With others in this forum, I see queer theorizing as having multiple logics – both within each approach to queer theorizing and across queer approaches (see Weber, this volume). In this view, *queer* is unsettlable, intersectional, uncaging, multiple (and multiplied), both/and (e.g., Weber, 1999), and engaged in projects of (the productivity of) failure and maybe even destruction (e.g., Halberstam, 2011; Edelman, 2004). Many of instantiations of *queer* might (appropriately) reject conversations with ‘mainstream’. I contend queer theorizing can be fruitfully applied, not only as rejection and/or transformation, but in conversation with the research agendas of ‘mainstream’ IR (e.g., Sjoberg, 2013, 2012). Along those lines, this piece uses a brief example of engaging the logics of the materiality of sex in Judith Butler’s (1993) *Bodies that Matter* with the ‘mainstream’ IR research agenda addressing the “territorial peace” (Gibler 2007; 2012; Gibler and Tir, 2010; Gibler and Braithwaite, 2013). Rather than being representative or totalizing, this engagement is meant to pair *one queer theory work* with *one IR research endeavor* to suggest the potential productivity of such engagements.

The Territorial Peace

Gibler’s (2007, 509) work on the “territorial peace” is an intervention in the Democratic Peace literature that suggests that “joint democracy is actually an instrumental variable that represents the absence of territorial issues in particular dyads, especially neighbors.” Gibler (2007, 509) contends that “democracy and peace might both be symptoms –not causes – of the removal of territorial issues between neighbors” since territorial issues are often fought over (e.g., Vasquez and Gibler 2001).

Accordingly, Gibler (2007, 516) argues that states with stable borders are more likely to become democracies, and operationalizes border stability as a product of whether a part of a state’s territory is at risk of capture by its neighbors and whether that state has the military capability to defend against any territorial challenges or pose a similar threat to its neighbors. Suggesting that “focal points” for coordination of boundaries in “natural” geographic landmarks stabilize borders, Gibler (2007, 518, 520) focuses on land borders not clearly demarcated in “nature” as hotbeds of instability. Using empirical data from 1946 to 1999, Gibler (2007, 529, 512) asserts that “the democratic peace is, in fact, a stable border peace” since “democracies have avoided war with one another because of lack of territorial issues.”

Bodies that Matter

In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler (1993, xi) looks to understand how to “link the materiality of sex to the performativity of gender.” In so doing, she describes sex as “a regulatory ideal whose materialization is forced” (Butler, 1993, xii). This “forcing” is a “regime of heterosexuality” which “circumscribes the materiality of sex” (Butler, 1993, xxii). In other words, the discursive norm of heterosexuality makes sex differences and straightness seem ‘natural’ not ‘natural’ and ‘natural’ does not exist. In this view, “it is no longer possible to take anatomy as a stable referent” and “the very contours of the body are sites that vacillate between the psychic and the material” (Butler, 1993, 35, 36). Butler (1993, 58, 71) critiques *both* the assumption that sex and sexuality are ‘natural’ and attempts to divorce them from anything material.

Arguing that “to proscribe an exclusive identification for a multiply constituted subject, as every subject is, is to enforce a reduction and paralysis,” Butler (1993, 78, 83) characterizes the production of gendered identity as the “simultaneous production and subjugation of subjects.” In this account, “hegemonic heterosexuality is itself a constant and repeated effort to imitate its own idealization” (Butler, 1993, 85). In other words, assigning one gender or sexual identity to any person is an act of violence towards that person as well as towards gendered and sexualized identities. It creates “the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior, authoritative set of practices” which both naturalize and reify (Butler, 1993, 172).

Yet, as Butler (1993, 176) contends, denaturalization is not the easy answer it appears to be – because “heterosexuality can augment its hegemony through its denaturalization, as when we see denaturalizing parodies that reidealize heterosexual norms without calling them into question.” This “resignification of norms” is “thus a function of their inefficacy” – an inefficacy that can only be corrected by “inhabiting the practices of its rearticulation” which can be done by recognizing the ambivalence, and indeed “drag” of not only homosexuality but gender generally (Butler, 1993, 181, 85). In other words, rejecting the materiality of sex and sexuality is as limiting as refusing to recognize its contingency.

An Engagement?

As Butler (1993, 172) argues, “the term ‘queer’ emerges as an interpolation that raises the question of the status of force and opposition, of stability and vulnerability.” The first contribution that (Butler’s) queer theorizing might have for the ‘territorial peace’ could be complicating the concept and operationalization of stable borders. Gibler carefully considers ways to define border (in)stability to avoid implicating other variables of interest, but Butler’s analysis suggests that Gibler’s account pays inadequate attention to borders’ foundational myths and perpetual unsettledness. Feminist and queer theorists (e.g., Peterson, 1999; Weber, 1998, 1999) have seen borders as gendered and sexualized constructions, but reading Butler onto Gibler’s work suggests a fruitful analysis of state sovereignty (and therefore territorial settledness) as what Butler characterizes as “hegemonic heterosexuality.” If sovereignty is, in Butler’s terms, a “regulatory ideal” the materialization of which is circumscribed by a discursive regime naturalizing statehood, then “it is no longer possible” to see borders “as a stable referent” – *no border is stable, because borders are conceptually, psychically, and materially unstable.* They “vacillate” between “the psychic and the material” and “cannot be stabilized” (Butler, 1993, 150).

The regulatory idea of the stable border reifies and is reified by the assumption of compulsory heterosexuality that often defines families, birthrights, and citizenships. Therefore, it is also fruitful to see the borders purported to delineate territory as literal regimes of heterosexuality. From early modern European borders moving with the marriages of royals to present-day legal migration structures being constructed in part around heterosexual marriage, borders have always been, and remain, violently entangled with (heterosexual) sexual norms. Belonging within (or being denied belonging within) borders is often linked to sexual lineage, as are the layouts of borders themselves – bounded territory (in Butler’s terms) circumscribes and is circumscribed by the materiality of sex.

Yet Gibler (2012) still finds the robust result that ‘territorially settled’ states are more likely both to become democracies and to resist initiating. This seems true even over the violent enforcement of (heterosexualized) borders. How? A third engagement with Butler’s theorizing suggests that the ‘territorial peace’ could be itself a complicated product of signification and resignification. State sovereignty (and the accompanying privileging of borders) is normatively naturalized in global politics, reified even through strategies of denaturalization. Even arguments about “artificial states” (Alesina, Easterly, and Matuszeski, 2011), “unnatural borders” (Knight 2012), and “common colonial history” creating border instability *appear to denaturalize the idea of borders* while actually reifying the notion that ‘real’ states, ‘natural’ borders and ‘stable’ territories exist (see Weber 1995). Apparently ‘settled’ borders, then, not only exist, but reify and reproduce themselves, a “constant and repeated effort to imitate …[their] own idealization” in which work like Gibler’s is complicit. This suggests and account of the “territorial peace” in which regimes of heteronormativity and the regulatory ideals of borders reinforce each other such that borders *and* heteronormative behavior are resignified.

Yet, following Butler, denaturalization is not an easy answer either, given that denaturalization of given borders can reify the *naturalization* borders generally. Recognizing the layers of ‘drag’ in current borders specifically and the concept of stable state borders generally might be a productive way to acknowledge this contradiction. This cannot be accomplished within Gibler’s two-dimensional operationalization of borders – more complexity would need to be included in both definition and quantification.

So What?

‘Mainstream’ IR theorists (e.g., Desch, 1998) have argued that critical theory has limited utility if it provides a more complicated explanation for a result a simpler theory could predict. Gibler’s theory is simpler than my account, and my alternative account is, in positivist terms, un-provable, with available (and perhaps even attainable) data. I suggest, though, using these arguments to halt the engagement is intellectually and politically problematic.

This is not least because Butler’s account of performances of gender and sexuality, applied to performances of ‘settled’ borders, suggests that Gibler’s notion of the benefits of territorial settledness is limited. Butler argues that proscribing stability and “an exclusive identification” for subjects which are “as every subject is” multiply constituted is both practically and normatively problematic, the “simultaneous production and subjugation of (heterosexual) subjects.” As distinct from feminist analysis of the role of ‘stabilized’ gender identities on the production of subjects (e.g., Tickner, 1992) and poststructuralist analysis on the inherent instability of the concept of sovereignty (Ashley, 1984; Walker, 1983), Butler’s contribution suggests that the (heteronormative) labeling and valorizing of ‘stable’ borders, whether or not it contributes to a decrease in military conflict among states, functions to “enforce a reduction and paralysis” on the multiply constituted identities *within* that (actually unsettled) territory, simultaneously producing the sovereign state and subjugating those produced within it (see, e.g., the argument in Weber, 1998). Butler’s work suggests that it is possible that *both* the fantasy of territorial stability *and* Gibler’s rearticulation of it are themselves acts of regulatory, heterosexist violence.

A fifth insight that reading Butler onto the ‘territorial peace’ provides is that it is not only state sovereignty that Gibler’s approach naturalizes and reifies, but also the democratic peace thesis that Gibler critiques from within. While proposing a different causal mechanism for the democratic peace result, Gibler’s work might be seen through Butler’s lenses to enact a (always yet never queer) “resignification of norms” of the democratic peace, given that it does not question the normative value or empirical utility to democracy, either generally or as a part of efforts to mitigate conflict among states. In this way, Gibler’s work might be described in Butler’s terms as a “denaturalizing parody” of the democratic peace which “reidealizes” its norms “without calling them into question.” Queer theorists have suggested that such resignification provides affirmation of existing norms *masquerading as critique*, injuring the subject more than the previous regulatory regime (see argument in Halberstam, 2011 about failure). Rather than critiquing the fetishization of democracy, then, the ‘territorial peace’ might reify it.

Perhaps this short engagement functions to suggest the potential productivity of (always fraught) conversations between ‘mainstream’ IR research and queer theory. While not all of the insights derived from *Bodies that Matter* for *The Territorial Peace* are unique to queer theorizing, and *Bodies that Matter* is a small subset of queer theorizing, this brief engagement suggests that both *queer methodological lenses* and the substance of queer theorizing could be useful interventions in mainstream IR. To that end, the point of this engagement has not been to condemn Gibler’s “territorial peace” or valorize Butler’s notions of the performance of the materiality of sex and the regulation of sexuality. Instead, it is to suggest that the *logics of queer theorizing* when inserted into the *research programs of ‘mainstream’ IR* produce not only recognition of ambivalence, pretension, and “drag” in IR theory, but also a hybrid, plural group of insights that could be fruitful for both approaches. Here, the logic of the materiality of sex in *Bodies that Matter* can identify vagueness, ambivalence, and even alternate causal connections within the ‘territorial peace’ research program. Engaging ‘territorial peace’ research with Butler’s framework suggests both macrotheoretical problems with the work *and* more micro-level changes to variable operationalizations – so ‘territorial peace’ researchers reading Butler might make the research better both *on its own terms* and as it resonates with queer logics in IR research. I recognize there is a distinct possibility that this brief discussion will not transform the ‘territorial peace’ research program. If it does not, there remain benefits to discursive intervention (Hamati-Ataya 2012). If it does attract a two-way engagement, its results could be creative and productive for both approaches. Perhaps this is what Butler meant by seeking to engage in “inhabiting the practices of …rearticulation.” If not, perhaps it could be.