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What is This?

A new bridge

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Amy Allen, *The Politics of Our Selves: Power, Autonomy, and Gender in Contemporary Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008)

From a historical perspective, Allen's courageous and beautiful book is a weight-bearing pillar of a new bridge that stretches across what has been perceived as a major rift on the Continental philosophical plateau since the 1960s. This bridge is barely a decade-old construction which, by connecting the topography of a split territory, will help foster the cross-fertilization between the German tradition of critical theory, at one end, and French poststructuralism, at the other. In my comments on this expansive and elegantly argued book, I will first briefly contextualize its contribution to the building of this bridge. Then, I will sketch its basic structure, bring into focus its theoretical scope and isolate some of the principal nodes in the complex network of exchanges that it establishes with major voices in contemporary philosophy and feminist theory on both sides of the Atlantic. Lastly, I will turn to Allen's reworking of the concept of mutual recognition that she pursues through a combination of Judith Butler's and Jessica Benjamin's approaches. Allen's project is to provide a feminist account of the structure of subject-formation, which she describes as *constituted by* power, but also able *to constitute itself* in emancipatory ways. While I find Allen's version of mutual recognition the most enticing and provocative aspect of her book, it also lends itself to some substantive and epistemic questions that need to be answered if her project is to succeed. At the end of my comments, I will pose these questions and offer suggestions as to how to answer them.

T. W. Adorno first charted what I have called the Continental rift in 1964. In *The Jargon of Authenticity*, he called attention to ideology's dependence on language and denounced Martin Heidegger for his aesthetic use of it. Adorno's claim was that Heidegger's 'jargon of authenticity' was a prime example of complacent cooperation between philosophy and free market capitalist ideology. According to Adorno, since *Being and Time* Heidegger's ambiguous reinvention of language would not only have ignored social injustice but let the feelings of contemporary meaninglessness glow in a linguistic and ahistorical aura. Such aura, however, far from being elusive and magical in the original Benjaminian

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definition, was recognizable enough to lend itself to being reproduced and sold according to dominant marketing strategies.

In his 1981 response to Jean-François Lyotard's 1979 pamphlet, *The Postmodern Condition*, Jürgen Habermas reopened and updated Adorno's polemics against Heidegger. In his essay, 'Modernity – An Incomplete Project', Habermas re-charted the Continental rift in terms of the debate on the political legacy of the Enlightenment and used the opposition between modernity and postmodernity to distinguish who was in line with it and who was not. While Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida were branded as young conservatives in that somewhat occasional essay, it was not until 1985, with the publication of *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity,* that Habermas provided a detailed account of the elements that he thought exposed the French critics of reason to the risk of political nihilism. The recipients of Habermas' attack either did not have time to respond fully, which is the case of Foucault who died prematurely in 1984, or decided to provide only oblique answers, which is the case of Derrida who disseminated them in long footnotes to a couple of his texts.

Allen and I came of age while the Franco-German battle was still raging. Interestingly enough, though we did not know each other at the time, neither of us took the validity of that battle at face value. This reticence prompted us to develop two independent but parallel projects. On the occasion of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, I pursued a rapprochement between Derrida and Habermas. After they appeared jointly for the first time in my book, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror* (2003), not only did they make their voice as public intellectuals heard jointly in praise of the mass demonstrations against the war in Iraq of 15 February 2003, but, and perhaps even more poignantly for me, they became friends. Allen, in this book, pursues the rapprochement between Foucault and Habermas around the compatibility of their critiques of power. She then examines the resources that such compatibility offers for feminist thought. Had Foucault been alive in 2008, the date of publication of *The Politics of Our Selves*, his relationship with Habermas might have changed dramatically, and perhaps they would have become friends too.

Yet, the parallel course of our work does not stop at the structural pairing of Habermas, the champion of the transcendental role of discursive rationality, with a French theorist, committed to the dissolution of permanent structures of discourse. Strikingly, Allen and I, again independently, turned to Kant to retrieve the roots of a possible conversation between Habermas on the one hand, and Foucault and Derrida on the other. Both of us sought to rethink Habermas' relation to poststructuralism from the perspective of the understated significance of Kant and the Enlightenment for both Foucault and Derrida. This is to say that Allen could not find a more sympathetic reader than me, with respect both to the mission of this volume and the appreciation of the difficulty it entails. Discussing Habermas and Foucault from the balanced and non-partisan perspective she takes in *The Politics of Our Selves* presents a challenge that can easily intimidate the most navigated and versatile scholar. Being able to shuttle, as smoothly as she does, between conceptual vocabularies and styles of argumentation that have been represented as incompatible by three decades of mutual misunderstanding is certainly no easy task.

Both Allen and I have underlined Foucault's and Derrida's debt to the Enlightenment. I undertook to engage Derrida and Habermas on a broad re-evaluation of the legacy of

the Enlightenment after it had been transformed into an ideological fetish by the extremist public statements of Al Qaeda and the Bush administration's response to them. Allen's engagement of Foucault and Habermas crosses over a specific aspect of the Enlightenment still affecting both critical theory and global justice: the entanglement between gender and power. How do critical theory and the Foucaultian critique of power intersect feminist reconstructions of the impact of gender norms on the agency of individuals, institutions, and communities? But also: How should we conceive and promote resistance to the repressive character of these norms? Allen's claim is that reliable answers to these questions cannot be found without formulating a model of subjectivity that acknowledges the performative power of the forces immanent in the social field while preserving the ability to express normative standards in judging and acting. The politics of ourselves, an expression Foucault used to designate the possibility of resisting oppressive dominant norms, not only gives Allen's book its title but names the model of subjectivity that she thinks can support her version of mutual recognition. Such model emerges from the dialogue that she sets up between two male thinkers, Habermas and Foucault, and two female thinkers and feminist theorists, Seyla Benhabib and Judith Butler. The result of juxtaposing these two pairs is highly productive because they reveal a number of unexpected convergences. Their cross-examination serves as background to Allen's own contribution that seeks, along a path opened by Nancy Fraser,

> to envision subjects as both culturally constructed and yet capable of critique, and to think through the implications of this for how we understand subjectivity, power, critique, and autonomy. But this analysis also goes beyond Fraser to think through the difficult issues of how our cultural construction mires us in modes of subjectivity that attach subjects to their subjection and thus threaten to undermine the motivation for autonomous self-transformation. ... The general conceptual philosophical problem that emerges from these debates is the difficulty we have in thinking through power and autonomy simultaneously. (21)

Allen is aware that her inquiry follows Fraser only up to a point. For Allen's real interest is in exploring perhaps the most unsettling question in feminist, moral, and political theories: 'What,' she asks her reader bluntly, 'if knowing the "truth" about, for example, the subordinating nature of the gender norms that constitute your identity does little or nothing to loosen their grip on you?'. (10) This question, variously but never sufficiently or satisfactorily answered by a number of feminist theorists, has never received as rigorous a survey and as insightful an assessment as in Allen's book. To explain why knowledge of injustice is oftentimes not enough to beat its oppressive effects seems to me the dilemma that captures most profoundly Allen's sensibility as a philosopher and a feminist. This is a question that benefits greatly from her native-like fluency in the various disciplinary languages that she speaks in the book, spanning political theory to psychoanalysis. Allen deploys the backbone of her argument by showing how Foucault and Habermas, while offering two very different models of critique, work within a modified Kantian space similar to what Thomas McCarthy has defined as the 'impurity of reason'. To substantiate her argument, Allen provides comprehensive critiques of both Habermas and Foucault, which she does with fluidity and analytical rigor.

In a way that originally reworks elements of both Benhabib's and Maeve Cooke's readings of Habermas, Allen sees the need for a more contextualist and pragmatic interpretation of normativity, especially in the late Habermas. Whereas in his earlier 'and more psychoanalytically engaged work, Habermas recognized that there is a key motivational component to the achievement of autonomy', thereby presupposing that 'engaging will and desire is necessary for the true realization of freedom with respect to existing norms' (12), ever since *A Theory of Communicative Action,* and even more acutely after *Between Facts and Norms*, Habermas defends that inner nature can be communicatively disambiguated, or purified, on cognitive rational grounds. By the sheer force of supporting arguments with reasons we should thus be able to remain open to criticism and recognize each other as rational agents. If this is the case, Habermas does not fully succeed in avoiding the empty formalism of Kant's moral theory, which prompts Allen to challenge Habermas at the level of the contextual and concrete aspects of moral and political deliberation. These moves set the preconditions for thematizing the motivational component of autonomy.

By contrast, Foucault readily embraces all sorts of impurities of reason at the expense of its normative dimension. Foucault, like Butler, offers a wealth of empirical insights into how power operates but offers 'no ontologically intact reflexivity, no reflexivity that is not itself culturally constructed' (6), to use Fraser's concise statement cited by Allen. Habermas' charge against Foucault is to have dissolved the normative edge of critique by endorsing one of the staple postmodern moves: the death of the subject. If this were true, there indeed could not be any continuity between Foucault and Kant, especially the political Kant of 'An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?' to whom Foucault offers a direct response in 'What Is Enlightenment?' After reading Allen's book it is going to be hard for anyone to hold Habermas' original position. For she proves, I think beyond any reasonable doubt, that Foucault does not negate the subject *tout court*, or even advocate its reduction to a fiction or an illusion, but instead 'proposes a historical investigation of the ways in which the subject has been constituted' (46). In this respect, Foucault's calling the subject into question is not aimed at negating the subject as such, but rather at submitting to critical scrutiny the specific philosophical use made of it both by Kant's transcendental critique and by Husserlian phenomenology. This is what brings Allen to claim, very lucidly, that:

> Foucault's work is best understood as an immanent rather than a total critique of the Kantian Enlightenment project. ... Foucault's inversion of Kant's notion of transcendental subjectivity constitutes a critique of critique itself, a continuation through transformation of that project. (24)

Allen offers a wealth of subtle arguments on Foucault's relation to Kant that I cannot do justice to in this limited space. However, it is essential to note that her analysis of Foucault's 'critique of critique' is indispensable to correct Habermas' overly rationalistic reading of Kant. Without the Foucaultian input we could not explain how power works intersubjectively to shape and constitute our subjectivity. In a complementary fashion, Allen levels Habermas and his own use of Kant against Foucault, by suggesting a modified account of autonomy, broadly construed along Habermasian lines. Her claim is that

without some account of autonomy Foucault ends up by overlooking the constituted subject's ability to critically reflect and implement self-transformation.

Like a master director of the new French cinema of the early 1960s, Allen films the same scene from a multitude of angles that illuminate the unity of the core issues not by essentializing them into a definitive formula, but rather by multiplying the questions that radiate from them. The reason why Allen turns to the debate between Benhabib and Butler, and to their critiques of Habermas and Foucault respectively, is to canvass her own feminist account of the politics of ourselves, which she intends as a theoretical diagnostic model as well as a practical strategy of resistance.

Allen endorses Benhabib's more Hegelian version of discourse ethics: 'The problem is not that Habermas stresses the rational potential implicit in processes of argumentation, it is that he overemphasizes this potential while simultaneously underemphasizing the other – non-rational, bodily, affective, concrete – aspects of ourselves' (153). Yet, by making gender into a narrative, Benhabib's own 'narrative conception of subjectivity' commits her to a fundamentally ungendered view of the self that reveals, in Allen's mind, a rationalist bias that is incompatible with an earnest feminist agenda. In order to tap into 'the motivational capacity to change who we want to be' (183) as women and oppressed recipients of gender norms, we simply cannot afford to think of ourselves as ungendered selves. Rather, it is precisely by reconstructing, on the score of Foucault's immanent critical model, the ways in which we have been and are still being constituted as subjects that we may at once take stock of the contingency of oppressive practices and cultivate the motivation to change who we want to be.

In the same way that Allen agrees with Benhabib's critique of Habermas but disagrees with Benhabib's narrative conception of the self, she agrees with Butler's intervention on the Foucaultian project with the toolbox of psychoanalysis, but disagrees with Butler's purely performative conception of subjectivity. In Butler's mind, Foucault's account of the constitution of the subject through ever more comprehensive processes of normalization, implemented by the disciplinary apparatus of modern institutions, is limited by the fact that Foucault 'does not elaborate on the specific mechanisms of how the subject is formed in submission' (73). Without an answer to this question there remains an explanatory gap between the social dimension in which the process of normalization occurs and what Butler calls the individual 'psychic form that power takes' (ibid.). Allen agrees with Butler's psychoanalytic extension of Foucault's theory of power as subjection, according to which subjection 'refers to the ambivalent process whereby one is constituted as a subject in and through the process of being subjected to disciplinary norms' (72). But Allen aims to push Butler further when she asks: Why do victims of oppression have a tendency to remain attached to the agents of their own oppression, whether discursive, institutional, collective, or individual, even after they have been 'rationally demystified'? This is a theoretical keystone in feminist theory, as Allen recognizes, but also, I may add, a crucial policy question, on which depends the feasibility of progressive politics in national and international settings: from welfare state programs supporting inner city and impoverished populations to international NGOs' activities around the world, from large financial incentives for economic development bestowed by world actors such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to microcredit projects.

One of the most illuminating among the thick web of well-reasoned arguments that Allen offers in this book is, for me, what she calls Butler's collapse of dependency and subordination, which causes Butler to remain ambivalent on the possibility of mutual recognition. Allen's critical appraisal of Butler on this point does not come as a surprise, for she had already warned her reader that 'what is missing from Foucault's account is an appreciation of the role played by non strategic relations with others in the constitution of autonomous selves' (48). 'Absent some understanding of social interaction in nonstrategic terms,' she writes, 'Foucault cannot make sense of how individuals cooperate with one another in collective social and political action to agitate for progressive change' (69). Butler does go further than Foucault, however, by using the psychoanalytic language of dependence and attachment, which illustrates what a model of non-strategic social interaction could be. But even if Butler is closer than Foucault to where Allen wants to get, she is not quite there. The reason is that, by collapsing dependence and subordination, Butler's position vis-à-vis the possibility of non-strategic social interaction remains ambiguous. 'Butler's account of resistance – specifically her ability to differentiate critical and subversive reinscriptions of subordinating norms from faithful ones – suffers as a result of this ambivalence' (74). In my favorite chapter of the book, which is dedicated to Butler, Allen is careful to point out how in her more recent work Butler

> ... invokes a recognition of our common humanity, grounded in our common corporeal vulnerability, that structures the individual pursuit of recognition. Butler suggests that our common human vulnerability is the basis for both political community and collective resistance. The fact that our primary sociality thus calls attention to the 'ongoing normative dimension of our social and political lives, one in which we are compelled to take stock of our interdependence. ... Can this insight lead to a normative reorientation of politics?' (88)

Since Butler's words clearly imply the possibility of distinguishing more subordinating from less subordinating forms of recognition, Allen detects in Butler a normative commitment to non-strategic possibilities in social interaction. Butler cashes it out in terms of recognition of our common humanity, understood as vulnerability, which in turn becomes the basis for the recognition of mutual interdependence. Yet, Butler's open-ended question regarding 'the normative reorientation of politics' testifies to her ambivalence toward validity and normativity in general. Contra Butler's ambivalence, I agree with Allen that we positively need a normative standpoint in order to distinguish between more oppressive and less oppressive reinscriptions, and that such standpoint should lead to a normative reorientation of politics. I also agree with Allen that mutual recognition plays a role in it. However, I am not sure I fully understand what Allen has in mind both substantively and epistemically by mutual recognition.

I wonder, for example, how extensive is Allen's agreement with Butler's appeal to vulnerability and dependence as the key phenomenological experiences of mutual recognition. And especially what Allen's position is on Butler's more recent formulations such as they appear in *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?,* which is dedicated to the symbolic, political and psychic effects of the second Iraq War. Here, in spite of her ambivalence toward recognition, Butler states clearly that others appear to us as truly living, or recognizably human, only if their lives are framed as vulnerable, which means

at the risk of being lost. The acknowledgement of this risk determines which lives we are allowed to grieve and which we are not. Since the possibility of mourning determines the condition of recognition, Butler seems to suggest that there should be a way to separate *normative humanization* from *distorted dehumanization*. Where that boundary falls, is the pivotal question, since the existence of that boundary determines the feasibility of the project of immanent critique, which is another name for the bridge that Allen and I have been contributing to building between critical theory and French poststructuralism. Moreover, setting that boundary seems essential to engage foundational questions in democratic theory: the role of the media in the formation of public opinion, freedom of expression, the nature of political participation, all which have again taken center-stage in the aftermath of the attacks of 11 September 2001.

In my own recent work, I have offered an assessment of Butler's argument. In the end, I think that Butler's ambivalence is not a principled position but the genuine posing of a question for which she has not yet found an answer. I believe the answer should be articulated from a discussion concerning the *representation of vulnerability,* which includes communicative as well as aesthetic dimensions. If Habermas has provided us with some guidelines for settling normative questions in the communicative domain, especially if tempered by Allen's critical appraisal of them, the aesthetic realm remains largely *terra incognita*. Yet, this is too crucial a question to be left to the empirical studies of sociologists, political scientists, and media theorists. The notion of 'framing', which Butler raises but does not sufficiently elaborate at the normative level, entails the possibility of critically assessing whatever is discursively or visually represented in the public sphere, from television to blogs, from marketing strategies to political campaigning. A discussion of framing appears to me a promising avenue to distinguish humanization from distorted dehumanization.

The question of the human underlies Butler's suggestion that others are recognizable as humans only if they are presented to us as potentially grievable. Since Butler's stance seems central to Allen's line of argument, I wish she would elucidate the following: on a kind of hyperbolic ethics in the Levinasian mold, one that privileges an interpretation of agency as responsiveness to the vulnerability of the other? Or does it fit the Foucaultian reversal of the Kantian conception of agency as autonomy? Whereas for Kant autonomy, as Allen writes, is 'the property the will has of being a law to itself' (65), whether law is interpreted ethically or juridically as a set of rights and duties,

> For Foucault, autonomy does not consist in freely bounding oneself to a necessity in the form of the moral law; instead, it consists in freely calling into question that which is presented to us as necessary, thus opening up the space for a possible transgression of those limits. (65)

Lastly, I wish Allen could clarify for me the epistemic status of mutual recognition in her critical-theoretical model. In taking a safe distance from Habermas' rationalist emphasis, Allen suggests that:

> Mutual recognition, then, can be thought of as an ideal that is immanent to social life; it provides a foothold within social practice for normative critique. It is only a pernicious illusion if we posit an end state of social life from which power has been expunged and in which social relations are structured by mutual recognition alone. (179)

While acknowledging the irreducible entanglement between power and validity, Allen wants to preserve the possibility of mutual recognition as an ideal 'immanent to social life'. I would like to know more about what Allen means by this formulation, and also how she coordinates what she means here with what she states earlier in the book, where mutual recognition 'clearly implies that non-subordinating, or at least, less subordinating forms of recognition are possible, at least in principle, at least as a regulative ideal' (88). So, I wish to ask her whether mutual recognition an ideal immanent to social life or a regulative ideal in the Kantian sense?

> We could understand mutual recognition not as a possible state of social relations from which power relations have been permanently and completely expunged but as a permanent though temporally fleeting possibility within dynamically unfolding human relationships. (179)

Allen suggests, very acutely from my perspective, that mutual recognition cannot be conceived as state, but rather as part of the temporal dynamic in which human relationships constantly unfold. I wonder whether, in the face of the ever more accelerated pace of social change and the fragmentation of civil society at the global level, understanding mutual recognition as an ideal, whether immanent or regulative, is the right way to go. Alternatively, I wonder whether Derrida's idea of the trace would serve Allen's argument better.

Let us take the Enlightenment as an example. For Derrida, the Enlightenment does not describe a finite historical experience, political event, or set of self-evident moral values. The Enlightenment is, rather, the trace of a promise that has never been exhaustively fulfilled or realized. In this sense, it is always still 'to come'. For Derrida the Enlightenment does not represent an 'ideal' that can never be fully realized, but rather designates the fragmentary legacy of a past that never took its full course, which needs to be discussed, explored and implemented. The sense in which Derrida states that the Enlightenment has not been fully actualized is not incompatible with Habermas' claim about the 'incomplete project of modernity'. And yet for Derrida, as it was true for Walter Benjamin, it is important that all political projects and values remain grounded in their historicity, for if they are assumed as descriptions of abstract constructs we run the risk of crystallizing them, essentializing them, causing them to lose their critical force.

I wish to submit to Allen the possibility that not only subjectivity but mutual recognition too might be better understood if its historicity, its corporeal and material constitution are preserved in some form. My suggestion is to apply the notion of critique of critique, which she invokes to describe Foucault's relation to the transcendental philosophers of the subject, Kant and Husserl, to the conception of mutual recognition. I think that the Derridean notion of trace could capture mutual recognition as always already embodied. If mutual recognition is to be truly theorized beyond Habermas' rationalistic and cognitive definition, it would simply 'happen' in a fragmentary and not always predictable manner. Recognition would thus emerge, whether intersubjectively or intrapsychically, as an event rather than a paradigm, whose normativity is that of the memory of a past that itself keeps calling for recognition.

Be reasonable: A response to Amy Allen's *The Politics of Our Selves: Power, Autonomy, and Gender in Contemporary Critical Theory*

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Amy Allen, *The Politics of Our Selves: Power, Autonomy, and Gender in Contemporary Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008)

Amy Allen's tour de force *The Politics of Our Selves: Power, Autonomy, and Gender in Contemporary Critical Theory* is motivated by a dual problem: a number of thinkers – Michel Foucault most notably – have argued that *selves* are in fact *subjects*. That is, relations of power create discursive spaces within which a way of being a person is possible; the individual, on this view, is an artefact of subjection, including as she or he is psychically shaped. For many critics, this position implies the over-determination of subjectivity by larger forces, and thus renders autonomy theoretically impossible. Thus, second, the self must be understood as an entity capable of critical reflection on itself and of self-transformation; it acts in ways not reducible to effects of power relations, including by acting on itself. Allen attempts to reconcile the truth of both positions by showing the usefulness of Foucault (and Judith Butler) to attempts to explain and diagnose the relation of the self to power, and the usefulness of Jürgen Habermas to a forward-looking normative political theory, where these two theoretical strengths need not be incompatible. How, in other words, to integrate a Foucaultian account of subjectivity with a Habermasian account of autonomy?

This is a hugely important problem in contemporary political and feminist philosophy. Allen's book responds to an extensively cultivated – and, to my mind, often rather contrived – schism in critical theory. There is a mutual stand-off between defenders of the context-transcendence of validity-claims (those die-hard Kantians [in philosophy] or Habermasians [in political theory] who frown despairingly over the immanence in which their relativist opponents are mired), and those thinkers who return again and again to the impossibility of a subjectivity outside relations of power (those career poststructuralists who never seem to want to take a position, and offer only critiques of their opponents' political *naïveté*). The considerable 'attitude' that I am implying accompanies these

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fights is, I think, not only a product of intellectual conviction. 'The difficulty that we have in thinking through power and autonomy simultaneously' (21) stems from a number of 'pictures' of the self that hold us captive. In my opinion the book's most significant contribution, taking a bird's-eye view, is to work through close and expert interpretations of the dense and technical *œuvres* of Foucault and Habermas to show in detail how these pictures involve reductive, even stereotypical thinking that need not be attributed to the authors themselves. The *Politics of Our Selves* thereby forces its reader to think hard, and honestly to think through the implications of the glib stand-off between Foucault and Habermas that stands in for a much more meaningful dialogue that we rarely get to have. This is achieved through fantastically attentive scholarship; a deep knowledge of the enormous outputs of several difficult philosophers; and a willingness to turn away from received orthodoxies and popular texts, to look for constructive possibilities instead of posturing.

Let me enumerate two strengths of this book, along the way summarizing its most important claims, before turning to a potential challenge to the argument.

A new Foucault, a new Habermas?

First, Allen offers us one of the finest and most subtle representations of a figure I might call 'the new Foucault'. A quarter-century after the man's death, the new Foucault has a corpus of work with a certain integrity and consistency. He did not radically depart from previous commitments, randomly change philosophical tack, or become a political quietist in mid-life. He is curious about and sensitive to the contributions of those thinkers often cast one-dimensionally as simply his targets – Hegel and Heidegger (and, Allen's point) Kant and Habermas, for example. He is not a crackpot – a queer dilettante with bizarre personal proclivities who joined political bandwagons that his philosophy could not justify; rather he is a humane and serious public intellectual who married philosophy and politics in his life and in his work. And he is not someone who evacuated all meaning from human experience, and, in declaring the death of the subject, denied the possibility or coherence of humans acting, together, to improve their common good. Rather he is precisely a philosopher *of* experience and a critic of our most dehumanizing practices and self-understandings.

Allen offers a textually and philosophically careful justification of one side of this Foucault. She makes an original and important argument for the continuity of his thought around an understanding of the subject that shows unexpected affinity with Kant. Both, she argues, are centrally scholars of philosophical anthropology. On Allen's interpretation of Foucault's Kant, the *Anthropology* – on which Foucault wrote his unpublished *thèse complémentaire* and that he later discusses in *The Order of Things* – actually reveals the historical embeddedness of those categories we take to be a priori, thus showing an implicit self-critique in Kant's own work. As she says,

> . . . what Foucault is calling for is a critique of critique, which means not only a criticism of Kant's project for the way in which it closes off the very opening for thought that it had created but also a critique *in the Kantian sense of the term* – that is, an interrogation of the

limits and conditions of possibility of that which Kant himself took as his own starting point, namely, the transcendental subject. (35)

Nonetheless, this cannot be a critique that simply refuses the transcendental subject: Kant, on Allen's interpretation of Foucault, opens the way to a modern episteme that on some level we must accept. Part of this acceptance, I take Allen to be arguing, includes some notion of autonomy, but it is a far more cautious and modest one than typically deserves the name. Instead of submitting to a universally reasoned obligation to obey the moral law, the Foucauldian subject critically examines all necessities – including this obligation itself. Autonomy is thus the capacity by which we reveal our own contingency and our unfreedom, and iteratively so. And our contingency is found in our historical and cultural locations, and cannot be understood outside relations of power, rendering Foucault's 'autonomous' subject fully situated rather than transcendental. This 'permanent critique of ourselves' presupposes autonomy – and to be hailed by that self-understanding we must see ourselves as part of a post-Kantian episteme – but also cultivates it.

I see Allen here as part of a trend to leave behind platitudes and orthodoxies about Foucault's proclamation of the death of the subject and its allegedly negative consequences for politics. She convincingly argues that, contra Habermas' own claim that Foucault treats Kant contradictorily, there is a consistency and sympathy in Foucault's corpus for Kant's project. This is another way of saying that there is no radical rupture between the different phases of his work – especially the genealogical and the ethical. To show this, Allen goes through one of the most careful accounts I have read anywhere of what Foucault actually thinks power is in its relation to the individual. In this part of the book she masterfully pulls together reference to Foucault's books, interviews and lectures across his lifetime.

So what can autonomy be for Foucault? According to Allen, it is the capacity to engage in critique – particularly of the forms of subjection that constitute our individuality within larger systems of government. So her argument about autonomy repeats and extends the argument about subjectivity. As we participate in articulating the genealogy of our own subjectivity, we develop our autonomy in two senses. First: 'For Foucault, autonomy ... consists in freely calling into question that which is presented to us as necessary, thus opening up the space for a possible transgression of those limits that turn out to be both contingent and linked to objectionable forms of constraint' (65). Second, this form of critique reveals to us the impurity of practical reason. We see our inherited understanding of our own rationality as potentially responsible for its own excesses and transgressions, and as having a form with its own constitutive exclusions. What is outside practical reason? Madness, for one thing, which is the point of Foucault's lifelong fascination with the psy- disciplines and their characterization of unreason – a point to which I shall return.

All of this leaves the question: even as we engage in critique and use technologies of the self to transform our situated selves, how can we possibly distinguish those moments in which we are doing something resistant and empowering, and those in which we are simply repeating the imperatives of discipline? Here, Allen's Foucault runs out of ideas. Because he defines power as always strategic, Allen

suggests, he cannot pick out social relations that are communicative and reciprocal. Enter Habermas.

As a second strength of the book I want to suggest that Allen makes Habermas more responsive and more modest than even he knew he could be. The problem from which Allen starts is how individuals socialized in the lifeworld can be autonomous – in the sense of having 'the capacity to take up reflective distance on one's beliefs, activities, norm-governed actions, and existential life projects' (98). The lifeworld is that background of shared understandings against which our more overtly reflective and public processes happen, and it includes the typically tacit and unreflective practices through which we become gendered subjects. If we see dominance and subordination as embedded in the ways we become gendered, then to see the forms of communicative action we learn in the lifeworld as even potentially free from power – as transparent and unforced instances of reciprocity – is to radically underestimate the formative role of gendered relations of power in subjectivity. Indeed, if Butler is right we may be attached to our gendered subjectivities for our intelligibility even as they are part of a larger lifeworld that is power-laden 'all the way down'. Thus we will never be autonomous with regard to the contents of our lifeworld, which is a serious problem for Habermas. Through painstaking interpretive work, Allen reveals a Habermas who is sensitive to Nietzschean critique of moral norms, but who needs to maintain a kind of political denial of the psychic costs of *assujettissement*.

In the most complex chapter of the book, Allen brings together her work on Foucault and this view of Habermas, to argue that Habermas' philosophy cannot incorporate a Foucauldian account of *assujettissement* without rethinking the distinction between power and validity (125), which in turn challenges Habermas' view of autonomy. This can be accomplished, she argues, with only a modicum of interpretive tweaking. Instead of joining the old Foucault in giving up on the possibility of autonomy, or joining the unreconstructed Habermas in asserting the context transcendence of validity-claims, Allen outlines a third, 'impure', contextualist view. On this view, which she articulates with help from Maeve Cooke and Thomas McCarthy, normative ideals – including the ideal of context-transcending validity – are all real, phenomenal, grounded in a specific time and place, but are nonetheless (indeed, *therefore*) necessary to our moral life, and motivating. Allen's contextualism thus 'emphasizes [with Habermas] our need both to posit context-transcending ideals and [with Foucault] to continually unmask their status as illusions rooted in interest and power-laden contexts' (148).

By the end of chapter six, then, the reader is rewarded with both a more reasonable Foucault and a less rationalist Habermas. Allen's extraordinary patience and faith in her intellectual project thus yield the surprising conclusion that, at this point, they meet in the middle. I needed 150 pages to be persuaded that this could possibly be true. But I think I am persuaded – at least on Allen's own terms. The aspects of the book I want to discuss further, then, concern the extent to which both Foucault and Habermas, as they are represented here, may remain unable to grasp the constitution of gendered subjectivity that provides a political counterpoint in *The Politics of Our Selves*.

Theory, practice and the gendered self

Towards the beginning of her chapter on Butler, Allen quotes Sandra Bartky's laconic remark that a feminism that shows the constitution of individual women through norms of femininity that they simultaneously criticize, might be 'a theory . . . for which there is no effective practice' (73). Bartky makes the comment in the context of recounting an anecdote: an enthusiastic and admiring student compliments her teaching of a class on 'sex roles', before adding, 'and you do all this without sacrificing your femininity'. Bartky is dismayed: her critical feminist work on the very concept of femininity, it seems, has had little consequence for her self-presentation. As a teacher she is 'generally warm and nurturant', even 'seductive', and she typically chooses silk blouses, skirts, and jewelry over 'fatigues and combat boots'. Is there a tension, she wonders, between writing polemics against femininity and having a feminine comportment? And how could she, in practice, resolve this tension?[1] This gap between theory and practice is a leitmotif for the whole of *The Politics of Our Selves*, and I would like to hear more from Allen about the practice part of it. To fully grasp Bartky's problem we need to go back to Allen's reading of Butler.

Allen attributes to Butler the view that we become passionately attached to "'identities' that require our own subjection. Given Butler's extra-Foucaultian psychoanalytic commitment to the necessity of attachment for effective subject-development of any kind, we would rather continue to be subjugated than suffer the loss of identity that comes with lack of attachment. Allen goes on to argue that Butler conflates dependency with subordination, failing to allow for the possibility of dependency relations that are normatively neutral, or for forms of non-subordinating mutual recognition. If these are conceptually possible, then non-subordinating relations to one's own *assujettissement* are also possible. Thus there is a real-life escape (in theory) from the endless round of pointing out the mechanisms of our own ambivalent and politically damaging attachments – including I suppose to the kind of attachment to femininity that Bartky gestures towards.

Indeed, Allen concludes her chapter on Butler by asking, 'How can members of subordinated groups form nonsubordinating or at least less oppressive attachments?' The answer is: 'by drawing on the resources of social and political movements that create alternative modes of attachment and structures of social recognition"' (93). But there are only a couple of pages of very general elaboration of what this suggestion would actually look like in practice. Allen seems to have reiterated the problem Bartky described, providing an even richer theoretical analysis of it, including a *theoretical* possibility for undercutting it, but without any accompanying practice. In one way this is not a criticism so much as a suggestion for a follow-up book with a more empirical, political bent – one showing how this theory might be 'applied'. However, in another way it can be posed as a criticism internal to Allen's text, which itself privileges theoretical articulations of problems that are arguably not reducible to communicative action, no matter how cautiously described.

As Allen runs through a demanding archive to make her case for the rapprochement between Habermas and Foucault, my own ongoing mental mutter was 'But what is the practice?' Perhaps both Foucault and Habermas, on Allen's interpretations, are thinkers

without a practice. Habermas, Allen suggests, cannot help reintroducing the transcendental subject and the gap between it and the empirical world, even though she has tried to talk him out of it. His emphasis on language, to borrow from Seyla Benhabib's critique as Allen describes it, persistently underestimates the significance of affective, embodied and unconscious features of the lifeworld. Does Allen's Habermas have anything to say to Bartky about her attachment to an embodied, aesthetically normative femininity? I have been thinking about how the concept of a context-transcending ideal that recognizes its own parochialism would help with this problem, and I am not sure the dilemma can be translated into that vernacular at all.

Foucault, on the other hand, is a different political animal. He endlessly describes practices of power and their constitution of the subject, but even for diehard Foucaultians it is often difficult to see how his work can move us forward, politically speaking. It certainly cannot do so programmatically; it probably can do so only through provocation – making us think ourselves differently and indirectly moving us to act against practices we newly understand as potential objects of critique. There is a large literature on Foucault's relation to political life, including strong responses to the once-popular suggestion that he is a political quietist; my personal favorites are David Halperin's *Saint Foucault*, and Ladelle McWhorter's *Bodies and Pleasures*.[2] These books, however, do not focus on a Foucault who is committed to deploying Enlightenment ideals, even transformed ones. They are interested in how to live a political life through deviant sexual subjectivity, how to challenge discursive orders of reason and unreason, how to open political space for subjects who have been excluded from communicative action. They are precisely not concerned with appropriating norms of reason, even with a self-conscious sense of their own immanence. Thus I think there might be a Foucault who could prove useful to Bartky, but it does not seem to be Allen's Foucault.

It is not a coincidence that Bartky's original dilemma comes up in the context of teaching: what to think (what to *do*?) as a feminist teacher? Reading Foucault, Butler and Habermas through Allen has provided us with a very sophisticated apparatus for thinking about this dilemma, but I am not sure it has provided any real sense of how to go on. It is not that we need an argumentative prescription for Bartky. Rather we need to enter a world of aesthetic expression, of risky and uncertain experimental politics, of self-undoing, which does not seem to have a lot to do with Allen's argument. This becomes even clearer when in her conclusion Allen discusses Joan Jacobs Brumberg's reflections on her own feminist students' poor body image. These students feel intensely guilty and ashamed of their own failure to conform closely enough to standards of attractiveness, *and* know that their own self-beratement as well as the standards themselves are a political problem (180–3). Again, we have a theoretical articulation of an embodied problem that involves affective economies and unconscious investments that the norms of rationality Allen theorizes do not seem to touch.

In bringing Habermas and Foucault together on the issue of how our ideals of reason might be more modestly deployed, Allen thus seems to me to evade the problematic that is her primary political example. I shall try to say more about what I mean through a suggestion about how to read Foucault differently. Foucault is concerned not only with

continuing, albeit in a transformed way, the Enlightenment project. As Allen acknowledges, he is also concerned with showing what it excludes – and often excludes violently. I mentioned earlier that, for Foucault, madness is practical reason's constitutive exclusion. In my view, Allen has Foucault focusing too much on what lies within the boundary of reason – all the while professing its contingency, admittedly – in the interests of bringing him into line with a chastened Habermas. But so much of Foucault's *oeuvre* is preoccupied with madness, and with his critique of the psy- disciplines – a preoccupation that can also be interpreted as the suggestion that we should understand unreason, too, as part of (the politics of) our selves.

This is of course a completely paradoxical and impossible suggestion. Even writing of madness is contradictory. As Lynne Huffer puts it, 'to explain unreason or make it speak is to betray unreason with reason's language about madness. . . . The modern subject who wants to know unreason is thus caught in this ethico-historical paradox: to recuperate, in language, the truths of the past is to betray unreason and the alterity of history.' Nonetheless, Huffer argues, Foucault is deeply interested in the subject's transgression of its own limits, including through our experience of madness. 'Becoming-other is thus a process of stripping away the structures of thought that produce reason and madness: an unlearning or releasing of the rationalist subject.'[3] I cannot explore this point further here. But it is not a possibility that surfaces in Allen's Foucault, in part because his view is developed through a careful, analytic style that makes his work theoretically coherent and propositionally fully contained. One can hardly make this a criticism of a brilliantly clear monograph in philosophy. But it does show something about the persistently theoretical nature of the argument – an argument whose limits will not be found in the reasoned language that constitutes it, but in practices that show its violence.

That is why, as Allen points out, Habermas is interested in Nietzsche but must reject the latter's conclusions about the will to power without really doing more than asserting his own position that critique requires normative discrimination (120). And why, as Allen points out in the same passage, Habermas is 'utterly unwilling to acknowledge the psychic costs involved in socialization' (121). The cost we are most interested in here is the cost of gender – a set of relations that are constitutively violent in their creation and in their ongoing effects. As Allen concludes her later detour through an empirical literature on child development, 'the idea of gender as a narrative and the related assumption of a nongendered core self that has the ability to autonomously choose whether and how to take up gender narratives are implausible' (168). So, really, what does *The Politics of Our Selves* do to help us with the problem of theory and practice in feminism? Allen's analysis of gendered subjectivity – which, by the way, I think is right – seems to happen mostly outside the frame of the rapprochement between Foucault and Habermas on autonomy. So it is not just that I would very much like Allen to write another book that develops her final four paragraphs into another 200 pages. I am also interested in what cannot be represented theoretically in the language of autonomy and selfhood that Allen deploys, but circulates as a set of anxieties about 'theory and practice' or reasoned discourse versus affect, embodiment, the unconscious. On Allen's own analysis, the experience of gender cannot be brought within the contingent account of reason she defends.

Indeed, why is not Allen's critique of Benhabib's narrative conception of the self a strike against her own objections to Butler? Selves are gendered through 'the child's subjugation to the power of the parent in the context of heterosexist and patriarchal family structures and the gendered nature of language' (171), which are prior to any actual development of a narrative self, Allen shows. So Benhabib's project retains a 'rationalist core' in its belief that a pre-existing self can take up (or refuse) a gender narrative. If our subjectivity is 'always already' gendered, then, and gender for us is constituted in 'heterosexist and patriarchal family structures', how can there be, as Allen counterposes to Butler, dependency relations that are non-subordinating? Allen explores this latter possibility through a reading of Butler's more recent work (an essay in *Precarious Life* and the book *Giving an Account of Oneself*) and Jessica Benjamin's account of mutual recognition. Allen clearly thinks that Butler retains an a priori commitment to the psychic destructiveness of intersubjective relations, which she contrasts with Benjamin's more positive view in order to conclude that:

> We could agree with ... Butler that there is no outside to power, in the sense that there is no possible human social world from which power has been completely eliminated, without denying that moments of mutual recognition remain possible within ongoing, dynamically unfolding, social relationships. (91)

In the part of the chapter on Butler where Allen develops this possibility (85–92), however, talk of gender completely drops away. The language is maximally abstract: 'the subject', 'our sociality', 'the psyche', and so on, are invoked without any specific relationships at all being considered. Although Allen goes on to suggest that 'members of oppressed groups' can 'resist regulatory regimes by providing new modes of recognition, new possibilities for attachment, and thus new ways of becoming subjects' (93), it is not clear to me how this would be possible in practice, especially given the critique of Benhabib at the end of the book. The choosing selves that resist the regulatory regime of gender in order to create new spaces for recognition are the same selves formed under the heterosexist and patriarchal conditions to which Allen also alludes. The temporality of the self is probably important here: there is a difference between childhood psychic formation and the capacity in adulthood to reflect on and transform it, including through political participation. But there is not anything in Allen's analysis of gender, writ large, that actually shows how Bartky's initial dilemma can be approached.

Exactly halfway through her book, Allen asks rhetorically, 'What good, we might wonder, is a theory that fails to line up with our practice? What good is a theory for which, indeed, there may be no possible practice? And, conversely, what good is a political practice that cannot be adequately explained and justified by our best theories?' (92). Even if these questions remain unresolved, they have been rendered very much more complex and compelling by *The Politics of Our Selves*. I hope that Amy Allen's next work will take them up so that I can continue to learn from her outstanding scholarship.

Recognition, reason and politics: A reply to Borradori and Heyes

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It is a great pleasure to have the opportunity to respond to the thoughtful and insightful critical readings of *The Politics of Our Selves: Power, Autonomy, and Gender in Contemporary Critical Theory* offered by Cressida Heyes and Giovanna Borradori. As an author, I simply could not have asked for more generous readers. More than once, in reading their laudatory assessments of the book's accomplishments, I thought to myself: did my book do *that*? I am particularly grateful for the way in which both Heyes and Borradori begin their articles by clarifying, in somewhat different ways, the theoretical stakes of the Foucault/Habermas debate and acknowledging the high degree of difficulty involved in bringing these two theoretical *oeuvres* into a fruitful conversation. Taken together, the two articles also raise deep and important concerns and questions about the position that I stake out in the book, all of which merit further reflection. In what follows, I fear that I will be unable to address fully all of their criticisms and concerns. I will have to content myself with focusing on what I take to be the central issues raised by their critiques, and, in some cases, a response that gestures toward my attempt to address certain concerns in my current and future work will have to suffice.

Heyes and Borradori do such a wonderful job of reconstructing the main claims and arguments of my book that there is no need for me to repeat that task here. Indeed, I am not sure that I could do it so well as either of them did. Nevertheless, it might be helpful for me to start by articulating what I take to be the three main aims of the book. The first, *interpretive*, aim is to intervene in the Foucault/Habermas debate and its feminist iteration, the Butler/Benhabib debate, challenging superficial misunderstandings on both sides and developing readings of both thinkers that show there to be more middle ground between them than is typically assumed. In line with this goal, I aim both to correct certain misreadings of Foucault that have been influential in the critical theory and also feminist literature on his work, and to develop a contextualist account of Habermas' notion of autonomy that is compatible with a Foucaultian conception of power and subjection. The second, *conceptual*, aim is to use this interpretive recasting to rethink the relationship between subjection and autonomy, in a way that allows us to understand

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individuals as both constituted through relations of power and yet still capable of autonomy in the relevant sense. With regard to this conceptual question, the case of gendered subjectivity serves as my focal point. And the third, *practical-political*, aim is to say something about how this conceptual account of the relationship between subjection and autonomy might be put to practical use in feminist politics.

With the benefits of hindsight in part as a result of the insightful criticisms raised by sympathetic and sharp-eyed interlocutors such as Heyes and Borradori, my own assessment is that the book accomplishes the first aim rather well and at least makes significant progress on the second. It is, however, least satisfying with respect to the third aim. My sense of this is confirmed by my reading of Heyes' and Borradori's articles, for both of them focus much more of their attention on the conceptual and practical aims of the book than on its interpretive claims.[4] And although it would be an oversimplification to suggest that these three threads can be fully disentangled – either in my book or in their articles – I hope it is not too controversial to say that Borradori's comment focuses more on the conceptual aims of the project while Heyes' focuses on the practical-political aims. Hence, I shall take up their criticisms and questions in that order.

Recognition and ambivalence

After a beautiful reconstruction of my readings of Foucault, Habermas and Benhabib, Giovanna Borradori focuses her critical attention on my discussion of recognition in relation to my critical reading of Butler in chapter four. Quite rightly, I think, she sees this discussion as a crucial hinge for the book as a whole, in a way that will be explained in a moment. Also rightly, she suggests that the details of my own account of recognition are not worked out fully or clearly enough in the book. Hence, she raises a series of three questions, with the intent of pushing me to clarify my understanding of mutual recognition 'both substantively and epistemically' (above, p. 750). Before taking up these three questions in turn, I will first briefly reconstruct the account of recognition offered in chapter four and attempt to clarify its role in the broader argument of the book.

The account of mutual recognition that I develop on the basis of my reading of the exchange between Judith Butler and Jessica Benjamin is a hinge for the whole book in the sense that it is an attempt to articulate something that I find missing in Foucault's work: namely, an account of the role that non-strategic relations with others play in the constitution of autonomous selves. This idea also plays a crucial role in my attempts to address practical questions about feminist politics, about which more below. However, in order to be consistent with the Foucault-inspired criticisms of Habermas presented later in the book, I cannot endorse an account of recognition that posits a state of pure mutual recognition that exists beyond or outside of all power relations.[5] The challenge, then, is to offer an account of recognition as a normative concept that is compatible with the Foucaultian conception of power that I defend.

For this task, I find Jessica Benjamin's account of recognition useful. As I understand it, Benjamin's notion of mutual recognition as a permanent but also temporally fleeting and inherently unstable possibility within human social relationships provides some content to the normative idea of non-strategic social relationships that are constitutive of our autonomy but is nevertheless compatible with the basically Foucaultian assumptions,

which Butler and I share, about the ineliminable role that power plays in constituting subjects and our social relations. This is because Benjamin understands destruction – and the relations of domination that are created and sustained by human destructiveness – as the necessary and ineradicable other side of recognition.[6] Hence, on her view, destructiveness and the domination to which it gives rise can never be finally overcome, but nor is such an overcoming necessary for achieving moments of mutual recognition within social relationships. The key to understanding this is to temporalize one's understanding of recognition, to view recognition and destruction as features of temporally unfolding, dynamic relationships. On the basis of this idea, we can, as I wrote in the book, 'agree with Foucault and Butler that there is no outside to power, in the sense that there is no possible human social world from which power has been completely eliminated, without denying that *moments* of mutual recognition remain possible within ongoing, dynamically unfolding, social relationships' (*Politics of Our Selves*, p. 91). The thought here is that mutual recognition understood in this dynamic conception sense is integral to (but not coextensive with) the intersubjective, social constitution of autonomous selves, and to their practical renegotiation within collective social and political movements. Moreover, these moments of recognition can provide an immanent, inner-worldly normative reference point for critique. Understood in this way, an embrace of a normative conception of recognition does not commit one to a belief in the problematic notion of a state of pure and power-free mutual recognition.

While Borradori seems sympathetic to this Benjamin-inspired account, she nonetheless raises three challenges to it. The first challenge concerns my critical reading of Butler, which charges Butler with a fundamental ambivalence about the notion of recognition. While Butler at times seems implicitly to rely on a normative conception of recognition for some of her own critical reflections and interventions, she also has a tendency to view recognition skeptically, as a vehicle for subordination. In her more skeptical moments, she locates the possibility of genuine resistance outside of the logic of recognition altogether; hence, she talks of resistance as risking unrecognizability.[7] In response to my charge of ambivalence, Borradori points to some of Butler's more recent work, and asks whether her recent reflections on the relationship between recognition, vulnerability and precariousness provide the basis for a different reading.[8] Borradori suggests that Butler's 'ambivalence is not a principled position but the genuine posing of a question for which she has not yet found an answer' (above, p. 751).

When the point is put this way, however, I am not sure that there is any disagreement between Borradori and me. I did not intend to suggest that Butler's ambivalence about recognition is a principled position that she adopts. On the contrary, I suggested that this ambivalence might be the result of an unacknowledged tension between her progressive political commitments and her theoretical adherence to a rather pessimistic and one-sided understanding of human sociality.[9] Regardless of whether one characterizes this aspect of Butler's work as an unanswered question or as an unacknowledged ambivalence, it nevertheless still seems to me that Benjamin's more ambivalent account of intersubjectivity – her acknowledgement that intersubjectivity is always already and necessarily structured by ongoing, temporally unfolding relationships of recognition and destruction – is both more plausible and less one-sided than the account that Butler offers in *The Psychic Life of Power* and in her critique of Benjamin.[10]

Moreover, Benjamin's view also provides the conceptual basis for an important practical-political point, one that Butler's work consistently fails to illuminate: namely, the role that collective social and political movements play in individual and collective resistance to and transformation of systems of subordination. Collective social and political movements are not only made possible by some sort of non-strategic, recognition-based mode of social interaction – what Hannah Arendt called simply power, but I have elsewhere called power-with[11] – they also generate alternative modes and spaces of recognition that can affectively and psychically sustain individuals in their ongoing struggles to resist subordinating norms. This is not to say that collective social movements are pure spaces that are free from struggles for power in the strategic sense. Rather, it is to say that without moments of recognition of others that enable us, as Benjamin puts it, to 'perceive commonality through difference',[12] such movements would not be possible. Theorizing this aspect of politics requires going beyond Butler's ambivalence and affirming a normative conception of recognition. Doing so does not, however, as Butler seems to suspect, commit one to an untenable utopian view of a form of human social life devoid of strategic power relations.

Borradori's second question has to do with the conception of agency that serves as the groundwork for Butler's discussion of vulnerability and recognition. Borradori asks: 'Is Butler's claim relying on a kind of hyperbolic ethics in the Levinasian mold, one that privileges an interpretation of agency as responsiveness to the vulnerability of the other? Or does it fit the Foucaultian reversal of the Kantian conception of agency as autonomy?' (751). I take it that behind or underneath this question is an implicit criticism. In *The Politics of Our Selves*, I tend to read Butler as a feminist-Foucaultian, but perhaps, Borradori suggests, this is a misreading or at least an overly simplistic one. Not only that, but perhaps the other theoretical sources for Butler's conception of agency might push her thought in directions that I do not want to follow?

In response to this challenge, I admit that Borradori is quite right to point out that Butler's conception of agency is clearly inspired in important ways not only by her reading of Foucault, but also by her readings of Levinas, of psychoanalysis, of Derrida, and others. I also grant that there are interesting and important contrasts between Foucaultian and Levinasian conceptions of intersubjectivity. While Levinas views intersubjectivity as marked by a fundamental and necessary asymmetry that generates an infinite ethical demand to the Other who founds my subjectivity, Foucault understands intersubjectivity (or as he would probably prefer to say: social relations) as a mobile and unstable field of force relations that are, in all but the most extreme cases of domination, constantly shifting and being reconfigured. Reflecting on this contrast, one might suggest that the Foucaultian and Levinasian theoretical commitments underlying Butler's more recent work push her in different directions: the former toward a trenchant moral skepticism grounded in the belief that all social relations are also power relations and that subjects are constituted by power and the latter toward a phenomenology of the moral that views my ethical debt to the Other as constitutive of who I am. If this thought is compelling, then it may be that Butler's ambivalence about recognition is not – or not only – the result of a tension between her progressive political aims and her theoretical commitments, as I suggested above and in the book. Perhaps it is also the result of a tension between two deeply held but not obviously compatible theoretical commitments.

Although it is not easy to see how these two strands of Butler's thought can be brought together, it is interesting to note that both Levinas and Foucault would agree, I think, though perhaps in different ways and for different reasons, with a claim that is fundamental to the argument of *The Politics of Our Selves*: that heteronomy is the condition of possibility of autonomy.

But whatever problems might arise as the result of Butler's allegiance to these competing theoretical frameworks in her recent work, I think that they are hers, and not mine. Although it is certainly worth noticing the theoretical commitments underlying Butler's very interesting and provocative recent reflections on agency, I do not think that anything I have argued in *The Politics of Our Selves* commits me to taking these on board. In fact, one implication of the argument of my book, if that argument is compelling, might be this: Butler did not need to turn to Levinas to provide an ethical grounding for her conceptions of agency and sociality; she could just as well have turned to Habermas, and doing so might have allowed her to avoid some of the thorny conceptual issues discussed above. No doubt turning to Habermas rather than Levinas would have generated thorny conceptual problems of its own, but the central argument of my book is that these conceptual problems can be overcome.

Borradori's final question concerns the epistemic status of recognition within my critical-theoretical model. She astutely points out an apparent tension between two kinds of claims I make on behalf of the normative status of mutual recognition. At one point in the text (*Politics of Our Selves*, p. 179), I characterize it as an ideal immanent within social life, whereas elsewhere (ibid., p. 88), I suggest that it is a regulative ideal. Borradori presses me to explain what I mean by saying that mutual recognition is an ideal immanent in social life, and to clarify whether this is, in my view, different from saying that it is regulative ideal. If it is different, then which view do I actually hold? And how do either of these ideas fit together with my claim – following Jessica Benjamin – that recognition is best understood not as a state but instead as 'part of the temporal dynamic in which human relationships constantly unfold' (Borradori, p. 752)? And, finally, is the idea of recognition as an ideal – whether immanent to social life or regulative – the best way to go? Perhaps, Borradori suggests, the Derridean idea of a trace – 'the trace of a promise that has never been exhaustively fulfilled or realized' (ibid., p. 752) – would better serve the project of critical theory, inasmuch as it would enable us to avoid the risk of 'crystallizing' and 'essentializing' the value of recognition, hence, robbing it of its critical force (ibid., p. 752). Borradori suggests that this Derridian formulation would enable us to theorize recognition 'as an event rather than a paradigm' (ibid., p. 753) in a way that captures its historicity and its embodied nature.

How one answers this line of questioning will obviously depend a great deal on how one understands the notion of a regulative idea(l). Borradori is quite right to point out that I do not spell this out clearly enough in the context of my discussion of recognition, nor do I explain what this has to do with my suggestion that the norm of mutual recognition is immanent within social life. These failings notwithstanding, I think that the conceptual basis for a response to these questions can be found within my book itself, specifically, in the discussion in chapter six of context-transcend*ing* (rather than context-transcend*ent*) claims to normative validity. There, following Maeve Cooke and Thomas McCarthy, I argue that truth and normative validity-claims should be

understood not as actually transcending their context (as Habermas tends to suggest) but rather as aiming toward transcendence. The former construal of the notion of validity implicitly appeals to a point of view beyond or outside of all contexts, a place free of the distortions of power relations. Construing validity as context-transcending, by contrast, enables us to view normative ideals – such as a normative conception of mutual recognition – as *immanent within* human social life but nevertheless *aiming toward* transcendence. The key move here is to locate the tension between the real and the ideal, the immanent and the transcendent, within the social world. Although I could have made this point clearer in the book, this notion of context-transcending validity can be understood, following Thomas McCarthy, as a pragmatized and historicized version of Kant's notion of a regulative idea.[13] On this way of understanding it, however, there is no incompatibility between a regulative idea and an ideal immanent within social life. Precisely the point is to acknowledge the force of our normative ideals while at the same time understanding them as inextricably rooted in our social practices and forms of life, which is to say, in relations of power. Theorizing normativity and validity in this way does not, I think, require us to view our ideals – of recognition, say – as essentialized or crystallized 'abstract constructs' (above, p. 752). Rather, I suspect that the pragmatized, temporalized and, though I do not describe it in quite this way in the book, necessarily future-oriented understanding of the Habermasian notion of context-transcendence that I defend in chapter six may be compatible with Borradori's Derridean suggestion, though showing that this is the case will have to wait for another occasion.

The politics of *The Politics of Our Selves*

Whereas Borradori focuses her commentary on conceptual questions concerning my understanding of mutual recognition and the role that this concept plays in my critical-theoretical framework, Heyes devotes the bulk of her critical attention to the third, practical-political aim of the book. Framing her critique in terms of the gap between theory and practice in the text, Heyes is unsatisfied with my brief reflections in the conclusion on how gendered modes of subjection can be transformed through expanded literary and cultural imaginaries and the new spaces of recognition generated by collective social movements. Even more worrisome, Heyes raises the possibility that the theoretical framework that I have reconstructed through my readings of Foucault and Habermas is *incapable* of addressing the practical-political problems about resistance to and transformation of gendered subjection that motivated me to develop that framework in the first place. Perhaps, Heyes suggests, I have unwittingly offered a theory of gendered subjection and its relation to autonomy for which there is no possible feminist political practice.

   Heyes locates the source of the problem in my focus on ideals or norms of reason. However modestly deployed and self-conscious of their own immanence these ideals or norms may be in my account, Heyes suggests that my focus on norms of reason causes me 'to evade the problematic that is [its] primary political example' (Heyes, p. 759). Following Heyes, we could call this problematic 'Bartky's dilemma', where the dilemma consists in an ongoing attachment to and investment in normative femininity even after the crucial role that norms of femininity play in maintaining and upholding gender

subordination has been unmasked. The question is not just how to *think* about this dilemma, but also what to *do*, how to go on in the face of it. Although Heyes grants that I have provided 'a very sophisticated apparatus for thinking about this dilemma' she worries that I have not offered 'any real sense of how to go on' (p. 758). What is needed is not a theoretical re–articulation of norms of rationality but instead some account of a politics that can unsettle and undo 'the affective economies and unconscious invest-ments' (p. 758) that trap women in Bartky's dilemma in the first place.

This worry leads Heyes to gesture toward a different reading of Foucault, one that focuses on unreason, as that which is constitutively excluded, often violently, by norms and ideals of practical reason. On this view, Foucaultian politics would consist not in appropriating norms of reason but in challenging and transgressing them, including transgressing the very limits of the rational subject. Such a reading of Foucault is more amenable to feminism, in Heyes' view, because it allows us to rethink the opposition between reasoned discourse and its others – affect, embodiment, the unconscious – as both gendered and a key mechanism through which gender difference is constructed and maintained. But rethinking these oppositions in relation to the production of gender requires, for Heyes, going beyond the 'contingent account of reason' that I defend (p. 760).

As Heyes notes, I do attempt to address worries about the relationship between theory and practice in the conclusion to the book, where I elaborate two potential social sources that might enable individuals to transform not only how we think about gender, sex and normative femininity, but also our affective and libidinal investments in current gender arrangements despite the role they play in ongoing gender subordination. Heyes is quite right to claim that that discussion is too brief and schematic to fully address Bartky's dilemma – in hindsight, I can now see this as a weakness of the book. However, I am unwilling to concede – if indeed this is what Heyes is suggesting – that there is no pos-sible practice that could go along with the theoretical position staked out in my book. I am also reluctant to follow Heyes' suggested alternative reading of Foucault – at least on a certain, strongly romantic, interpretation of it. Hence I will take the opportunity here to say a bit more about what I see as the kind of practices that go along with my theoretical account of the relationship between subjection and autonomy, before concluding with some thoughts on the relationship between power, gender and reason.

The key question raised by Bartky's dilemma is this: how can members of subordi-nated groups constitute themselves in less subordinating ways? As I see it, there are two, interrelated, components to this question. The first involves identifying certain norms, practices, institutions, forms of life, modes of attachment, structures of subjectivity, and so on, as subordinating, and certain concrete alternatives as less so. For this task, we need some sort of normative framework, and in order to function critically, such a framework cannot be arbitrary but rather must be justified through appeal to practical reason(s). In light of the tendency of normative frameworks and conceptions of reason to function in normalizing, exclusionary and oppressive ways, our conception of practical reason must, as I argued throughout *The Politics of Our Selves*, be a modest and self-consciously con-tingent one, an account that acknowledges the fundamental impurity of practical reason.

The second component has to do with the more practical question of how subordi-nated individuals can constitute themselves as selves in less subordinating ways.[14]

Although I have no plans at the moment to write the follow-up book that Heyes asks me to write, I can say a bit more here to show how the suggestions offered at the end of the book might be developed further. In the conclusion to *The Politics of Our Selves*, I suggest that social and political movements and cultural and social imaginaries can provide resources for individual projects of self-transformation.[15] The thought is that social movements and cultural imaginaries can generate not only conceptual and normative (i.e. broadly speaking, rational) but also psychic and affective resources that enable subordinated individuals to reconstitute themselves in less subordinating ways.

As an example of the former, consider Jane Mansbridge's account of the ways in which social movements like the feminist movement create possibilities for the micro-negotiation of gendered relations of power.[16] Mansbridge tells the story of a woman that she interviewed in New York City who was engaged in a conflict with her husband over the gender division of paid and unpaid labor in their household. She had recently taken a job as a teacher's assistant in order to help out the family financially, but found, to her dismay, that this did not change her husband's expectations for how the domestic labor within the household would be divided up. The woman relayed the following story to Mansbridge:

> Well, I love to cook – I really do – but I like to cook a big meal – from so many years of cooking. And I made a big meal one night – the works! Ham and muffins and all. And he went over to the table and went, 'Yup, forgot the mustard!' … And I had been working about six months and that enraged me so much. And he went into the living room and picked up the paper. And – it's probably the strongest stand I ever took – I stood over him and said: 'I bring the medical and dental benefits into this house; you get the mustard!'[17]

As Mansbridge observes, the woman who tells this story makes no explicit references to the conceptual vocabularies developed in the second wave feminist movement. And yet, feminist ideals of equality, of empowerment and of the unfair burdens of the gender division of labor 'served as conceptual and normative resources in the negotiations she carried on within herself and with others'.[18] Not only that, but the feeling of empowerment that she gained through her new understanding of situation made her angry, and that anger gave her the courage and strength that she needed to renegotiate her gendered sense of herself and what she was entitled to.

As an example of the latter, consider the classic radical feminist novel from 1976, Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*. The book offers two starkly contrasting pictures of social reality: a dystopian vision of New York City in the 1970s and a possible utopian future, 150 years hence, in a society called Mattapoisett. The protagonist of the novel, Connie Ramos, is a Latina who has been subjected to the harsh disciplinary power of the state: labeled a child abuser, she has her child taken away from her, and judged to be insane, she is placed in a mental hospital and held there against her will. There she begins receiving regular visits from Luciente, an inhabitant of that future world. Hence, Connie is the woman 'on the edge of time', caught between the dismal present and a possible future, and part of the genius of the novel is that the reader is never quite sure whether the visitor from the future is real or a figment of Connie's imagination. Be that as it may, the future presented in the novel is a feminist utopia in which gender, racial

and class hierarchies have been radically transformed. The level of detail of Piercy's vision of what is required for a world beyond gender subordination is especially striking. In Mattapoisett, language has been radically reimagined, such that there are no more gendered pronouns, and everyone is referred to simply as 'per', which is short for person. Child-bearing and reproduction have been debiologized, and are now done via mechanical wombs. The nuclear family has been abolished, and children are raised communally, by groups of several pers, in order to break the stranglehold that the nuclear family has on the reproduction of gender norms. Norms of gender performance have been transformed, such that there are no outwardly visible signs of gender difference in terms of style of dress, hairstyle, make-up, or of bodily comportment. This novel presents a radical feminist imaginary that offers a vision of new ways of speaking and thinking, new modes of embodiment, and new possibilities for institutional structures, all of which can serve as inspiration for individual practices of self-transformation (even as the novel was no doubt also inspired in part by such practices within the feminist movement at the time it was written).

My point in offering these two examples is not to suggest that either of them constitutes an unproblematic or obvious example of or blueprint for 'successful' self-transformation in the face of gender subordination. Nor is it to pretend that the brief sketch of these two examples serves as a full answer to Heyes' critique. Rather, my point is to try to make plausible my response to Heyes' challenge, which is to say that there is nothing about my theoretical analysis of the politics of our selves that makes the practical-political questions raised by Bartky's dilemma unanswerable. I agree with Heyes that answering the question of how to go on in the face of the realization that one is attached to norms of femininity that one knows to be subordinating means entering the world 'of risky and uncertain experimental politics, of self-undoing' (above, p. 758). But, as I see it, social and political movements and cultural and literary imaginaries open up spaces and provide resources for such experimental politics and practices of self-undoing. They imagine and generate new critical vocabularies, alternative modes of recognition and experimental bodily practices. Hence, they provide not only conceptual and normative but also psychic and affective resources for both the deconstruction and the reconstruction of modes of subjectivity and embodiment, both (critical) self-undoing and (less subordinating) self-doings.

To be sure, one might still wonder, are these gestures toward collective social movements and radical imaginaries sufficient to enable us to distinguish between genuine transformation, on the one hand, and the reinscription of existing relations of subordination or the creation of new forms thereof, on the other? After all, as Heyes notes, 'the choosing selves that resist the regulatory regime of gender in order to create new spaces of recognition are the same selves formed under the heterosexist and patriarchal conditions to which Allen also alludes' (above, p. 760 above). So why should we think that feminist literary or political counterpublics will actually make a difference, especially in light of the fact that, per my argument, I must have become passionately attached to my gender identity before I am in a position to read feminist literature or to take part in social activism? Does this not mean that the conceptual, normative, narrative and affective resources found in such social and literary counterpublics will never enable me to get behind my gender identity and thus *genuinely* to transform it? The mistaken

assumption here is that transformation is only genuine or worthwhile when it comes from a place that is behind or outside of power relations altogether. As I have already said, I think there is no such place. This does not mean that resistance is futile nor does it imply that it cannot change anything for the better. What it means, as I argued in the book, is that we have no choice but to start from where we are, as gendered subjects who are constituted by power relations, and that subversion and transformation of such power relations will have to come from within. It follows from this that we can never be in a position to know, once and for all, whether some act of self-transformation is genuinely progressive and emancipatory or serves to reinforce subordination or to create it anew. Even our judgments about what constitutes change for the better will have to remain permanently open to contestation. What shape such transformations will ultimately take must be left up to what Foucault once called 'the undefined work of freedom'.[19]

But what of Heyes' claim that developing this practical-political thread further necessitates moving in the direction of a more radical critique of reason? Is she right to suggest that 'we should understand unreason, too, as part of (the politics of) our selves' (p. 759 above)? In some sense, I agree with this. After all, one of the central claims of my book is that rational critique is not, by itself, *sufficient* for progressive self-transformation – though it is, in my view, *necessary*. Self-transformation also requires a reconfiguration of will, affect and desire that is in itself not a rational process. But, in order to count as *progressive* self-transformation, such a reconfiguration should be tied to a critique of subordination – though that critique could be largely implicit in the claims and demands of a social or political movement, and certainly need not be formulated in sophisticated theoretical language in order to count as critique. In other words, *both* critical self-reflection *and* not only rational but also affective and embodied self-transformation are required for progressive change.

Furthermore, I am not sure whether I would be willing to develop this thread in quite the way that Heyes suggests. In part this is for interpretive reasons. In contrast with Huffer – whose book I very much admire – and possibly also with Heyes, I am inclined to read Foucault's critique of reason as less about the constitutive exclusions and violence of practical reason per se and more about the contingent relations of entanglement between historically specific forms of rationality and relations of exclusion, normalization and social control. On that reading, it would be a mistake to read Foucault as advocating a romantic embrace of unreason and the radical undoing of the rational subject, which I fear Huffer has the tendency to do (whether Heyes follows Huffer here is not clear to me). Rather, we should read him as attempting to write a history of a specific form of rationality – call it the Western Enlightenment form – a history that exposes the inherently *ambivalent* effects of that form of rationality. The central question raised by this critique of reason, as Foucault himself put it, is this:

> How can we exist as rational beings, fortunately committed to practicing a rationality that is unfortunately crisscrossed by intrinsic dangers? ... If critical thought itself has a function – and, even more specifically, if philosophy has a function within critical thought – it is precisely to accept this sort of spiral, this sort of revolving door of rationality that refers us to its necessity, to its indispensability, and, at the same time, to its intrinsic dangers.[20]

On this account, practical reason is not in itself despotic or violent nor is it something we should strive to reject altogether, for to do so would be to ignore its indispensability. But the reason that we use is nonetheless dangerous inasmuch as it is thoroughly bound up with contingently emergent power relations, whose complex entanglements Foucault sought to understand. As Heyes reminds us, 'our' conception of rationality is quite closely bound up with relations of gender subordination (and heterosexist, colonial and racist subordination to boot). Any defense of the normativity of practical reason must confront these particular spirals. This is a challenge that I am attempting to take up in my current research project, on the relationship between power, reason and notions of historical progress in contemporary critical theory, and I am very much indebted to Heyes' sharp formulation of the obstacles such a defense must necessarily face.

In closing, let me once again express my deep and profound gratitude to Borradori and Heyes, who are the best readers an author could hope for – generous, sympathetic and constructive, yet also probing and critical, in all the right ways. If only I had had the benefit of their critical insights while I was writing the book, I am sure I would have avoided many pitfalls and blind alleys.

Notes

1. Sandra Bartky, *Sympathy and Solidarity and Other Essays* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), pp. 13–14.
2. David Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Ladelle McWhorter, *Bodies and Pleasures: Foucault and the Politics of Sexual Normalization* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).
3. Lynne Huffer, *Mad for Foucault: Rethinking the Foundations of Queer Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), pp. 242, 243.
4. There are some interpretive issues that come up along the way, as might well be expected. Borradori raises a question about my reading of Butler, and Heyes gestures toward an alternative way of reading Foucault that she thinks might offer more resources for addressing the practical questions that are driving the book. I shall address these interpretive questions as they arise in the context of my response.
5. This is precisely the charge that Butler levels against Benjamin. See Judith Butler, 'Longing for Recognition', in *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004). I discuss Butler's critique of Benjamin on pp. 88–92 of *The Politics of Our Selves*.
6. On this point, see Jessica Benjamin, *Like Subjects, Love Objects* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 24, 47.
7. See Judith Butler, 'Bodies and Power Revisited', in *Feminism and the Final Foucault*, ed. Dianna Taylor and Karen Vintges (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2004).
8. Borradori specifically cites Butler's recent text *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2010). Although a full discussion of Butler's position in this text is beyond the scope of this article, I think that Borradori is right to suggest that Butler's account there of the relationship between the apprehension of precariousness and norms of recognition could provide the basis of a response to my critique. The apprehension of shared precariousness could be read as something like the kind of positive form of sociality that I have claimed is missing in Butler's earlier work. This would still leave open the question, which I discuss

below, of how Butler's articulation of the ethical dimension of sociality can be squared with her basically Foucaultian commitments.

9. In her recent work, Butler has broadened her conception of sociality through her reading of Levinas, in ways that complicate this issue. I shall say more about this aspect of Butler's recent work below, in response to Borradori's second challenge.

10. Interestingly, Butler gestures approvingly toward this basically Kleinian conception of social relationship in *Frames of War*; see p. 30.

11. For Arendt's conception of power, see her *The Human Condition* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1958) and *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1969). For my (Arendt-inspired) discussion of power-with, see chapter four of Allen, *The Power of Feminist Theory: Domination, Resistance, Solidarity* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), and Allen, 'Solidarity after Identity Politics: Hannah Arendt and the Power of Feminist Theory', *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 25(1) (January 1999): 97–118.

12. Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination* (New York: Pantheon, 1988), p. 171.

13. Thomas McCarthy, *Ideals and Illusions: On Reconstruction and Deconstruction in Contemporary Critical Theory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), esp. ch. 1.

14. Note that these two components of the question correspond to the twin capacities for autonomy that I spell out in the Introduction to the book: critical self-reflection and self-transformation. In her reconstruction of my position, Heyes tends to reduce my account of autonomy to the former capacity and to ignore the latter, though both are central to the Foucaultian conception of autonomy that I defend. See above, Heyes, p. 755: 'So what can autonomy be for Foucault? According to Allen, it's the capacity to engage in critique … '

15. In her article, Heyes mentions the former but not the latter.

16. Jane Mansbridge, 'The Role of Discourse in the Feminist Movement', Working Paper for the Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University, WP-94-12.

17. ibid., p. 35.

18. ibid., pp. 36–7.

19. Michel Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment?', in *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault*, vol. 1, *Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press, 1997), p. 316.

20. Michel Foucault, 'Space, Knowledge, Power', in *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault*, vol. 3, *Power*, ed. James Faubion (New York: New Press, 2000), p. 358.