(Re)conceptualizing and (re)theorizing difference is one of the core ways in which sociolinguistic scholarship involves itself with projects of social advocacy for marginalized groups. While variationist scholars counter deficit views by demonstrating the logic and coherence of linguistic difference, those taking a more social constructivist approach argue that difference and its consequences are ideological constructs that produce marginality. In this talk, I use my own trajectory as a scholar to discuss these approaches, along with an additional way of conceptualizing difference: as a real fact based on embodied experiences of unequal material conditions. I build on theories of chronotopes and scales and my recent ethnographic research with migrant domestic worker activists in Hong Kong to argue that a recognition of difference as real and material has important implications for sociolinguistic research and advocacy. More specifically, I demonstrate how it (1) allows scholars to reflect on the limits and possibilities of research that seeks social transformation through retheorization of language and (2) enables a recognition of the “special” status of the knowledge of materially marginalized groups. I also provide concrete examples of how such materialist approaches have informed my advocacy work and research dissemination, and I make note of the unresolved dimensions of this ongoing work.