theoretical anachronism” to be eschewed in social theory. None of these arguments is persuasive, in my view, largely because none affords an adequately differentiated and historically situated view of modern capitalist society. Let me consider the three arguments in turn.

Butler’s first argument appeals to some indisputable facts about the harms currently suffered by gays and lesbians. Far from being “merely symbolic,” these harms include serious economic disadvantages with undeniable material effects. In the United States today, for example, gays and lesbians can be summarily dismissed from civilian employment and military service, are denied a broad range of family-based social welfare benefits, are disproportionately burdened with medical costs, and are disadvantaged in tax and inheritance law. Equally material are the effects of the fact that homosexuals lack the full range of constitutional rights and protections enjoyed by heterosexuals. In many jurisdictions, they can be prosecuted for consensual sex; and in many more, they can be assaulted with impunity. It follows, claims Butler, from the economic and material character of these liabilities, that the “misrecognition” analysis of heterosexism is mistaken.

Butler’s premise is true, of course, but her conclusion does not follow. She assumes that injustices of misrecognition must be immaterial and noneconomic. Leaving aside for the moment her conflation of the material with the economic, her assumption is on both counts mistaken. Consider first the issue of materiality. In my conception, injustices of misrecognition are just as material as injustices of maldistribution. To be sure, the first are rooted in social patterns of interpretation, evaluation, and communication, hence, if you like, in the symbolic order. But this does not mean they are “merely” symbolic. On the contrary, the norms, significations, and constructions of personhood that impede women, racialized peoples, and/or gays and lesbians from parity of participation in social life are materially instantiated—in institutions and social practices, in social action and embodied habitus, and yes, in ideological state apparatuses. Far from occupying some wispy, ethereal realm, they are material in their existence and effects.

From my perspective, therefore, the material harms cited by Butler constitute paradigmatic cases of misrecognition. They reflect the institutionalization of heterosexist meanings, norms, and constructions of personhood in such arenas as constitutional law, medicine, immigration and naturalization policy, federal and state tax codes, social welfare and employment policy, equal opportunity legislation, and the like. What is institutionalized, moreover, as Butler herself notes, are cultural constructions of entitlement and personhood that produce homosexual subjects

as objects. This, to repeat, is the essence of misrecognition: the *material* construction through the institutionalization of cultural norms of a class of devalued persons who are impeded from participatory parity.

If misrecognition harms can thus be material, can they also be economic? It is true, as Butler notes, and as I myself expressly noted in *Justice Interruptus*, that some forms of heterosexism inflict economic harms on gays and lesbians. The question is how to interpret them. One possibility is to see these economic harms as direct expressions of the economic structure of society—much like Marxists see the exploitation of workers. In this interpretation, which Butler appears to endorse, the economic liabilities of homosexuals would be hardwired in the relations of production. To remedy them would require transforming those relations. Another possibility, favored by me, is to see the economic harms of heterosexism as indirect (mal)distributive consequences of the more fundamental injustice of misrecognition. In this interpretation, which I proposed in *Justice Interruptus*, the roots of economic heterosexism would be the “relations of recognition”: an institutionalized pattern of interpretation and valuation that constructs heterosexuality as normative and homosexuality as deviant, thereby denying participatory parity to gays and lesbians. Change the relations of recognition and the maldistribution would disappear.

This conflict of interpretations raises deep and difficult questions. Is it necessary to transform the economic structure of contemporary capitalism in order to redress the economic liabilities of homosexuals? What precisely is meant by the “economic structure”? Should one conceive the heteronormative regulation of sexuality as belonging directly to the capitalist economy? Or is it better seen as belonging to a status order that is differentiated from, and complexly related to, the economic structure? More generally, do the relations of recognition in late-capitalist society coincide with economic relations? Or do the institutional differentiations of modern capitalism introduce gaps between status and class?

To pursue these questions, let us examine Butler’s second argument. Here she invokes the 1970s socialist-feminist insight that the family is part of the mode of production to support the thesis that the heteronormative regulation of sexuality is “central to the functioning of the political economy.” It follows, claims Butler, that contemporary struggles against that regulation “threaten the workability” of the capitalist system.

Actually, two different variants of the argument are discernible here, one definitional, the other functionalist. According to the first variant, (hetero)sexual regulation belongs by definition to the economic structure. The economic structure simply *is* the entire set of social mechanisms and institutions that (re)produce persons and goods. By definition, then, the family is part of this structure, being the primary site for the reproduction of persons. So, by extension, is the gender order, which standardizes the

family's "products" to conform to one of two—and only two—mutually exclusive, seemingly natural kinds of persons: men and women. The gender order, in turn, is held to presuppose a mode of sexual regulation that produces and naturalizes heterosexuality, while simultaneously producing homosexuality as abject. The conclusion drawn by Butler is that the heteronormative regulation of sexuality is part of the economic structure by definition, *despite the fact that it structures neither the social division of labor nor the mode of exploitation of labor power in capitalist society.*

This definitional argument has an air of olympian indifference to history. As a result, it risks accomplishing too much. Stipulating that the mode of sexual regulation belongs to the economic structure by definition—even in the absence of any discernible impact on the division of labor or the mode of exploitation—threatens to dehistoricize the idea of the economic structure and drain it of conceptual force. What gets lost is the specificity of capitalist society as a distinctive and highly peculiar form of social organization. This organization creates an order of specialized economic relations that are relatively decoupled from relations of kinship and political authority. Thus, in capitalist society, the link between the mode of sexual regulation, on the one hand, and an order of specialized economic relations whose *raison d'être* is the accumulation of surplus value, on the other, is attenuated. It is far more attenuated, certainly, than in precapitalist, pre-state societies, where economic relations are largely adumbrated through the mechanisms of kinship and directly imbricated with sexuality. In the late capitalist society of the twentieth century, moreover, the links between sexuality and surplus-value accumulation have been still further attenuated by the rise of what Eli Zaretsky has called "personal life": a space of intimate relations, including sexuality, friendship, and love, that can no longer be identified with the family and that is lived as disconnected from the imperatives of production and reproduction.⁴ In general, then, contemporary capitalist society contains "gaps": between the economic order and the kinship order; between the family and personal life; and between the status order and the class hierarchy. In this sort of highly differentiated society, it does not make sense to me to conceive the mode of sexual regulation as simply a part of the economic structure. Nor to conceive queer demands for the recognition of difference as misplaced demands for redistribution.

In another sense, moreover, the definitional argument accomplishes very little. Butler wants to conclude that struggles over sexuality are economic, but that conclusion has been rendered tautologous. If sexual struggles are economic by definition, then they are not economic in the same sense as are struggles over the rate of exploitation. Simply calling both sorts of struggles "economic" risks collapsing the differences, creating the misleading impression that they will synergize automatically and blunting our capacity to pose, and answer, hard but pressing political

questions as to how they can be *made* to synergize when in fact they diverge or conflict.⁵

This brings me to the functionalist variant of Butler’s second argument. Here the claim is that the heteronormative regulation of sexuality is economic—not by definition, but because it is functional to the expansion of surplus value. Capitalism, in other words, “needs” or benefits from compulsory heterosexuality. It follows, according to Butler, that gay and lesbian struggles against heterosexism threaten the “workability” of the capitalist system.

Like all functionalist arguments, this one stands or falls with the empirical relations of cause and effect. Empirically, however, it is highly implausible that gay and lesbian struggles threaten capitalism in its actually existing historical form. That might be the case if homosexuals were constructed as an inferior but useful class of menial laborers whose exploitation was central to the workings of the economy, as African Americans, for example, have been. Then one could say that capital’s interests are served by keeping them “in their place.” In fact, however, homosexuals are more often constructed as a group whose very existence is an abomination, much like the Nazi construction of Jews; they should have no “place” in society at all. No wonder, then, that the principal opponents of gay and lesbian rights today are not multinational corporations, but religious and cultural conservatives, whose obsession is status, not profits. In fact, some multinationals—notably American Airlines, Apple Computer, and Disney—have elicited the wrath of such conservatives by instituting gay-friendly policies, such as domestic partnership benefits. They apparently see advantages in accommodating gays, provided they are not subject to boycotts or else are big enough to withstand them if they are.

Empirically, therefore, contemporary capitalism seems not to require heterosexism. With its gaps between the economic order and the kinship order, and between the family and personal life, capitalist society now permits significant numbers of individuals to live through wage labor outside of heterosexual families. It could permit many more to do so—provided the relations of recognition were changed. Thus we can now answer one of the questions posed earlier: the economic disabilities of homosexuals are better understood as effects of heterosexism in the relations of recognition than as hardwired in the structure of capitalism. The good news is that we do not need to overthrow capitalism in order to remedy those disabilities—although we may well need to overthrow it for other reasons. The bad news is that we need to transform the existing status order and restructure the relations of recognition.

With her functionalist argument, Butler has resurrected what is in my view one of the worst aspects of 1970s Marxism and socialist feminism: the overtotalized view of capitalist society as a monolithic “system”

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of interlocking structures of oppression that seamlessly reinforce one another. This view misses the “gaps.” It has been resoundingly and persuasively critiqued from many directions, including the poststructuralist paradigm that Butler endorses and the Weberian one adapted by me. Functionalist systems theory is one strand of 1970s thought that is better forgotten.

The question of what should replace functionalism bears on Butler’s third argument against my redistribution/recognition framework. This argument is deconstructive. Far from insisting that the roots of heterosexism are economic as opposed to “merely cultural,” its point is to deconstruct the “material/cultural distinction.” That distinction, claims Butler, is “unstable.” Important currents of neo-Marxian thought, ranging from Raymond Williams to Althusser, have irretrievably thrown it into “crisis.” The knockdown argument comes from the anthropologists, however, notably Mauss and Levi-Strauss. Their respective accounts of “the gift” and “the exchange of women” reveal that “primitive” processes of exchange cannot be assigned to one side or the other of the material/cultural divide. Being both at once, such processes “destabilize” the very distinction. Thus, in invoking the material/cultural distinction today, Butler contends, I have lapsed into a “theoretical anachronism.”

This argument is unconvincing for several reasons, the first of which is that it conflates “the economic” with “the material.” Butler assumes that my normative distinction between redistribution and recognition rests on an ontological distinction between the material and the cultural. She therefore assumes that to deconstruct the latter distinction is to pull the rug out from under the former. In fact, however, this assumption does not hold. As I noted earlier, injustices of misrecognition are, from my perspective, just as material as injustices of maldistribution. Thus, my normative distinction rests on no ground of ontological difference. What it *does* correlate with, in capitalist societies, is a distinction between the economic and the cultural. This, however, is not an ontological distinction but a social-theoretical distinction. The economic/cultural distinction, not the material/cultural distinction, is the real bone of contention between Butler and me, the distinction whose status is at issue.

What, then, is the conceptual status of the economic/cultural distinction? The anthropological arguments do shed light on this matter, in my view, but not in a way that supports Butler’s position. As I read them, both Mauss and Levi-Strauss analyzed processes of exchange in pre-state, precapitalist societies, where the master idiom of social relations was kinship. In their accounts, kinship organized not only marriage and sexual relations, but also the labor process and the distribution of goods; relations of authority, reciprocity, and obligation; and symbolic hierarchies of status and prestige. Neither distinctively economic relations nor distinctively

cultural relations existed; hence, the economic/cultural distinction was presumably not available to the members of those societies. It does not follow, however, that the distinction is senseless or useless. On the contrary, it can be meaningfully and usefully applied to capitalist societies, which unlike so-called “primitive” societies *do* contain the social-structural differentiations in question.⁶ Moreover, it can also be applied *by us* to societies that lack these differentiations in order to indicate how they differ from ours. One can say, for example, as I just did, that in such societies a single order of social relations handles both economic integration and cultural integration, matters that are relatively decoupled in capitalist society. This, moreover, is precisely the spirit in which I understand Mauss and Levi-Strauss. Whatever their intentions regarding “the economic” and “the cultural,” we gain less from reading them as having “destabilized” the distinction than from reading them as having *historicized* it. The point, in other words, is to historicize a distinction central to modern capitalism—and with it modern capitalism itself—by situating both in the larger anthropological context and thereby revealing their historical specificity.

Thus, Butler’s “destabilization” argument goes astray at two crucial points. First, it illegitimately generalizes to capitalist societies a feature specific to precapitalist societies: namely, the absence of a social-structural economic/cultural differentiation. Second, it erroneously assumes that to historicize a distinction is to render it nugatory and useless in social theory. In fact, historicization does the contrary. Far from rendering distinctions unstable, it renders their usage more precise.

From my perspective, then, historicization represents a better approach to social theory than destabilization or deconstruction.⁷ It allows us to appreciate the social-structurally differentiated and historically specific character of contemporary capitalist society. In so doing, it also enables us to locate the antifunctionalist moment and possibilities of countersystemic “agency” and social change. These appear not in an abstract transhistorical property of language, such as “resignification” or “performativity,” but rather in the actual contradictory character of specific social relations. With a historically specific, differentiated view of contemporary capitalist society, we can locate the gaps, the nonisomorphisms of status and class, the multiple contradictory interpellations of social subjects, and the multiple complex *moral imperatives* that motivate struggles for social justice.

Seen from this sort of perspective, moreover, the current political conjuncture is not adequately grasped by a diagnosis centered on the putative resurgence of orthodox Marxism. It is better grasped, rather, by one that forthrightly acknowledges, and seeks to overcome, splits in the Left between socialist/social-democratic currents oriented to the politics of

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redistribution, on the one hand, and multiculturalist currents oriented to the politics of recognition, on the other. The indispensable starting point for such an analysis must be a principled acknowledgment that *both sides have legitimate claims*, which must somehow be harmonized programmatically and made to synergize politically. Social justice today, in sum, requires *both* redistribution *and* recognition; neither alone will suffice.

On this last point, I feel certain, Butler and I agree. Despite her reluctance to invoke the language of social justice, and despite our theoretical disagreements, both of us are committed to reclaiming the best elements of socialist politics and to integrating them with the best elements of the politics of the “new social movements.” Likewise, we are both committed to retrieving the genuinely valuable strands of the neo-Marxian critique of capitalism and to integrating them with the most insightful strands of post-Marxian critical theorizing. It is the merit of Butler’s essay and, I would hope, of my own book as well, to have put this project on the agenda once again.

Notes

I am grateful for helpful comments from Laura Kipnis, Linda Nicholson, and Eli Zaretsky.

1. See especially the introduction and chapter 1, “From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a ‘Postsocialist’ Age,” in Nancy Fraser, *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the ‘Postsocialist’ Condition* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

2. In what follows I shall leave aside a problem with Butler’s rendition of the argument of *Justice Interruptus*. She presents me as arguing categorically that heterosexism is a pure injustice of misrecognition, unalloyed by maldistribution. In fact, I discussed the issue hypothetically in the mode of a thought experiment. Aiming to disclose the distinctive logics of redistribution claims and recognition claims respectively, I invited readers to imagine a conceptual spectrum of oppressed collectivities, ranging from ideal-typical victims of pure maldistribution at one end to ideal-typical victims of pure misrecognition at the other end, with hybrid or “bivalent” cases in the middle. In this hypothetical spirit, I sketched a conception of a “despised sexuality” as a concrete approximation of the ideal type at the misrecognition end of the spectrum, while explicitly noting that this conception of sexuality was controversial and while leaving open the question of whether and how closely it corresponded to the actually existing homosexual collectivities struggling for justice in the real world. Thus, my “misrecognition” analysis of heterosexism in *Justice Interruptus* is far more qualified than Butler lets on. Recently, moreover, I have argued that for practical purposes virtually all real-world oppressed collectivities are “bivalent.” Virtually all, that is, have both an economic and a status component; virtually all, therefore, suffer both maldistribution and misrecognition *in forms where neither of these injustices is*

a mere indirect effect of the other, but where each has some independent weight. Nevertheless, not all are bivalent in the same way, nor to the same degree. Some axes of oppression tilt more heavily toward the distribution end of the spectrum, others incline more to the recognition end, while still others cluster closer to the center. On this account, heterosexism, while consisting in part in maldistribution, consists primarily in injustices of misrecognition and is rooted predominantly in a status order that constructs homosexuality as devalued and that institutes it as a despised sexuality. For the original argument, see *Justice Interruptus*, chapter 1. For the subsequent refinement, see Nancy Fraser, "Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition, and Participation," in *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, vol. 18 (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, forthcoming).

3. In general, one should distinguish several questions here: (1) the nature of the injustices in question, (2) their ultimate causes, (3) the contemporary causal mechanisms that reproduce them, and (4) their remedies. I am grateful to Erik Olin Wright for this point (private communication, 1997).

4. Eli Zaretsky, *Capitalism, the Family, and Personal Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976).

5. Thus, the definitional argument merely pushes the need for distinctions to another level. One might of course say that a political claim can be economic in either of two ways: first, by contesting the production and distribution of economic value, including surplus value; and second, by contesting the production and reproduction of norms, significations, and constructions of personhood, including those concerning sexuality. But I fail to see how this improves on my simpler strategy of restricting the term *economic* to its capitalist meaning and distinguishing claims for recognition from claims for redistribution.

6. In this brief essay I cannot take up the important but difficult question of how the economic/cultural distinction is best applied to the critical theory of contemporary capitalist society. In "Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics," however, I discuss this question at length. Rejecting the view of economy and culture as separate spheres, I propose a critical approach that reveals the hidden connections between them. The point, in other words, is to use the distinction against the grain, making visible, and criticizable, both the cultural subtexts of apparently economic processes and the economic subtexts of apparently cultural processes. Such a "perspectival dualism" is only possible, of course, once we have the economic/cultural distinction.

7. At another level, however, I mean to endorse deconstruction. It represents an approach to the politics of recognition that is often superior in my view to standard identity politics. A deconstructive politics of recognition is transformative, not affirmative, of existing group identities and differentiations. In this respect, it has affinities with socialism, which I understand as a transformative, as opposed to affirmative, approach to the politics of redistribution. (For an elaboration of this argument, see *Justice Interruptus*, chapter 1.) Nevertheless, I do not find deconstruction useful at the level on which Butler invokes it here: namely, the level of social theory.