

STAGING A NOUMENAL BODY IN THE VORSTELLUNGSWELT, OR: DISSECTING “MATERIALITY” IN SCHOPENHAUER AND BUTLER

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ABSTRACT

This essay begins with mimicry. First, the body of Schopenhauer—as it can be inferred from books I and II of *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*—is performatively portrayed within the scope of one page. Second, the body of Judith Butler, as inferred from *Bodies that Matter*, is equally laid bare by means of the same gimmick: via the lenses of rhythmic and quasi-satirical judgement. Each sentence laid out within these two pages (one to speak to each author) is then duly dwelt upon in the subsequent sections. A comparative study of Schopenhauer’s take on the body against Judith Butler’s, this paper is bound to exceed phenomenality. In its first section, the paper addresses Schopenhauer’s Leib as it presents itself in two (seemingly) antipodal fashions: once as Wille, and once as Vorstellung.¹ Accordingly, Schopenhauer’s account of Materie and Wille is carefully investigated, so as to illuminate the body in both of its polarities. In its second section, Butler’s notion of “materiality” and “construction” in *Bodies that Matter* is cautiously dissected, with the aim of exhibiting a body which exceeds its own referent. Lastly, these two free-standing bodies are positioned against one another, parading their differences as well as intersections, while questioning their viability in a Vorstellungswelt. In my concluding section, I attempt to understand the corollaries of each bodies’ framework of agency, and assert that because “the body” is not a stable referent, either notion of body may be said to be a deviation from an originary.

¹ SCHOPENHAUER, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, (2016, reis.; 1819, Berlin: Berliner Ausgabe), Book I, sec. 18. “Dieser Leib [ist] auf zwei ganz verschiedene Weisen gegeben: einmal als Vorstellung [...] aber auch zugleich auf eine ganz andere Weise, nämlich als [...] Wille.”

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Lastly, I will position these two free-standing bodies against one another, parading their differences as well as intersections, while questioning their viability in a Vorstellungswelt. In my concluding section, I will attempt to understand the corollaries of each bodies' framework of agency, and assert that because "the body" is not a stable referent, either notion of body may be said to be a deviation from an originary.



"Mein Leib und mein Wille sind Eines; oder was ich als anschauliche Vorstellung meinen Leib nenne, nenne ich, sofern ich desselben auf eine ganz verschiedene, keiner andern zu vergleichende Weise mir bewußt bin, meinen Willen; oder, mein Leib ist die Objektivität meines Willens."³

—ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER, *DIE WELT ALS WILLE UND VORSTELLUNG*

² SCHOPENHAUER, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, (2016, reis.; 1819, Berlin: Berliner Ausgabe), Book I, sec. 18. "Dieser Leib [ist] auf zwei ganz verschiedene Weisen gegeben: einmal als Vorstellung [...] aber auch zugleich auf eine ganz andere Weise, nämlich als [...] Wille."

³ SCHOPENHAUER, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, Book II, sec. 18.

The body delights, bemoans, creates—it is the always libidinous, which in turn effortlessly seduces metaphysically.⁴ The body engenders, gives birth, is innate. It is (to itself) the limit of the Weltwille, a sightless, obedient servant; its eyesight serves only for the Schattenspiel of Erscheinungen which it alone orchestrates: it is the Subjekt-Objekt which always already serenades a world of Vorstellung. The body is reflection; primordial facsimile: an echo which hums, imperatively, until quasi-docilely surpassing the brink—a make-believe brink—of the Vorstellungswelt. The body is the proof, at times living and solemn, that Vorstellung and Wille are one and the same: as well as the testament to their discongruity.⁵ The body is the frontier to that which is borderless; the body is a verb, the Wirken of matter, the screaming of space, the folding of time; the offspring of space-time; though, too, their begetter.⁶ The body is matter: time, space, causality. The body ek-sists: as objectified Wille; Erscheinung; Vorstellung. The body becomes—but through what? The Wille IS ALWAYS.⁷ The body is the immediate performance of an aimless, bodiless, groundless (grundlos) life-force. Is it itself ALWAYS? The body speaks noumenally, but is heard phenomenally. Its center is the sex;⁸ the outburst-made-flesh. Within it the Weltwille: undressed, impervious, the one Ding an sich, the breath of the body,⁹ or the body its instrument.



“There is no nature, only the effects of nature: denaturalization or naturalization.”¹⁰

—JACQUES DERRIDA, *Dormer le Temps*

The body, now, shivers, endures, contains; is hardly even bore—the product of alienness, mediacy, indirectness; extraneous, cumulative trauma. To itself it is Other, as it

⁴ It may be argued that there exists a quasi-kinesthetic relation between Schopenhauer’s notion of the Weltwille and the physical body. The latter exists in a twofold condition of Wille and Vorstellung, and serves as (one of the various) manifestations of a single, all-encompassing Weltwille.

⁵ Wille and Vorstellung may be said to be different sides of a single coin, as Schopenhauer explains: “was an sich Wille ist, ist andererseits als Vorstellung da.” *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, sec. 18.

⁶ The body, for Schopenhauer, is the precondition for the presence of time-space-causality, as it permits these “Formen der Erkenntnis” to be. The body, however, insofar as it is matter(ed), ek-sists only as an immediate corollary of time-space-causality—in which case Schopenhauer must permit these categories to be, too, the Grund des Seins.

⁷ To Schopenhauer, Ursache and Wirkung exist only in the Vorstellungswelt (and necessarily there). It is a fallacy, he argues, to project such a causal motion (Bewegung) upon the relationship of Subjekt and Objekt, as well as upon the manifestations of the Wille itself.

⁸ LUCHTE, JAMES. “The Body of Sublime Knowledge: The Aesthetic Phenomenology of Arthur Schopenhauer” (2009, New York: Heythrop Journal, pp. 228-242).

⁹ Not only does the Weltwille behave as the breath/pneuma of the body, but also of all other Erscheinungen in the Vorstellungswelt.

¹⁰ Epigraph to Judith Butler’s *Bodies that Matter*.

longs simultaneously to flee and engulf the always clothed distance of which it is made. Its sex is mute, but hears—it hides, but only so that it may squelch its shrieks: it is a peek-a-boo game, a timidly fatal fort-da, an uncomfortable corollary, outgrowth, effect, of alien sources which are themselves sourceless. The body becomes—but through what? Its screams hover depthlessly, like laughter which springs from Odradek's lungs.¹¹ The body is a means-for-whom? Its matter is unclaimed. The body is the laic Word-made-flesh "still dwelling among us,"¹² yet hesitantly—like centipedes who intermittently forget how to walk.¹³ The body is one thing, the spirit another; an sich there is no thing, unless it is culture. Culture (and the body its mute servant) becomes—but through what? Culture is the subject; the all-encompassing verb, the making of flesh. The body, its maltreated breed.

I. SCHOPENHAUER

"Erkenne die Wahrheit in dir: dort berührt der Himmel die Erde."

—SCHOPENHAUER, *DIE WELT ALS WILLE UND VORSTELLUNG*, 1819

The body, then, must coexist with its various forms—to Schopenhauer, namely, the natural condition of Vielheit in which it functions (wirkt). To this essay, the body's perhaps most fertile idiosyncrasy will have been the premise that, unlike any other object, "das Leib" presents itself before us in a two-fold manner: once as Wille, and once as Vorstellung.¹⁴ It is the single object-in-the-world which offers to its counterpart (the subject), more than the "Vereinigung von Raum und Zeit [Materie/Kausalitaet]," a glimpse into the "unmittelbar Bekannte"; namely the Wille.¹⁵

To Schopenhauer, Kant's novel understanding of time, space and causality as a priori "Formen der Erkenntnis" (in Kant's speak, "Kategorien")¹⁶ falls short in that it attempts to, phenomenologically, direct the subject's "intentionality" outwards in search of Truth—toward a Ding an sich veiled behind alien objects. To Schopenhauer, there is no "transcendental object," and

¹¹ "Und wo wohnst du?' 'Unbestimmter Wohnsitz', sagt [Odradek] und lacht; es ist aber nur ein Lachen, wie man es ohne Lungen hervorbringen kann." KAFKA, Franz. "Die Sorge eines Hausvaters," (1917, reis.; 2006, Fischer Klassik Plus).

¹² John 1:14, *The Holy Bible*, (2001, Wheaton (IL): Crossway Bibles, ESV)

¹³ Allusion to the "centipede effect," from the folkloric English poem: "A centipede was happy – quite!/ Until a toad in fun/ Said, 'Pray, which leg moves after which?'/ This raised her doubts to such a pitch,/ She fell exhausted in the ditch/ Not knowing how to run."

¹⁴ SCHOPENHAUER, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, Book II, sec. 18.

¹⁵ SCHOPENHAUER., *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, Book II, sec. 22.

¹⁶ KÖRNER, Stephan. *Kant* (1990, London: Penguin Books), ch. 3.

as such, no Ding an sich to be sought after behind objects which are, necessarily, only there for the subjective pole of the Subjekt-Objekt condition (Bedingung). As Schopenhauer explains it best, "die objektiv vorhandene Welt nur in der Vorstellung, also nur für ein Subjekt daseyn kann, nicht umstößt."¹⁷

In the quest of truth, then, one must look inward, for only there, to the living, bodily subject, lies the possibility of an immediate—though not unquarrelsome—glimpse of the one Ding an sich: the Weltwille. The Weltwille is not subject to time or space, nor is it "dem Satze vom Grunde [unterworfen],"¹⁸ which means its relationship with any Erscheinung in the Vorstellungswelt may not be one of "Ursache und Wirkung," but instead (only a quasi-relationship, unless one with one's troubled self), "was an sich Wille ist, ist andererseits als Vorstellung da."¹⁹

In all philosophy thus far, Schopenhauer contends, the sophism had been committed of favoring an Ausgangspunkt from which to best ambush Truth: the idealists make of the object the Wirkung of the subject; the realists its Ursache.²⁰ Kant—the Copernican revolutionist credited, among other things, with the bridging of these two views—is not made mention of at this point. The novelty of Schopenhauer's view—perhaps indeed its unprecedented contribution—lies, however, in the potentiality of an introspection desirous *not of the subject's* anecdotal truths, but of a bigger, incommensurably higher force, encompassing at once the entire Vorstellungswelt; and to which the Subjekt-Objekt relation appears as a humorous Schattenspiel.

In this light, Edmund Husserl's call for a return "zu den Dingen selbst,"²¹ appears hopelessly grim. One must, Schopenhauer emphatically argues, "erkennen die Wahrheit" *in oneself*: Only so will the skies (der Weltwille) touch the Earth (die Vorstellungswelt). If, however, one senses the body now slip through one's fingers, as the armies of metaphors grow untouchable, it is, too, only befitting. If the Wille will be staged as the primary actor in the quest for the body, it is because "jeder wahre Akt [des] Willens ist sofort und unausbleiblich auch eine Bewegung [des] Leibes."²²

Schopenhauer's body, accordingly, may not be grasped as a source (from which performative utterances are engendered), and even less as an accidental corollary of the Weltwille. All that is, *must* necessarily be. The Weltwille itself, rather than inhabit a distinctive Hinterwelt from

¹⁷ Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, Book I, sec. 1.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, sec. 26.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, sec. 27.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, sec. 7.

²¹ HUSSERL, Edmund. *Ideen zu einer Reinen Phänomenologie* (1953, reis.; 2009, Muenster, Felix Meiner).

²² SCHOPENHAUER. *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, sec. 18.

which it inconspicuously whispers its outbursting mandates—utterances from a Noumenalwelt which at a precise juncture (and not another) breach the Phänomenal, in rare motion—rather than so exist, the Weltwille *is* always, at one and the same time, and at one and the same juncture, as *is* the Vorstellungswelt.²³

Yet, despite Schopenhauer's mindful insistence that one does not envision a condition of cause and effect within this particular motion, the Weltwille appears, too, to be irremediably creative of the Subjekt-Objekt condition (itself pregnant of matter, time, space, causality) which allows for the Vorstellungswelt to appear. Without any living (causality recognizing) being, the Vorstellungswelt *is* no longer. If time and space are indeed only an immediate corollary of the subject's ek-sistence, then along with all living beings, matter, too, would abruptly vanish. The subject, as such, appears to be the sufficient condition of matter; since matter is but the "Vereinigung von Raum und Zeit,"²⁴ for which the subject alone is a Voraussetzung.

If the subject *is*, there must be a Wille, of which the (body-dependent, though not bodily) subject is always an immediate manifestation; i.e. Willenserscheinung, rather than Objektivität des Willens. In this spirit, the subject entails, too, the rhizomatic actuality of the Weltwille itself: a physical glimpse into a metaphysical universe, with no time and space; no beginning or end. Once the subject already is, thence it alone may be said to be the single (sufficient) condition of matter. Yet, the subject is itself necessarily subject to matter in its Subjekt-Objekt condition (namely, as Vorstellung). As such, the subject is justly deemed "der traeger der Welt,"²⁵ insofar as it entails—within no temporally hierarchical motion—the world as Wille, and the world as Vorstellung.

Without the subjective pole of the Subjekt-Objekt condition, not only would the Vorstellungswelt not *be*, but the world as Wille would be unattainable (indeed to no one). The Wille, as such, would have no spectators, though it might behave—still—as music frantically orchestrated not "by whom" but "for what;" almost like Zarathustra's freedom, unfettered not "wovon?" but "WOZU!"²⁶ The Wille, however, is the outbursting Kern of the Vorstellungswelt, whose

²³ When engaging with Schopenhauer's theory, one is bound to compassionately comprehend his honest struggle with grammar as it entices one to allude, for instance, to the world as Wille via the principle of reason, i.e., the Formen der Erkenntnis, which pertain exclusively to the world as Vorstellung. To say that the Weltwille is at the same *time* or *space* as *anything* else, more than a contradictio in adjecto, is to use language as it is formed and presented before us in the Vorstellungswelt.

²⁴ "[D]as Wesen der Materie in der gänzlichen Vereinigung von Raum und Zeit besteht, welche Vereinigung nur mittelst der Vorstellung der Kausalität möglich ist." Schopenhauer, *Kritik der Kantischen Philosophie*, sec. 74.

"Innige Vereinigung von Raum und Zeit, – Kausalität, Materie, Wirklichkeit, – sind also Eines, und das subjektive Korrelat dieses Einen ist der Verstand." SCHOPENHAUER. *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, sec. 18.

²⁵ SCHOPENHAUER. *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, Book I, sec. 2.

²⁶ NIETZSCHE, Friedrich. *Also Sprach Zarathustra*. (1883, reis.; 2011, Muenchen: Akademie Verlag) "Frei wovon? Was schiert das Zarathustra! Hell aber soll mir dein Auge künden: frei WOZU?" ch. 28, "Vom Wege des Schaffenden."

(un)teleology is irrationally splintered in a frenzied stage of reflections. It aims always, though only ever aimlessly. But, more importantly: if the Wille *is* always, and is not free wovon, but (explosively) WOZU—if it has no specific beginning in time (it is atemporal)—might there be a world where the Objektität des Willens has not always already occurred? May there be a world as Wille, but not as Vorstellung?

The world as Wille, short of the “traeger der Welt,” would be limitless. A melody hovering vigorously, lustfully, most shamelessly bare—with no contrapposto sway, no synchronized-other-side, no reflection. Until, forthwith; at one point in time and not another, the *necessary* Objektität des Willens would occur. Might it have been so, then one must ask again: may the Weltwille exist without always already engendering a Subjekt-Objekt condition, and—more importantly, how does the Wille choose to, at last, objectify? May this movement have been spurred by the inflation of time, space, causality? In it exists none. May the Vorstellungswelt (and thereby *some* body, *some* subject) have been always, necessarily at one and the same compass as the Weltwille?

Perhaps somewhat reassuringly, for Schopenhauer, any motion that has been, *must* inescapably have been so.²⁷ Yet, one proceeds unsatisfied. Schopenhauer remains mindful of this peril, and urges his reader to note that Ursache and Wirkung do not exist in the world as Wille (nor in the Subjekt-Objekt “relation”), but only in the Vorstellungswelt. Yet, it is difficult—even if one takes Schopenhauer’s foresight for granted—to posit such a virginal, causality-independent condition, as living spectators *in* a world of appearances and (re)presentations. How might matter be the offspring of time-space-causality, if the subject, necessarily body-dependent, is responsible for the “recognition” of these categories in the first place? Must the subject not precede matter, and matter the subject, in its turn?

Schopenhauer, then, proposes an escape route: not only are (what was left of) the Kantian categories mere Formen der Erkenntniss, but—exceeding Kant—they are, too, the Grund des Seins.²⁸ The subject, in this light, is suddenly generative of its very ground/reason (Grund) of being, as a body-dependent Willenserscheinung. Almost intuitively, one craves again an unfathomable answer to the unyielding question: has the Weltwille always looked itself in the mirror, at the cost of a subject—and if it keeps memories, does it remember not being looked at as a Vorstellungswelt?

²⁷ SCHOPENHAUER. *Ueber die vierfache Wurzel des Satzes vom zureichenden Grunde* (1813, reis.; 2012, Leipzig: Jazzybee Verlag). “Nihil est sine ratione cur potius sit, quam non sit. Nichts ist ohne Grund warum es sei,” sec. 5, “Der Satz Selbst.”

²⁸ SCHOPENHAUER. *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, Book I, sec 3.

Lastly, is it not the Wille itself which is fertile of bodies that matter? Or may this be the sight of a linguistic failing, as language yields to the imperative service of the world will: beseeching life, fertility, reproduction—practically *apparent* Ursache und Wirkung? These are, however, Schopenhauer argues, etiological questions, to which the answers would not bring one closer to the recognition of the Weltwille.²⁹ Even resolved, they would not permit the Earth to at last touch the skies, but only make note of a fruitless “how,” rather than a “why.”

Yet, the chief function of Verstand in all living creatures, Schopenhauer notes himself, is that of recognizing causal relations in Erscheinungen as they present themselves before us in the world of Vorstellung. In Book I, Schopenhauer introduces his concept of Dummheit as the failure of recognition of causality, introducing a patient in an Irrenhaus with his Vernunft in check (“da er sprach und vernahm”) but his potentiality for intelligence fully disabled: “weil er diese ganz unmittelbare Kausalität der Spiegelung [des Brillenglases] nicht verstand.”³⁰

In this regard, causality takes place because it lies in the Vorstellungswelt—and “da muss z.B. jede Bewegung, obwohl sie allemal Willenserscheinung ist, dennoch eine Ursache haben.”³¹ Schopenhauer, however, elucidates few explanations for why it is improper to speak of causality in the world as Wille, other than that its “Verhältnis zur Erscheinung ist durchaus nicht nach dem Satz vom Grunde.”³² The body which allows for a causality-recognizing subject (which itself does not lie in time or space) to be, is engendered already as organic effect of the Weltwille (i.e., Objektität des Willens)—namely, in the always mattered realm of causality.

It is, Schopenhauer scholar Matthias Kosslar explains, “only by the fact that the mind puts the sensations into forms of space, time and causality that the object is created as a carrier of physical properties.”³³ Through these lenses, then, the body itself is perceived as an indirect object to (and by) its own mind—which appears to exist in a relation of both capacitating, and simultaneously being capacitated by the body. But it is through the body’s direct, immediate form, that Schopenhauer proves to, indeed, have been the first among philosophers to present—rather

²⁹ “Also auch die Aetiologie kann uns nimmermehr über jene Erscheinungen, welche wir nur als unsere Vorstellungen kennen, den erwünschten, uns hierüber hinausführenden Aufschluß geben.” SCHOPENHAUER. *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, Book II, sec. 17.

³⁰ “Mangel an Verstand heißt im eigentlichen Sinne Dummheit” SCHOPENHAUER. *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, Book I, sec. 6.

³¹ SCHOPENHAUER. *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, Book II, sec. 27.

³² SCHOPENHAUER. *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, sec. 62.

³³ KOSSLAR, Mathias. *Life, Body, Person and Self: A Reconsideration of Core Concepts in Bioethics* (Freiburg: Karl Alber Verlag, 2017), 282.

than a rationalizing theory of the subject, or yet the mind—a tantalizing body which permits a glimpse into the Sein of all things *and* their very Kern.

The Wille—"das Innerste Wesen jedes Dinge in der Natur"—³⁴ though not a differentiable substratum from its own Erscheinungen, does not exist within the same conditions of time-space-causality.³⁵ Yet, every Willensakt is one and the same with the Schattenspiel it creates, at the cost of a body-dependent mind. Body and Wille, then, are at once flash and lightning,³⁶ spark and electricity, the urgency of movement and the hand which forthwith moves; aimlessly and unconcerned with the Satze vom Grunde. Its motion is, more than a reaction to the Vorstellungswelt, an intrinsic, impulsive and aimless *necessity*.

That "der wille selbst, das Ding an sich, grundlos ist," one may grasp on to with little refrainment, since there is hardly an argument for why it would loom in one precise point in time and not another (even if one were, forcibly, to lithograph time upon its framework of being). Yet, to accept that the body itself—the very first body—may be equally groundless, seems a daunting task to spectators in the Vorstellungswelt, to whom the only irremediable truth about bodies is that, at some point in time, they must have been conceived—even if, like Jesus's, its conception was one metaphysical, indeed welding the Earth to the skies.

Our question thus, must be formulated as follows: If one accepts Schopenhauer's theory, how does the Objektität des Willens take place, if not by a necessarily causal process of engendering?

Like asking Michelangelo how indeed God created Adam,³⁷ and dismissing his masterpiece if his answer falls short, we instinctively accuse Schopenhauer perhaps not of a theoretical-aesthetic oversight, but of our own, rather limited principles of reason; only functional in a Vorstellungswelt.

³⁴ SCHOPENHAUER. *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, sec. 29.

³⁵ Though Schopenhauer argues that these are mere reflections of the one Ding an sich (the Wille), there are two contradicting notions within Book I and II: namely, that these reflections are, on the one side, categories (Formen der Erkenntnis), though also creative or permitting of matter, and thereby potentially of the body itself (Grund des Seins). The latter version might help Schopenhauer escape the almost inescapable notion that it is the Wille itself which engenders the body (thus demanding a condition of Ursache-Wirkung within the world as Wille).

³⁶ In *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, Nietzsche discusses at length the inseparability of doer and deed; a theory evidently developed from Schopenhauer's.

"Ebenso nämlich, wie das Volk den Blitz von seinem Leuchten trennt und letzteres als *Thun*, als Wirkung eines Subjekts nimmt, das Blitz heisst, so trennt die Volks-Moral auch die Stärke von den Äusserungen der Stärke ab." NIETZSCHE, *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, first essay, sec. 13.

³⁷ Michelangelo's "The Creation of Adam" (1512) is a fresco, high renaissance painting, which forms part of the Sistine Chapel's ceiling.

II. BUTLER

“And if I persisted in this notion that bodies were in some way *constructed*, perhaps I really thought that words alone had the power to craft bodies from their own linguistic substance?”

—JUDITH BUTLER, *BODIES THAT MATTER: ON THE DISCURSIVE LIMITS OF “SEX,”* PREFACE

The body that matters, for Butler, is also a verb: insofar as it is not the material body. Or, it is the material body insofar as materiality is redefined. Or yet still, it is body as long as the notion of body itself escapes, and prolifically reinvents what it means to be a noun, ascribing to it the art of calcification-through-performance. Better yet, it takes up Deleuze and Guattari’s percept on immaterial structures and willfully inscribes it upon its own structure, as if to bashfully hide its (sex): “the fabric of the rhizome is made up by and... and... and... conjunctions which are forceful enough to shake and uproot the verb to be.”³⁸

If the body *becomes*, then discourse is its bearer. Yet, from it, it flees—unless each conjunction, verb, noun, adverb, is allowed to speak at will, each in its own language, dismissive perhaps of language’s function of communication. How must these signifiers lay bare their wills to one another, one asks—if not by losing track of their meanings-always-in-deferral and forgiving themselves the offense? Quite unsurprisingly, they are bound to “a difficult future terrain of community, one in which the hope of ever fully recognizing oneself in the terms by which one signifies is sure to be disappointed.”³⁹

(Schopenhauer grumbles: Why would one expect anything other than disappointment?) Given the task of altering one’s state of thrownness (*Geworfenheit*) by means of resignification,⁴⁰ one must not be a pessimist to foresee an unfulfilling future. Here the body’s is—if at all consistently—a language of *mea culpas*. Beyond the ever-meandering structures of signifiers which surround it, however, lies no trace of a *Sein*: no *Wille* or facticity—the body is silent, it may only ever hope or fear being done to—thus upon it a restless (and alien) *Wirken*.⁴¹

³⁸ DELEUZE, GUATTARI. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 17.

³⁹ BUTLER, Judith. *Bodies that Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 243.

⁴⁰ This logic is twofold and consistent throughout Butler’s works. As we will see further in this section, the altering of “materiality” is both the ideal (positive) task and the subversive power of language. In other words, the body is constructed either negatively or positively—but *always* via the ever-meandering structure of signifiers. For this reason, Butler has chosen to rectify (as it will be exposed in the following pages) the words “materiality” and “construction,” after the (equally twofold) reception of *Gender Trouble*.

⁴¹ The same allusion as in footnote 38.

It claims to endorse Nietzsche's view that "der Thäter ist zum Thun bloss hinzugedichtet,—[dass] das Thun Alles [ist],"⁴² but its language is a daily permission of precisely the opposite: a forceful inscription of the Thun upon some Thäter, which is always subversively *done to*, even if it itself does the deed. The body, at last, is confined, defined, enslaved, *identified* by its doing or done-to-ness. And if it does or is done to, so too, must it *be*. Accordingly, in *Bodies that Matter*, Butler must redefine "the materiality of sex" as that which "is constructed through a ritualized repetition of norms."⁴³

The rectification of terminology previously used in *Gender Trouble* becomes, as it follows, one of the book's main task. *Bodies that Matter*, as such, is spurred by the inevitable astoundment: "What about the materiality of the body, Judy?," the question is posed with "a certain patronizing quality which (re)constituted [her] as an unruly child, one who needed to be brought to task, restored to that bodily being which is, after all, considered to be most real, most pressing, most undeniable."⁴⁴ The question—though mindfully exposed—appears not to be answered. The first paragraph of the book reads:

I began writing this book by trying to consider the materiality of the body only to find that the thought of materiality invariably moved me into other domains. I reflected that this wavering might be the vocational difficulty of those trained in philosophy, always at some distance from corporeal matters, who try in that disembodied way to demarcate bodily terrains.⁴⁵

The honesty is admirable, and unfound in the works of Schopenhauer (who did not have to deal with the backlashes of academia).⁴⁶ Having been warned, Butler's reader must not be disappointed if the body as such does not make an appearance throughout the entire text. The (arguable) fallacy committed in the previous sentence—"the body as such"—is precisely what will be put to task. In letting go of its supposedly noun-like structure, the body longs to be freed into a sphere of inaugurative—and metaphysical—neutrality. Its achievement, however, appears to be irreconcilable with this longing, as it becomes, instead, the ontological (noun-like) product of normative discourse (another nod to Deleuze and Guattari's "and...and...and... conjunctions which are forceful enough to *uproot the verb to be*.")

⁴² NIETZSCHE. *Zur Genealogie der Moral* (1887; reis.; 2016, Berlin: Hofenberg), first essay, sec. 13.

⁴³ BUTLER. *Bodies that Matter*, preface.

⁴⁴ BUTLER. *Bodies that Matter*, preface.

⁴⁵ BUTLER. *Bodies that Matter*, preface.

⁴⁶ Schopenhauer only briefly held an academic position at the University of Berlin, in 1820. In his late life, he wrote an essay entitled "On University Philosophy," condemning the work conducted in Western academia.

In its ideal form, then, the body of Judy, when exhibited, appears as a blank slate; a noun deaf and mute, uncorrupted by the adjectives and adverbs forcibly imprinted upon it; yet a slate always prone to the reification of its materiality via the reiteration of deeds (always subversively inscribed upon its "neutral surface").⁴⁷ Further in *Bodies that Matter*, having perhaps willfully let go of her initial longing to "consider the materiality of the body," Butler argues that "regulatory norms" are what "work in a performative fashion to constitute the materiality of bodies and, more specifically, to materialize the body's sex, to materialize sexual difference."⁴⁸

To comprehend Butler's efforts, gender theorist Stephen K. White explains, a commitment to the "problematizing suspension of the ontological" is necessary.⁴⁹ Yet, Butler's unique theory of performativity, if it achieves any axiom, it is that of perceiving that one ultimately becomes what one enacts—or, most crucially to us, that one only *materially* is what one is subversively *done to*. As such, "materiality will be rethought as the effect of power, as power's most productive effect."⁵⁰ Not in disconcert with Butler's warning at the beginning of the book, materiality here flees any assumption of matter.⁵¹ The mattered body as such (and by now one knows not what this means), in any case, must rely on the unlikely leniency of an alien world for its successful "materialization."⁵² Under these lenses, agency appears to be always at the hands of an Other.⁵³

"The 'I'," Butler explains, "neither precedes nor follows the process of gendering, but emerges only within and as the matrix of gender relations themselves."⁵⁴ Further, she elucidates: "In other words, 'sex' is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time."⁵⁵ Given that the words "construct," "sex" and "materialized" have gained each a new life of their own, this sentence *may* very well be logically consistent. Yet, it also begs the question: is Butler be grappling with ideas for which there is no present vocabulary at hand, and thus justly (as one may argue did

⁴⁷ "The sex is a politically neutral surface on which culture acts." Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 7.

⁴⁸ BUTLER. *Bodies that Matter*, 2.

⁴⁹ WHITE, Stephan. *Sustaining Affirmation*, quote extracted directly from Butler's essay "The Force of Fantasy" (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 106.

⁵⁰ BUTLER. *Bodies that Matter*, 2.

⁵¹ "For there is an "outside" to what is constructed by discourse, but this is not an absolute "outside," an ontological there-ness that exceeds or counters the boundaries of discourse." Under these lenses, it appears that even the conventional notion of bodily matter itself—flesh, blood, carnality—must be within the "boundaries of discourse."

⁵² At this point, the mattered body for Butler seems to signify *anything but* the mattered body as a referent.

⁵³ This notion is terrifying to Nietzsche's ideal of a functional Herrenmoral. Rather than engaging in amor fati and taking agency over one's future, Butler's motion appears to be one of self-dwarfing, self-renouncement, and moreover, a pursuit of an external Other on which to place the overwhelming guilt carried by the body: all distinctive of a Sklavenmoral.

⁵⁴ BUTLER. *Bodies that Matter*, 7.

The agency here stands in stark contrast with Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* (

"Sexuality is part of [...] our world freedom. Sexuality is something that we ourselves create. It is our own creation."

⁵⁵ BUTLER. *Bodies that Matter*, 7.

Heidegger or Aristotle) proposing new lexical terms, with the aim of adjusting the failings of language as it signifies concrete and otherwise abstract referents—or is she arbitrarily toying with referents to which there already exist (relatively) well-functioning signifiers?

For the sake of her own argument, Butler would most likely argue for either of the two (rather confining) options above. She must be wrestling, rather, with the impropriety of grammar as it abides to heteronormative rules which arise within rigid structures of power. Her argument, however, even if operating within this third, nobler enterprise, runs the risk of opposing its own task of liberating the repressed body in that it unwittingly rigidifies it by deeming it the inescapable *product* of normative conduct. Worse still, it risks rendering the body an uncomfortable corollary of sheer repetition, rather than a complex and mattered structure itself generative of dynamic and non-confining performance.

Foucault, in *The History of Sexuality*, contends that our so called “biological drives” are often *shaped* by hegemonic discourses. Yet, in laying out his critique of the repressive hypothesis—in which he claims it to be a myth that societies had been repressive of sex until modernity finally liberated it—he contends that modernity imposes (sexual) identification upon individuals, who must from then on signify and identify what they perform.⁵⁶ The shift, under these lenses, is not from repression into liberation, but from an unconstraining “I do” to an incarcerating “I am.” If, like Butler portrays it, “identity is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results,”⁵⁷ her achievement is at best a chiasmic reversal of cause and effect. Nonetheless, it appears to entail a commitment to a reverse-ontology; one perhaps unnecessarily added as a rigidifying structure of identity surrounding and altering the living body.

Indeed, one may argue that it is not Butler’s argument, but the power structures within which it operates, that ultimately confine and restrain the body. Surely, the body *is* susceptible to confinement—though I suspect Butler may have, to some extent, misplaced it, locating it where there was none necessary, and dismissing it where it was always irremediable—namely, in what is justifiably “considered to be most real, most pressing, most undeniable”:⁵⁸ the human, all to human, and unclothed sex.

⁵⁶ FOUCAULT, Michel. *The History of Sexuality* (1984, reis.; 1990: New York: Vintage), 163.

⁵⁷ BUTLER. *Gender Trouble*, 7.

⁵⁸ BUTLER. *Bodies that Matter*, preface.

No definitive answer is given to the question of whether Butler had, indeed, “really thought that words alone had the power to craft bodies from their own linguistic substance.”⁵⁹ But if she did momentarily think so, perhaps in a glimpse of instinctive “philosophical” discernment—our question must be: How does Butler’s metaphysical account of the body’s materialization differ from Schopenhauer’s?

III. DISSECTING “MATERIALITY” IN SCHOPENHAUER AND BUTLER

“Why should our bodies end at the skin, or include at best other beings encapsulated by skin?”⁶⁰

—DONNA HARAWAY, *A MANIFESTO FOR CYBORGS*

While Butler’s academic training began with philosophy, Schopenhauer’s did with medicine.⁶¹ It is, then, perhaps only natural that Schopenhauer’s body be slightly more attentive to the phenomenal. One may even argue that it is vigorously so: the *Weltwille*, while not bodied itself, lusts first and foremost for the proliferation of bodies.⁶² Yet, the coming-to-presence of the body seems, in both cases, largely susceptible to a *creatio ex nihilo* argument. Schopenhauer, once more, comes off slightly—or perhaps considerably—less prone to this peril, since his *Weltwille* needs no beginning, and is itself responsible for the body’s *Erscheinung* in the *Vorstellungswelt*.

If for Butler, agency rests at the hands of an alien Other, for Schopenhauer, it does under the dominion of the *Weltwille*, which is never alien. In each case, the free will of the subject appears insurmountable—unless one assumes that since *Weltwille* and body occur within one single motion, the body is always itself (freely) choosing. Notwithstanding, to Butler, culture and normative discourse seem to function in compelling similarity to the *Weltwille*. If “words alone had the power to craft bodies from their own linguistic substance,”⁶³ one must ask whether they would at all differ from Schopenhauer’s *Weltwille*—both, immaterial agents responsible for the body’s *Erscheinung*.

If brought to a monad-like condition, words would, unlike the *Weltwille*, remain temporal. It

⁵⁹ BUTLER. *Bodies that Matter*, preface.

⁶⁰ One of the epigraphs to Butler’s *Bodies that Matter*.

⁶¹ Before devoting his life to (non-academic) philosophy, Schopenhauer briefly attended medical school in Göttingen, in 1809.

⁶² For this reason, Schopenhauer is usually observed as a forerunner of Darwinism; indeed, perhaps (as he argues in section 4 of Book I from *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*), the first among philosophers to have given himself the task of duly considering the living body. It is, however, arguable whether he does not himself meander into metaphysical spheres to explicate it. His argument is saved in that for him, the metaphysics of the universe is always at once its physics.

⁶³ BUTLER. *Bodies that Matter*, preface.

is easily agreed upon that words, in whatever condition, are born, fade away, and are forever subject to a process of diachronicity. But most notably, words—like the *Weltwille*—rely on a living, body-dependent subject, in order to *be* in the first place; a quarrel strikingly reminiscent of Schopenhauer's mind-body/body-mind dilemma. Words, however, are not one and the same with the body, but are capable of altering—like the *Weltwille*—their very materiality. If for Butler the body is the confined product of language, for Schopenhauer, the body is the confined product of time, space, causality and Will. We may equally ask, somewhat patronizingly: "How does the *Objektivität des Willens* really occur, Arthur?"

If Butler's is a laic Word-made-flesh, Schopenhauer's is a vehemently atheistic Wille-made-flesh. If for Butler, sex is "an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized"⁶⁴—what else is the body as *Objektivität des Willens*? If the body in Schopenhauer (in enabling the subject) enables, also, matter to appear (*erscheinen*) in the *Vorstellungswelt*, where the principle of reason reigns—Butler's body conceives of its materiality as a mere *Begriff*; an abstract effect in relation to power.

Schopenhauer's body is active. Butler's, in its turn, reacts. Both, if willing, may easily locate an agent "elsewhere" upon which to place blame—except Schopenhauer's knows, *deep inside*, that its blame and the *Wille's* are one and the same. Butler's body is a carrier of done-to-ness, which thus justifiably longs for equality and balance. Schopenhauer's is explosive disequilibrium in its rawest, un-done-to state, and its wills, more than irrational, express always a state of exception.⁶⁵ The latter bears vigorous (twofold) agency and longs to conceive; the former refrains from creation and is, instead, only ever conceived. One is libidinous, lustful, abundant; the other is vigilant and voluntarily infertile.

Finally, if this comparative analysis of bodies may point one to any stable perception, it is that the body has never been an originary *thing* or a constant referent, from which deviations are to be made. Instead, each of its (re)presentations is perhaps always virginal, and of "the body itself" one may only fail to speak of. Butler elucidates it best:

We seek to give a name to that which perhaps can never be finally or fully named. The body perhaps is the name for our conceptual humility, the limit of our conceptual schemes—perhaps it is the sight of our linguistic failing.⁶⁶

Yet, if the body *were* a choice, and one might choose it as one chooses words, I would choose

⁶⁴ BUTLER. *Bodies that Matter*, 2.

⁶⁵ NIETZSCHE. *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, sec. 22.

⁶⁶ BUTLER. *Bodies that Matter*, 223.

that my body were, sooner than a Butlerian, a Schopenhauerean body—and moreover, that the world I inhabited were filled such bodies. Perhaps one might find that, in allowing oneself more agency; more explosive unbalance, fertility; unanathematized outburst of wills—rather than chaos, there could arise (in disconcert with Schopenhauer) unprecedented social justice. Most surprisingly—in this utopic, speculative world of *Vorstellungen*, comically resemblant of John Lennon’s—not only a few, select selves might have their wills satisfied, but an overwhelming threshold of social well-being might be reached, in front of the realization that, rather than being done-to, one may choose to actively *vorstellen* the change whose appearance one wills in the *Vorstellungswelt*.⁶⁷

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⁶⁷ It is worth noting that Butler’s depictions of the body are usually those of an unwanted, yet pressing bodily state—and not of an ideal version of the body. Yet, her theoretical engagement (and personal energy) devoted to “the unwanted body” are distinctive of Nietzsche’s notion of a *Sklavenmoral*, or yet of a herd-like instinct of *not* loving one’s fate. This, again, may be contravened with the very notion that she is, indeed, attempting to take agency upon not only her fate, but the fate of millions of bodies done injustice to.

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