

Bodies of Matter: Theorising corporeality through Bhaskar, Butler and Latour

Aaron Reeves

University of Essex

Abstract

There is some difficulty for social theory in trying to understand corporeality. This paper works through the ideas of Bhaskar, Butler and Latour in order to draw out those concepts that may be of value in theorising materiality. Bhaskar's Critical Realism deals with matter primarily through the concept of 'emergence'. His tri-partite ontology coupled with his multi-layered view of scientific reality and focus leads to an overly complex and cumbersome view of matter that leaves very little space for social theorists to comment upon corporeality. His conception of agents is useful and can be compared with Latour's later ideas around humans, non-humans and actants (agents). Butler's work wants to move away from constructivist arguments of matter while retaining the history (or changing conceptions) of matter. Butler therefore sees matter as caught in an aporia between materiality and signification; where each is reliant upon, but not reducible to the other. In this regard Butler lays out how matter is brought to mean and the consequences of this for those bodies that are privileged and those that are abjected. For Latour social theory is primarily concerned with associations between humans and non-humans (each are regarded as actants or agents). In this regard he wants to collapse the bifurcation of nature, which Butler appears to be guilty of accepting uncritically. Consequently, it is argued that social theory can speak about corporeality as long as it considers both humans and non-humans as actors, and remembers to consider the history of matter and the way that it comes to mean. Bodies that matter are always bodies of matter, however they are materialised.

Keywords: Social theory, corporeality, Bhaskar, Butler, Latour.

Introduction

There seems to be a conceptual slipperiness that comes with speaking about the body. For example Butler notes ‘the thought of materiality invariably moved me into other domains... I could not fix bodies as simple objects of thought’ (1993: ix). Further, within the many attempts to theorise the body in social theory there has been an increasing chasm emerging between the cultural and material body (see Turner: 1996; Shilling: 2003). This paper will discuss attempts within social theory to account for materiality, using the body as a specific example of the challenges, while discussing its success in working with this slipperiness. Consequently this argument will contain an explication and discussion of three broad attempts to account for materiality in social theory: Bhaskar’s (1975; 1979; 1989) Critical Realism, Butler’s (1993; 2006 [1990]) Materialisation and Latour’s (1993; 2005) Actor-Network Theory (ANT) of nature-culture. This essay will argue that social theory can account for the materiality of the body but only by breaking down the nature-culture divide, thinking of all objects as actants¹ and carefully considering the way that matter materialises.

Critical Realism and Emergence

This outline will not provide a full discussion of Bhaskar’s philosophy of science and its role in social theory, but it will briefly articulate his ideas around emergence and their relation to how he theorises materiality. It should be noted that Bhaskar is not explicitly trying to deal with materiality in his theory, in the same way that Butler is for example, but is more interested in materialism as a philosophy.² Yet he is concerned with developing theories of society and nature under the premises

¹ For Latour, as will be discussed in greater detail later, actants is a loose, but technical, term that can refer to humans and non-humans. Actants are actors in that they are potentially translatable by mediators in the networks they are connected to. They are the effects that are transported around networks. An air pump, a government, an individual and a tree can all be a figuration of an actant. They are ‘different ways to make people do things’ (Latour: 2005: 55).

² ‘In its broadest sense, materialism contends that whatever exists just is, or at least depends upon, matter. (In its more general form it claims that all reality is essentially material...)’ (Bhaskar: 1989: 125). Bhaskar

of realism and naturalism and therefore inevitably discusses the nature of materiality. Bhaskar is aware, like Butler, of the problems of conceptualising materiality, for he writes that 'in any discussion of materialism there lurks the problem of the definition of matter' (1989: 130).

Bhaskar argues that 'the operations of a higher level cannot be accounted for solely by the laws governing the lower-order level in which... the higher-order-level is 'rooted' and from which... it was 'emergent'' (1975: 113). The lower-levels might be hydrogen and oxygen while the higher-order level would be water; the properties of water are not reducible to its constitutive parts but can act back upon them. The sum is always greater than the parts. Bhaskar posits, and it seems even hopes that, 'there is a substance, whose nature is at present unknown, which is the bearer of [emergent] powers' (1979: 124); this substance Bhaskar labels 'matter'. Further 'emergence is an irreducible feature of our world... it has an irreducible ontological character' (1975: 113). Now each level of a higher-order would, when joined together with other parts, become the lower-level of another higher-order level: thus water becomes part of the cell, the cell becomes part of the organ and this moves onward until we reach the agent and then on to society.

Each level is as 'real', in Bhaskar's ontological theory, as the one below it and each should become the subject of its own discipline or field of study (Bhaskar: 1975). Thus each level (society, agents, atoms etc.) contains within it Bhaskar's (1975) tri-partite model of reality: that of the real, the actual and the empirical. The real, as an 'intransitive dimension' (Bhaskar: 1975: 17), corresponds with the causal laws of scientific enquiry, described as the 'generative mechanisms of nature' (Bhaskar: 1975: 14). These 'generative mechanisms' are differentiated, meaning that they persist in open and closed systems (Bhaskar: 1979).³ The actual level refers to events resulting from the 'generative mechanisms' of the real (Bhaskar: 1975). The empirical level is the sense-experiences, mediated by individual perceptions, of these actual events.

These generative mechanisms should be expressed as 'tendencies of things, not conjunctions of events' (Bhaskar: 1975: 10). Thus as tendencies they are omnipresent but are not always active or

uses this frame because of his Marxist leanings, but there are a number of versions of materialism, especially within sociology (see Scott & Marshall: 2005).

³ 'Where mechanisms coexist and interact with one another in contingent ways, Bhaskar speaks of 'open' systems. Where mechanisms exist in isolation... or where there is artificial isolation... Bhaskar speaks of 'closed' systems' (Benton & Craib: 2001: 128).

productive; further the activation of such 'generative mechanisms' is not solely contingent upon a specific sequence of events or conditions. Thus they are described as 'tendencies'. Therefore 'the mechanisms constituted at each level have their own specific reality' (Benton & Craib: 2001: 127). Consequently materiality has as one of its fundamental properties these emergent powers and also this tri-partite ontological reality which is increasingly stratified and complex. Interestingly, and we will return to this, both Butler (1993) and Bhaskar (1975) - although in different ways - resist defining materiality but instead explain the *process* of how matter comes to be(come); its 'emergence' or 'materialization'.

Based on Bhaskar's (1979) multiple levels of reality that emerge from each other, he begins to sharply demarcate the academy's disciplinary jurisdiction. Thus psychology has the responsibility to account for a different level of ontological reality to sociology and also from biology. Such a sharp disciplinary distinction means that social theory is not capable of accounting for matter outside of saying that it emerges from a lower ontological level which they are not responsible for or cannot account for. Societies in Critical Realism are real but primarily immaterial (even though Bhaskar (1989) does seem to recognise that they are in part material); whereas all lower levels are material only (Bhaskar: 1989). Thus as sociology primarily studies the immaterial 'social' it will inevitably grasp the *cultural* body (one that is real but immaterial).⁴ It must leave the study of the physicality of the body to those disciplines that are designated to deal with it. Thus materiality becomes sequestered from social theory within the Critical Realist frame - all that it can say is that it is emergent, which to some extent Bhaskar (1979; 1989) himself argues.

A further problem that this view raises is the contradictory ways that Bhaskar describes agents, nature and society. In this regard Benton (1981) has observed in Bhaskar a dualist conception of humans and nature, each with their own way of being studied because of their differing ontologies. Further, Bhaskar (1989) explicitly acknowledges that nature, agents and societies are ontologically different. What is unclear as a result of these formulations is upon what basis these dualist or tri-partite categorisation of nature, agents and society are maintained considering that each is emergent

⁴ As noted earlier this consequence of Bhaskar's ideas has been inadvertently realised in the work of Shilling (2003), Turner (1996) and others. However this is not necessarily characteristic of all work that has been completed in the area of embodiment. For example, Kirby (1997) represents a specific attempt to theorise the substance of corporeality.

from the others. It seems that Bhaskar's distinctions are arbitrary and reflect certain commonly accepted distinctions within the 'modern' tradition (see Latour: 1993), rather than being based upon accurate considerations.

In addition, the concept of emergence raises some questions which are not fully answered in Bhaskar's theory. First there is no consideration of how or why he can assume that emergence is 'an irreducible ontological character' (1975: 113) of matter. Such an important presumption would seem to require a more detailed discussion; this is not to suggest that such a view is not intuitively accurate but that part of the role of philosophy and sociology is to question common sense assumptions. Secondly, if emergence is an 'irreducible ontological feature' then why does it stop at society? What is it about societies that mean there is no higher level emerging from them? If there is a higher level, what is it and why does Bhaskar not describe it? Third, emergence, in reality, is not the simple linear model that it is often represented to be, in which one level flows neatly into the next (see Benton & Craib: 2001). It is much more fragmented and uneven; for example how many agents are required for a society to emerge, or where are animals featured in this model? Fourth and perhaps most importantly is the idea of a foundation or origin, for implicit in Bhaskar is the notion that there is a primary substance from which all things originate or emerge. There is within this expectation an idea that this lowest level is the really 'real' substance of the world, which harks back to a number of the problems associated with ideas around reality that Bhaskar is trying to combat. These questions seem to create a space where the place of materiality in Critical Realism is undecided and perhaps undecidable and is at the very least contingent upon the work of the 'hard' sciences in uncovering what is the origin and foundation of the world.

There is one final part of Bhaskar's work which is interestingly underdeveloped within Critical Realism and this is the specific definition he gives for the 'agent'.⁵ Bhaskar explicitly defines an agent as 'anything which is capable of bringing about a change in something (including itself). A hydrogen atom is... an agent' (1975: 109). He argues that even for an atom 'the concept of their agency is irreducible' (1975: 114). Now he does also note that there are other emergent powers that humans possess which atoms seem not to possess, but he is keen not to conflate the terms agents

⁵ I of course do not mean that agents have been undertheorised, but that Bhaskar's idea that even an atom can be an agent has (see 1975).

and humans (Bhaskar: 1975). This idea will have important implications as we discuss Butler and Latour later.

Butler and Materialisation

Now, recognising that Bhaskar's theory is not a specific attempt to theorise materiality, we will attempt to critique his ideas and develop the theory further by working through Butler's account of matter. Early in Butler's work the body's slipperiness was captured. She writes that 'the body is not a 'being'' but is theorised as a 'variable boundary, a [permeable] surface... a signifying practice' (2006 [1990]: 189). Butler's main insight here seems to be that bodies are not an essence but are becoming, or are in process. Although this understanding began early it was not fully formulated until *Bodies that Matter* (1993) and for that reason this argument will use that text primarily for the following discussion.

Butler's argument in this book tries to walk between critiquing constructionist accounts of the body while also recognising that matter cannot be understood outside of language resulting in the interpretative character of those attempts to conceptualise matter (see Fraser: 2002). Further it seems that Butler has endeavoured to reclaim what is made 'prior and passive' with regard to the body: it is an attempt to reject any purely constructionist accounts, which *Gender Trouble* leaned toward⁶, while bringing matter back into the discussion about the body (see Kirby: 1997).

Thus we read that matter is 'a process of materialization that stabilises over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity and surface' (Butler: 1993: 9). In this regard it is interesting to note Jonas' insight that being is doing and that things 'exist by way of exchanging matter with the environment, transiently incorporate it, use it, excrete it again' (1996: 88). The body is not a fixity or boundary but is constantly exchanging and shifting; it is in flux. Hence the process that Butler sees of creating such boundaries or fixities is in part the process of materialization.

⁶ The following quotations are not a comprehensive list of how Butler describes the construction of the body but merely provide a selection of comments on her allusions to the body as a construction. Butler writes that "the body' itself is a construction... bodies cannot be said to have a signifiable existence prior to the mark of gender' (2006 [1990]: 12), and notes that 'the discursive construction of the body...' (2006 [1990]: 17) and 'the culturally constructed body will then be liberated...' (2006 [1990]: 127).

There is yet another important aspect to Butler's notion of the process of materialisation; 'matter has a history' (Butler: 1993: 29).⁷ It has been argued that the very articulation of matter conditions and enables materiality. Thus to materialize is to become intelligible but this cannot be separated from coming to mean which invariably invokes notions of power (Butler: 1993).⁸ Therefore notions of sexual difference are played out within this process of materialisation. Similarly, Haraway (1991) has traced the ways that accounts of the body have been influenced by the technological framing of the body; thus descriptions of the body come to make matter something else as it shifts its meanings. For Butler, "to matter' means at once 'to materialize' and 'to mean'" (1993: 32) which captures both the corporeality and the meaning of matter while recognising that 'language and materiality are fully embedded in each other' (1993: 69).

A Foucauldian vision of power is linked closely with Butler's view of materialisation. Foucault's (1998) account has been widely discussed (see Lukes: 2005; Rouse: 1994) and will not be recounted here in detail. Yet Butler recognises in *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault: 1979) bodies are materialised under 'the historically contingent nexus of power/discourse' (1993: 33). In Butler power simultaneously materialises and dematerialises; thus there are those bodies that mean, or matter, and those that do not. These dematerialised bodies become less than, or peripheral to, those that are materialised; they are abjected. Thus what is at stake for Butler in the process of materialisation is not just academic word games (see Nussbaum: 1999), but 'the possibilities for a liveable life for those who live, or try to live, on the sexual margins' (2006 [1990]: xxviii).

Now this process of materialization is especially important because it works with and against Bhaskar's account previously described. Bhaskar (1975) is aware of the influence of the transitive dimension in understanding the intransitive dimension, and therefore the way that matter has a history.⁹ However, Butler's theory fails to account for how, if it is possible at all, theorists can escape

⁷ As an aside it is interesting to note that one of Latour's (1993) concerns is to give non-human actants (or matter) a history.

⁸ In part Butler's argument follows Foucault (1979; 1991; 1998) here by noting that discursive formations are a system of norms of values that are intimately tied up with notions of bio-power and the disciplinary society. Thus that which is intelligible is also that which is normative while that which is unintelligible is abjected and is deviant; norms and values are part of the politics of power.

⁹ The real is an 'intransitive dimension' (Bhaskar: 1975: 17) and corresponds with the causal laws of scientific enquiry, described as the 'generative mechanisms of nature' (Bhaskar: 1975: 14). Bhaskar also

the transitivity of the discourses around materiality. Therefore Bhaskar neglects to account for how his own theory will 'materialise' matter and it is therefore possible to subject it to a Butlerian critique. It is likely that Bhaskar's theory of emergence is liable to (de)materialise bodies in ways similar to previous theories of matter, as Butler highlights, and may therefore be implicated in legitimating certain notions of social dominance.

Butler's theory is also liable to criticism, for as Kirby notes 'Butler deploys the term 'matter' rather than 'substance' because the former is a synonym for significance/signification' (1997: 125). Thus it is possible that Butler is playing a word game where 'we are no longer dealing with matter as a substance, but with matter as signification' (Wilson: 2005: 162). Butler can be read in this way. For example, she states that 'to posit a materiality outside of language is still to posit that materiality' (1993: 67). Further Butler (1993) argues that trying to draw an absolute distinction between language and materiality is to undermine that very distinction by lifting language off the material. In so doing we take away any means of language referring to materiality; consequently we find ourselves locked in the old structuralist problem of Saussure.¹⁰

Yet, it seems that to interpret Butler solely in this way is to mis-represent the aporia she is dealing with. Butler is keen to point out that 'every effort to refer to materiality takes place through a signifying process which, in its phenomenality, is always already material' (1993: 68). Further she is aware that 'it must be possible to concede and affirm an array of 'materialities' that pertain to the body... biology, anatomy, physiology, hormonal and chemical composition' (Butler: 1993: 66). These cannot be denied but neither can we separate what these 'mean' or 'matter' to society. Butler sees that 'each of these categories have a history' (1993: 67) and therefore materialise. The aporia Butler is describing then is a material one, not a discursive one: for every time we signify we invoke

accepts the socially mediated nature of scientific knowledge, which is the transitive dimension (Bhaskar: 1975). Bhaskar stresses how '[humans] in their social activity produce knowledge which is a social product' (Bhaskar: 1975: 21) and is therefore a transitive version of the intransitive dimension.

¹⁰ This refers to the distinction that Saussure makes between signifier (the material rose) and the signified (the linguistic word or letters 'Rose' and then also the mental associations of flower, love and romance). If this association between the signifier (the material) and signified (the linguistic) is arbitrary, which Saussure argued it is, how then can language ever refer to anything but itself? Language is lifted off of matter and becomes an internal system of difference without any access to the material world. For an excellent and extended discussion of these issues see Kirby (1997).

materiality. This process of signifying matter is then performative¹¹ of the essence or ontology of matter; thus matter is constituted by the material process of signification (Butler: 2006 [1990]).

One weakness in Butler's (2006 [1990]) theory is the way she attempts to destabilise the essentialised ontology of gender and bodies by noting that they have a history without recognising how her own theory of matter materialises. Butler argues that 'the presumption here is that the 'being' of gender is an effect... that maps out the political parameters of its construction in the mode of ontology' (Butler: 2006 [1990]: 45). Thus Butler's (2006 [1990]) attempt to criticise this stabilisation of a material ontology is done by revealing that bodies materialise within and through cultural inscriptions rather than ontologically pre-existing them. However one could ask to what extent this theory of materialisation presumes another ontology of matter, an ontology that is boundary-less or non-fixed but is capable of assuming the appearance of a boundary or a fixity. What impact will this materialisation of matter have on gender and bodies? In one sense this ontology reinforces distinctions between nature-culture, for this theory provides a space where it is only human-bodies that come to 'matter'; this is both a reappropriation and an exclusion of nature/matter/bodies, much like those that Butler is combating.

Latour and the Nature-Culture Divide

Latour (1993) has made an extended effort to explicate how this exclusion of the natural is, to use Butler's own phrase, a dematerialisation of other types of materialised bodies. Specifically his work has been an attempt to consider how through the modern constitution there have been a number of implicit assumptions that have led to an untenable separation of culture and nature. For Latour (1993) all objects, or things, are concurrently natural and cultural; he describes them as hybrids. Butler (1993) is not completely oblivious to this oversight, for she recognises in her discussion of Aristotle that there is a hierarchy of matter between men, women and animals, but there is also a

¹¹ Part of the difficulty with understanding performativity is, as Butler acknowledges, her 'theory sometimes waffles between understanding performativity as linguistic and casting it as theatrical' (2006 [1990]: xxvi; 1999 Preface). The confusion then is that for Butler 'the two are invariably related' (2006 [1990]: xxvi; 1999 Preface) and that her 'own views on what 'performativity' might mean have changed over time' (2006 [1990]: xv; 1999 Preface). For clarity here, 'performativity must not be understood as a singular deliberate 'act', but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names' (Butler: 1993: 2).

resemblance between them. However, animals or even any discussion of other parts of the natural world are then forgotten in the rest of Butler's argument.

A similar criticism has been made by Barad (1998), who notes that in Butler there is no meaning for matter without humans and therefore no chance of a theory of materiality without the subject. Barad (1998) believes that this is an important neglect and one that she tries to rectify. Kirby also sees Butler's matter to be 'unspeakable and unthinkable' (1997: 108). In a similar vein Fraser notes that 'the human realm is the only one in which matter, for Butler, really matters' (2002: 614). Thus when Barad highlights that Butler's process of materialisation seems to displace the inert passivity of nature she argues that materialisation should be reconfigured so that it captures 'not only... how discourse comes to matter but how matter comes to matter' (1998: 108).

Latour takes an interesting route in trying to accomplish a comparable end. He argues that by changing and collapsing how we reconfigure nature and culture we then need to redistribute the status of agents 'to all the entities that make up... history' (1993: 81). Subsequently these entities become 'actors endowed with the capacity to translate what they transport, to redefine it, redeploy it, and also to betray it' (1993: 81). Here we see a return to Bhaskar (1975) and his notion of agents discussed briefly earlier. For as Bhaskar notes a 'hydrogen atom is... an agent' (1975: 109). Within this model Latour often refers to actants instead of agents or actors, yet the intent is somewhat the same.

Elder-Vass (2008) has warned social theorists of taking this insight too far, although he recognises that it is valuable. He notes that some translations (from example from French to English), although they may be incorrect, of Callon and Latour (two principle exponents of ANT) have attributed emotions or actions to non-human actants that seem untenable positions to maintain, such as betrayal, representation or negotiation. Yet, it would seem that for actor-network theorists these are supposed to be metaphors that jar readers out of thinking in these dualistic ways. For ANT argues that there are differences between nature and society but not the ones that are commonly accepted (see Latour: 1993). In fact, in some ways, it is exactly this type of speaking for non-human entities that Latour (1993) criticises in his discussion of the modern constitution.

In a similar vein Whitehead has criticised this bifurcation of nature (see Halewood: 2008) which has resulted in 'nature' being characterised as a 'life-less realm, devoid of feeling and value' (Halewood: 2005: 59). Thus like Jonas (1996) earlier, Whitehead argues that 'we cannot tell with what molecules the body ends and the external world begins' (in Halewood: 2005: 76). Materiality is a process of exchange; humans are as much hybrids, or actants, as are engines (see Latour: 1993), if not with slightly different capabilities or powers (see Benton: 1991).

In following this line of argument ANT can be seen as espousing the view that 'entities take their form and acquire their attributes as a result of their relations with other entities' (Law: 1999: 3). Consequently, we can see through this paradigm materialisations and dematerialisations, but we can also see non-human entities in relational networks as well. Thus, it is not that ANT argues that there are no divisions, but that 'such divisions or distinctions are understood as *effects or outcomes*' (1999: 3; *emphasis in original*); hence the importance of Fraser and Barad's aforementioned critiques of Butler.

Benton too has opposed the maintenance of dualistic notions of social theory, such as: 'biology/society, nature/culture' (Benton: 1991: 7). His critique also highlights the power of such arguments. Benton notes that the animal world is one example where the possibility of matter coming to mean for itself is located. For '(some) animals are conscious beings, suffer pain and fear, and can be regarded as 'subjects of a biography'' (1991: 8). In addition, these ideas have the ability to work with and against biologically-based accounts of the body (such as gender), which have often been categorised as subject to a different discipline and therefore a different set of theoretical and methodological tools. This view, however, has created a 'biological blindness' (Benton: 1991: 2) in some sociological accounts of gender. The result has been to fail to account for how such biological accounts legitimate 'naturalised' ideologies of social domination (see Benton: 1991). For Benton such dualisms 'obstruct the sociological investigation of the *relations* between these abstractly counter-posed domains' (1991: 7; *emphasis in original*).

Similarly, Law notes that ANT can be regard as a 'semiotics of materiality' (1999: 4), where the relational nature of entities is applied to all materials. Thus ANT is conceptualised as a means of overcoming such obstructions, as noted by Benton. Law argues that another important feature of ANT is the notion of performativity (see 1999); it is unclear whether he draws this specifically from

Butler but what is clear is that there are some similarities between how they are conceptualised. Thus Law writes that entities are constituted by, in and through the relations of performance, which is similar to Butler's use of the linguistic performative she borrows from Austin (see Butler: 1993). Further, Law also highlights the relative durability of performativity, much like Butler. Thus in ANT it is 'performativity which (sometimes) makes durability and fixity' (1999: 4).

These ideas may sound conceptually attractive, but can Latour so easily reconfigure and define the entire social world by creating a catch-all concept of actants and then linking them with, what could be regarded as, a loose or even arbitrary relationship system called networks? Rix (1991) argues that to do so is to leave these reconstructions without any content: they become vacuous because all entities are the same. It is as if by tracing these networks Latour places everything into an epistemological blender making all entities the same type and size (see Rix: 1991). Yet for Rix, this blender is only possible because of the way Latour gathers his research; his analysis, although attempting to trace networks, is too narrowly defined within a specific locale to observe the networks that extend beyond these restricted spaces.

However for Latour (1993) not all actants have the same capabilities or potentialities and thus these differences serve as suggestions for how the 'social' could still have content. Furthermore, it is the connections, networks and associations of these actants that further complicate the content of the 'social'. Thus Rix's argument is like saying that if everything is reducible to atoms (i.e. the same) then there can be no content. This is patently an error; for each atom may have a different structure to the next (just as actants differ from each other) while the connections between them also organises a variety of substances and contexts. Thus within Rix's monist-soup there are still entities that are capable of different relations, inscriptions and traces. Thus 'there is no genuine distinction between the material and the social... all existence is a complex combination of the two' (Halewood: 2005: 75) and therefore Latour's account does not seem to leave us with no content, but leaves it saturated.

This brief discussion of ANT through Latour and Law demonstrates some of the links between Butler, Latour and Bhaskar and shows how the criticisms and strengths of each may in some ways be preliminarily reappropriated in a theory of relations between material actants. Thus in providing 'actant' status to both humans and non-humans Latour attempts to understand both; for 'so long as

humanism is constructed through contrast with the object... neither the human nor the non-human can be understood' (1993: 136). Thus without a social theory that can understand materiality, and specifically the materiality of the body, social theorists will not be able to understand the relations of the actants that assemble the 'social'.

Consequently the materiality of the body can be accounted for if theorists are successful in breaking down the nature-culture divide and then redistributing actant/agent status to both human and non-human entities while tracing the relational networks such actants/agents are involved within. This formulation will allow researchers to observe the process of (de)materialisation while also allowing a theory of matter that comes to mean without the subject and which can therefore reflexively engage with its own materialisation of matter.

References

Barad K., 1998, 'Getting Real: Technoscientific Practices and the Materialization of Reality' in *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, vol. 10, no. 2, Providence RI.: Duke University Press, pp. 87-128.

Benton T., 1981, 'Realism and Social Science: Some comments on Roy Bhaskar's 'The Possibility of Naturalism' in *Radical Philosophy*, vol. 27, ed. Skillen T. et al., London: PDC.

Benton T., 1991, 'Biology and Social Science: Why the return of the repressed should be given a (cautious) welcome' in *Sociology*, vol. 25, no. 1, London: British Sociological Association, pp. 1-29.

Benton T & Craib I., 2001, *Philosophy of Social Science: The Philosophical Foundations of Social Thought*, Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Bhaskar R., 1975, *A Realist Theory of Science*, London: Verso.

Bhaskar R., 1979, *The Possibility of Naturalism: A Philosophical Critique of the Contemporary Human Sciences*, London: Routledge.

Bhaskar R., 1989, *Reclaiming Reality*, London: Verso.

Butler J., 1993, *Bodies that Matter*, London: Routledge.

Butler J., 2006 [1990], *Gender Trouble*, London: Routledge.

Elder-Vass D., 2008, 'Searching for Realism, Structure and Agency in Actor Network Theory' in *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 99, London: Blackwell, pp. 455-73.

Foucault M., 1979, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, London: Peregrine.

Foucault M., 1991, *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Rabinow P., London: Penguin.

Foucault M., 1998, *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge, Vol. 1*, London: Penguin.

Fraser M., 2002, 'What is the Matter of Feminist Criticism?' In *Economy and Society*, vol. 31, no. 4, London: Routledge, pp. 606-625.

Halewood M., 2005, 'On Whitehead and Deleuze: The Process of Materiality' in *Configurations*, vol. 13, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, pp. 57-76.

Halewood M., 2008, 'Introduction to Special Section on A.N. Whitehead' in *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 25, no. 4, London: SAGE, pp. 1-14.

Haraway D., 1991, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, London: Free Association Books.

Jonas H., 1996, *Mortality and Morality: A Search for the Good after Auschwitz*, Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press.

Kirby V., 1997, *Telling Flesh: The Substance of the Corporeal*, London: Routledge.

Latour B., 1993, *We Have Never Been Modern*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Latour, B., 2005, *Reassembling the Social*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Law J., 1999, 'After ANT: Complexity, Naming and Topology' in *Actor-Network Theory and After*, ed. Law J. & Hassard J., London: Blackwell, pp. 1-14.

Lukes S., 2005, *Power: A Radical View*, 2nd edn., New York: Palgrave.

Nussbaum M., 1999, 'The Professor of Parody' in *The New Republic Online*, accessed online on 22/12/08 at <http://www.tnr.com/archive/0299/022299/nussbaum022299.html>.

Rix M.D., 1991, 'Latour and Nuclear Strategy: The Big, The Bad, and the Ugly' in *STA Working Papers*, accessed online on 9/1/09 at <http://www.uow.edu.au/arts/selpl/science/UOW018678.html>.

Rouse J., 1994, 'Power/Knowledge' in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press p. 92-114.

Scott J. and Marshall G., 2005, *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*, Oxford: Oxford Printing Press.

Shilling, C., 2003, *The Body and Social Theory*, 2nd edn., London: Sage.

Turner B.S., 1996, *The Body and Society*, 2nd edn., London: Sage.

Wilson N., 2005, 'Butler's Corporeal Politics: Matters of Politicized Abjection' in *Butler Matters: Judith Butler's Impact on Feminist and Queer Studies*, ed. Breen M.S. & Blumenfeld W.J., Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, pp. 161-174.

©Aaron Reeves. This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Licence (CC BY).