

Contextualizing Gender
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Lecture - 28
Gender Trouble II


Good morning dear friends and welcome to this module. In the previous module we had looked into first two parts of 'Gender Trouble.' Butler has examined the persistent concerns which prevent the emancipation of feminist politics.



Essentialist notions, in her opinion, of gender categories will always exclude some group or the other and therefore, there is a need for a performative understanding of gender. In today's lecture, we will look at the final part and conclusion to 'Gender Trouble,' where Butler drives home her concept of gender performativity and its significance.

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Towards Gender Performativity

- In the second part, Butler found that psychoanalytic approaches to gender, like the ones found in Freud and Lacan, are rooted in foundational assumptions about pre-existing biological sex. This limits the possibilities of subverting enforced gender categories.
- So, Butler turns towards Foucault's anti-foundationalist critique to deconstruct the accounts of gender formation propounded by the psychoanalysts.



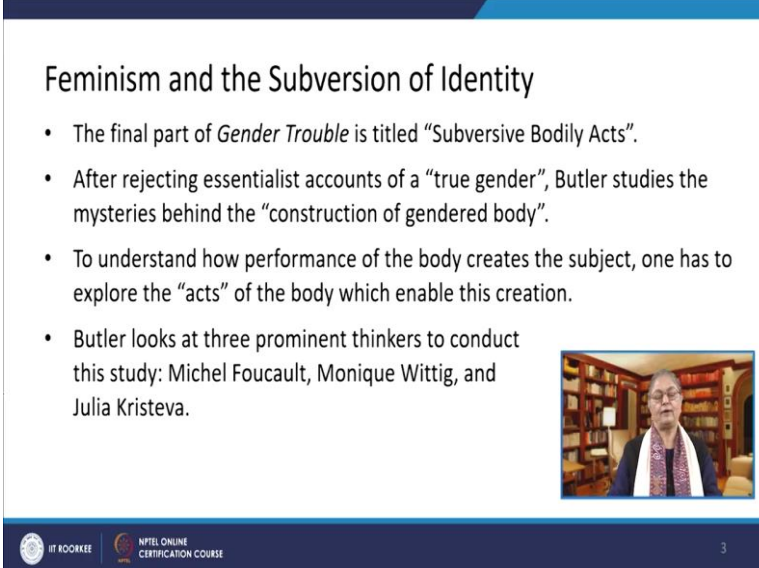
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In the second part, Butler found that psychoanalytic approaches to gender like the ones found in Freud and Lacan are rooted in foundational assumptions about certain pre-existing biological sex. This also limits in her opinion the possibilities of subverting those gender categories which have been enforced in the society.

So, Butler turns towards Foucault's anti-foundationalist critique to deconstruct the accounts of gender formation propounded by the psychoanalysts. This marks a shift


away from the essentialist ways which were hitherto prominent in feminist critique and it also leads us to a new investigation of critical assumptions and frameworks. The goal of Butler's critic is to locate to ways in which alternative gender configurations might be constructed as intelligible.

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Feminism and the Subversion of Identity

- The final part of *Gender Trouble* is titled "Subversive Bodily Acts".
- After rejecting essentialist accounts of a "true gender", Butler studies the mysteries behind the "construction of gendered body".
- To understand how performance of the body creates the subject, one has to explore the "acts" of the body which enable this creation.
- Butler looks at three prominent thinkers to conduct this study: Michel Foucault, Monique Wittig, and Julia Kristeva.



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The final part of 'Gender Trouble' is titled "Subversive Bodily Acts". After rejecting essentialist accounts of a "true gender", Butler studies the mysteries behind the "construction of gendered body". To understand how performance of the body creates the subject one, has to explore the 'acts' of the body which enable this creation.

Butler looks at certain prominent thinkers to conduct this study. She looks at the criticisms put forward by Michel Foucault, Monique Wittig, and Julia Kristeva at this juncture Butler rejects the structuralist notion of ideas where an overall unified structure can define the individual elements this is not true with the case of gender and hence she relies on the philosophy of poststructuralism. We would discuss the critic of Julia Kristeva first whose theory of the semiotic dimension of language initially exposes Lacanian premise to offer a feminine locus of subversion.

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The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva

- Julia Kristeva, born in 1941, is a Bulgarian-born French psychoanalyst, novelist, and critic.
- In psychoanalytic-feminist phase, Kristeva created a new study which she called *semanalysis* – a combination of psychoanalysis and semiotics.
- She proposed that bodily drives are discharged in language, and that structure of language is already operating in the body.
- Kristeva's theory of the semiotic dimension of language initially exposes Lacanian premise to offer a feminine locus of subversion.



Julia Kristeva
Source: The New York Times



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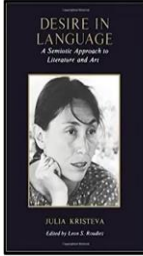
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Born in 1941, Julia Kristeva is a Bulgarian born French psychoanalyst, novelist and critic. In psychoanalytic-feminist phase, Kristeva has created a new study which she called *semanalysis*, that is a combination of psychoanalysis and semiotics. She has proposed that bodily drives are discharged in language and that a structure of language is already operating in the body.


Kristeva's theory of the semiotic dimension of language initially exposes Lacanian premise to offer a feminine locus of subversion. For Kristeva, the semiotic is associated with maternal body and the symbolic corresponds to grammar and syntax. Initially Butler agrees with Kristeva's analysis of Lacan; however, she also locates some problematic elements in Kristeva's conclusions.

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- The Symbolic, according to Lacan, is the universe of linguistic structures and is characterized by univocality. This means that each term has only one meaning.
- Within the Symbolic, the subject comes into existence by processing the loss of the primary relationship to the mother's body through language.
- Kristeva in her work *Desire in Language* (1969), claims the existence of an alternate dimension within the Symbolic, where language has multiple meanings.
- This semiotic dimension allows the relationship with the maternal body to be recovered.



Desire in Language
Source: Columbia University Press




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The Symbolic, according to Lacan, is the universe of linguistic structures and is characterized by univocality. This means that each term has only one meaning. Within the symbolic, the subject comes into existence by processing the laws of the primary relationship to the mother's body through language.

In a work 'Desire in Language,' which was published in 1969, Kristeva claims the existence of an alternate dimension within the Symbolic, where language has multiple meanings. This semiotic dimension allows the relationship with the maternal body to be recovered. The semiotic dimension within the symbolic blurs the distinction between subject and object in the opinion of Julia Kristeva. Since it is instinctual it acts to subvert the paternal law and its repressive taboos.

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- Kristeva argues that homosexuality or incest taboo may be processed in culturally acceptable ways like poetic expression or childbirth.
- When a woman gives birth, she becomes, like her mother before her, "the same continuity differentiating itself" (p. 107).
- The incest taboo then fixes the post-birth detachment of the female infant from her mother. This also creates a melancholy in the subject, especially in the daughter.
- Kristeva, here, is explaining what she finds as the origin of female homosexuality.




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Kristeva argues that homosexuality or incest taboo may be processed in culturally accepted ways like poetic expression or childbirth. When a woman gives birth, she becomes, like her mother before her, “the same continually differentiating itself”. The incest taboo then fixes the post birth detachment of the female infant from her mother.

This also creates in Kristeva’s opinion a melancholy in the subject especially in the daughter. Kristeva here is trying to explain what she finds as the origin of female homosexuality. For Kristeva, both homosexuality and incest taboo are culturally intelligible because they lie at the boundary of the semiotic and the symbolic. The semiotic expresses the original libidinal drives within the very terms of culture and the recovery of the maternal body is achieved through language.

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- Sometimes this *melancholy* prompts the daughter to internalize the lack of the maternal body as her own identity.
- According to Kristeva, this rupturing of the incest taboo results in female homosexuality.
- The lesbian self, which comes into being through a rupturing of the paternal law is not a coherent self. It is “a site of fusion, self-loss, and psychosis” (p. 111).
- It is culturally unintelligible as well as culturally unsustainable.




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Sometimes this melancholy prompts the daughter to internalize the lack of the maternal body as her own identity. In the opinion of Julia Kristeva, this rupturing of the incest taboo results in female homosexuality.

The lesbian self, which comes into being through a rupturing of the paternal law, is not a coherent self. It is to quote her “a site of fusion, self-loss and psychosis.” Unquote. It is culturally unintelligible as well as culturally unsustainable. Kristeva’s arguments on homosexuality and psychosis are rejected by Judith Butler. Butler also brings several criticisms against the claims of Julia Kristeva.

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- In Butler's opinion, Kristeva's account is based on her assumption of a primary, pre-discursive maternal relationship characterized by a "libidinal multiplicity" of drives.
- Butler finds that this assumption of a pre-discursive state is not justified or explained by Kristeva.
- Such naturalization, which presents motherhood as the primary function of the female body, reflects the power structure's interest in promoting the reproduction of its subjects.




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In the opinion of Butler, Kristeva's account is based on her assumption of a primary pre-discursive maternal relationship which is characterized by a libidinal multiplicity of drives. Butler finds that this assumption of a pre-discursive state is not justified or explained satisfactorily by Kristeva.

Such naturalization, which presents motherhood as the primary function of the female body, reflects the power structure's interest in promoting the reproduction of its subjects. Butler argues that sex is a discursively constituted category created within a historical power structure whereas in Kristeva, sex and the maternal body are presented as natural and pre-discursive as a means of protecting that heterosexual power is structure.

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- In asserting that there is no "true body beyond the law," Butler agrees with Foucault, who denies the naturalness of the category of sex.
- Butler quotes Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* when she says that sex is an artificial grouping of "anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations and pleasures" (p. 117).
- Butler also challenges Kristeva's claim that poetic language and female homosexuality are sites of psychosis, because they are a refusal to comply with the paternal law that structures society.




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In asserting that there is no “true body beyond the law”, Butler agrees with Foucault, who denies the naturalness of the category of sex. Butler quotes Foucault’s ‘The History of Sexuality’, when she says that sex is an artificial grouping of, I quote, “anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations and pleasures.” Unquote. Butler also challenges Kristeva’s claim that poetic language and female homosexuality are sites of psychosis. Because they are a refusal to comply with the paternal law that structures society.

Kristeva’s idea about lesbianism is a discursive claim made within the interests of the heterosexual power structure. This is a criticism that Butler forwards against Kristeva. Butler does not intend to define gender within the terms dominated by heterosexuality, but aims to free gender from all types of stereotypical definitions.

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- Butler subjects Kristeva's theory to some of the same criticisms she has applied to other theorists' work in earlier chapters.
- This Foucauldian critique is equally applicable to any claims made about pre-discursivity, because discourse cannot know anything outside or beyond, or prior to itself.
- Butler is troubled by noticing elements of homophobia and a promotion of heterosexual privilege that pervade Kristeva's work.



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Butler subjects Kristeva's theory to some of the same criticisms she has applied to other theorists' work in earlier chapters. The Foucauldian critique is equally applicable to any claims made about pre-discursivity because discourse cannot know anything outside or beyond or prior to itself.

Butler is also troubled by noticing elements of homophobia and a promotion of heterosexual privilege that pervade Kristeva's work. This critical outlook of Kristeva is not shared by Butler alone. Critics of Kristeva include prominent figures like Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak and Ian Almond as well. With her comments on discourse and power, one can see Butler leaning towards Foucault's poststructuralist outlook, but Butler also attests that she does not agree with every analysis done by Foucault.

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Foucault, Herculine, and the Politics of Sexual Discontinuity

- In this section, Butler examines the case of the 19th-century hermaphrodite or intersex individual, Herculine Barbin (1838–68).
- Born with ambiguous genitalia but assigned the sex of "female" at birth, Herculine lived a turbulent and confused life until her early 20s.
- Following an investigation to determine his/her "true" sex, Herculine was legally forced to assume a male identity and then subsequently committed suicide.

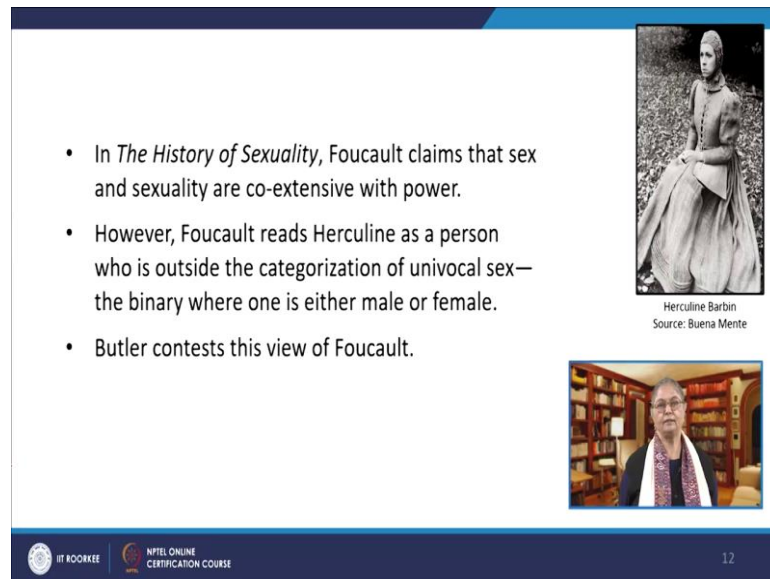


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To enforce her differences from Foucauldian ideology, Butler has examined the case of the 19th-century hermaphrodite or intersex individual, Herculine Barbin (1838-1868). Born with ambiguous genitalia, but assigned the sex of female at birth Herculine lived a turbulent and confused life until her early 20s.

Following an investigation to determine his/her true sex, Herculine was legally forced to assume a male identity. However, subsequently Herculine committed suicide. Herculine's story provides a window into the problematic nature of the categories of sex gender and social norms. Butler's study of Herculine begins with a critique of Foucault's analysis of Herculine situation. For Foucault, sex and sexuality arise within institutions of power and do not exist outside or prior to them.

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- In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault claims that sex and sexuality are co-extensive with power.
- However, Foucault reads Herculine as a person who is outside the categorization of univocal sex—the binary where one is either male or female.
- Butler contests this view of Foucault.

Herculine Barbin
Source: Buena Mente

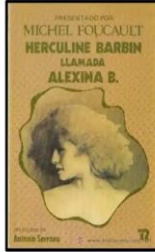
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In ‘The History of Sexuality’, Foucault claims that sex and sexuality are co-extensive with power. However, Foucault reads Herculine as a person who is outside the categorization of univocal sex, that is the binary where one is either male or female.


Butler contests this opinion of Foucault. Butler argues that by locating Herculine outside of the framework of intelligibility of the power matrix of compulsory heterosexuality, Foucault disregards his official stance on sex and sexuality as inseparable from institutions of power. Biology had given Herculine an anatomy that did not make sense within the binary sex category enforced by this discourse.

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- For Butler, Herculine's life is a conflicted dialogue with the laws that create and govern sex and identity.
- Because she/he can neither comply with, nor escape from these laws, and she/he is necessarily defeated by the same laws.
- Herculine's case lends support to the idea that subjective realities are completely determined by the discourses of power within which they arise.



Herculine Barbin by Michel Foucault.
Source: Pantheon Books



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For Butler, Herculine's life is a conflicted dialogue with the laws that create and govern sex and identity. Because she or he can neither comply with nor escape from these laws and she or he is necessarily defeated by the same laws.

Herculine's case lends support to the idea that subjective realities are completely determined by the discourse of power within which they arise. Butler concludes that what is most challenged by Herculine's case is the idea of emancipatory sexual politics, which is the notion that the rejection of the category of sex will result in a liberated bodily expression.

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Monique Wittig: Bodily Disintegration and Fictive Sex

- In this chapter, Butler offers an analysis of Monique Wittig's (1935–2003) feminist thought.
- Monique Wittig was a French avant-garde novelist and feminist whose works include unconventional narratives about utopian non-hierarchical worlds.
- Wittig makes two primary claims in her essay "One is Not Born a Woman":
 1. The category of sex is a political category generated by the "institution of heterosexuality."
 2. A lesbian transcends the binary opposition between woman and man and therefore is neither a woman nor a man.




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After this, Butler offers an analysis of Monique Wittig whom we have referred to previously also. Monique Wittig was a French avant-garde novelist and feminist whose works include unconventional narratives about utopian non-hierarchical worlds. Wittig makes two primary claims in her essay entitled 'One is Not Born a Woman,' which is based on her reading of Simone de Beauvoir's famous statement. Her first claim is that the category of sex is a political category generated by the institution of heterosexuality.


Her second claim is that a lesbian transcends the binary opposition between woman and man and therefore, is neither a woman nor a man. Butler has referred to Wittig's interrogation of gender. Wittig deconstructs the origin of womanhood to argue that the classification of women as a natural growth is a basis for social oppression.

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- Language, according to Wittig, has created the illusion that the universal speaking subject is the male.
- The linguistic division of reality into "concepts, categories, and abstractions" has a violent and material effect on bodies.
- Language has thus been appropriated by the heterosexual matrix. But the same language is also the means of challenging it.
- Butler notes that the political work Wittig proposes is to alter language so that it does not categorize according to gender or sex.



Monique Wittig
Source: Medium.com



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According to Wittig, language has created the illusion that the universal speaking subject is the male. The linguistic division of reality into concepts, categories and abstractions has a violent and material effect on bodies. Language has thus been appropriated by the heterosexual matrix, but the same language is also a means of challenging it.

Butler notes that the political work Wittig proposes is to alter language so that it does not categorize according to gender or sex. For Wittig, the gender binary is constructed through language so that the category of sex applies only to females and the feminine and indeed defines them. Wittig states that there is no 'natural woman' and the idea of feminine is created by the society. She also notes that the existence of lesbian society defeats the idea of natural women.

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- Wittig calls for a “war” which requires "women, lesbians, and gay men" to adopt the "position of the speaking subject" (p. 148).
- This will lead to the destruction of the artificial category of ‘women’ and the compulsory order of heterosexuality.
- Wittig experiments with this in her fiction by manipulating pronouns.
- Language has traditionally used the masculine pronoun to stand for the universal and the feminine pronoun to stand for the particular or specific.
- Butler disagrees with Wittig's idea that lesbianism should define itself as being outside of the sex and gender binary.



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Wittig calls for a war which requires women, lesbians, and gay men to adopt the position of the speaking subject this will lead to the destruction of the artificial category of women and the compulsory order of heterosexuality. Wittig experiments with this in her fiction by manipulating pronouns.

Language has traditionally used the masculine pronoun to stand for the universal and the feminine pronoun to stand for the particular or specific or weaker. Butler disagrees with Wittig’s idea that lesbianism should define itself as being outside of the sex and gender binary.

Wittig believes that the category of sex must be destroyed. She also states that lesbianism is a category that goes beyond man and woman. Butler disagrees with Wittig’s idea and opines that lesbianism should not describe itself as being separate or away from the sex and gender binary.

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- Wittig's conception of the lesbian as neither man nor woman can be understood in terms of Beauvoir's conception of "the myth of woman."
- For Wittig, the lesbian identity and a genderless discourse are the means of transcending the gender binary.
- Butler claims that to do this is merely to solidify the oppressive heterosexual construct.
- Instead, Butler proposes that the very concept of identity itself should be challenged.
- This can be done by revealing the way that discourse creates all the various categories of identity, not just the category of sex.



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Wittig's conception of the lesbian as neither man nor woman can be understood in terms of Beauvoir's conception of the myth of woman. For Wittig, the lesbian identity and a genderless discourse are the means of transcending the gender binary. Butler claims that to do this is merely to solidify the oppressive heterosexual construct. Instead, Butler has proposed that the very concept of identity itself should be challenged. And this can be done by revealing the way that discourse creates all the various categories of identity not just the category of sex.

Butler critiques the notion that homosexuality is outside and prior to the discourse of compulsory heterosexuality. On the contrary she argues that homosexuality is essential to gender discourse.

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Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions

- In this chapter, Butler produces a theory of performative gender by tracing the history of discourse on the body, beginning with Christian dualism and ending in modern drag performance.
- For Foucault, the body is a surface violently inscribed by history. This corporeal destruction which produces the speaking subject and its significations gives rise to the cultural values.
- Therefore, the body's material existence is prior to discourse.
- British anthropologist Mary Douglas (1921–2007), in *Purity and Danger*, follows Foucault and notes that cultural taboos and the boundaries of the body are established together.




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In a chapter on ‘Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions,’ Butler produces a theory of performative gender by tracing the history of discourse on the body, beginning with Christian dualism and ending in modern drag performance. For Foucault, the body is a surface violently inscribed by history.


This corporeal destruction which produces the speaking subject and its significations gives rise to the cultural values. Therefore, the body’s material existence is prior to discourse. British anthropologist Mary Douglas whose work has come out between 1921 and 2007, in a work ‘Purity and Danger’ has followed Foucault and noted down that cultural taboos and the boundaries of the body are established together.

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- Bodily limits are the margins at which culture is vulnerable to "pollution powers."
- "Pollution powers" reside in the structure of ideas which punish a symbolic breaking of the intelligible social order.
- Butler takes the example of the motif of "the polluting person" during the AIDS epidemic. A polluting person is always in the wrong.
- HIV AIDS was hailed as the "gay disease." According to Butler, the media had constructed a hysterical and homophobic response to the illness.



Protest against false HIV Assumptions
Source: Smithsonian Magazine




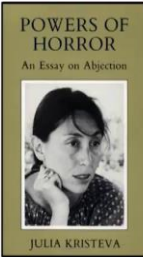
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Bodily limits are the margins at which culture is vulnerable to “pollution powers”. Pollution powers reside in the structure of ideas which punishes symbolic breaking of the intelligible social order. Butler takes the example of the motive of “the polluting person” during the AIDS epidemic.

A polluting person is always in the wrong. HIV-AIDS was hailed as the “gay disease”. According to Butler, the media had constructed a hysterical and homophobic response to the illness. In this section, Butler investigates if the sexed body is the foundation for the workings of the system of compulsory heterosexuality. From a poststructuralist perspective, bodily limits and exclusions are, as Butler has termed, the limits of the socially hegemonic.

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- To explain the purpose of constructing a discrete subject through exclusion, Butler cites Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* where she explains the concept of "abjection."
- Abjection is the rejection of something from within.
- For Kristeva, the "object" refers to that which has been expelled from the body and rendered as the Other.
- The construction of the "not-me" as the object establishes the boundaries of the body.
- Racism and homophobia can be considered to arise through this process.



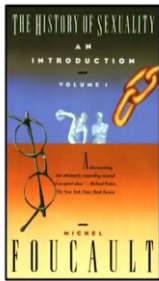
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To explain the purpose of constructing a discrete subject through exclusion, Butler cites Julia Kristeva's 'Powers of Horror' where she explains the concept of abjection. Abjection is the rejection of something from within, for Kristeva the object refers to that which has been expelled from the body and rendered as the other. The construction of the not-me as the object establishes the boundaries of the body.


Racism and homophobia can be considered to arise through this process. For Kristeva, the object is part of one's personal buried consciousness. It is part of the earliest struggle to separate from the mother. In other words, it is the object of primal repression. It is resistance to unity and disturbs identity in order to create a subject. The bodily permeability that permits abjection is a necessary condition for constitution and maintenance of the subject.

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- In contrast, Foucault understands the soul as the suggestion of an inner space written on the body's surface.
- He uses the situation of the prisoner to explain this theory of inscription.
- Through imprisonment, the social power structure causes the bodies of criminals to "signify the prohibitive law."
- The law suffuses the bodily realms of prisoners, signifying it as a vital and sacred enclosure, and rendering it as the soul – "which is precisely what the body lacks".
- In other words, the body presents itself as a signifying lack.



The History of Sexuality.
Source: Barnes & Noble




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In contrast, Foucault understands the soul is the suggestion of an inner space written on the body's surface. He uses the situation of the prisoner to explain this theory of inscription. Through imprisonment, the social power structure causes the bodies of criminals to "signify the prohibitive law".

The law suffuses the bodily realms of prisoners signifying it as a vital and sacred enclosure and rendering it as the soul which is precisely what the body lacks. In other words, the body presents itself as a signifying lack. For Foucault, the trope of the interior soul arises as a suggestion of an inner space written on the body's surface.

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- Butler holds the same mechanism as Foucault to focus on the "construction of the gendered body" on the body's surface.
- She says, "genders can be neither true nor false, but are only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity" (Butler, 1990, p. 174).
- Gender is the performative fabrication of an inner self through the repetition of "acts, gestures, and desire."
- It is the performance which gives rise to the gendered subject.

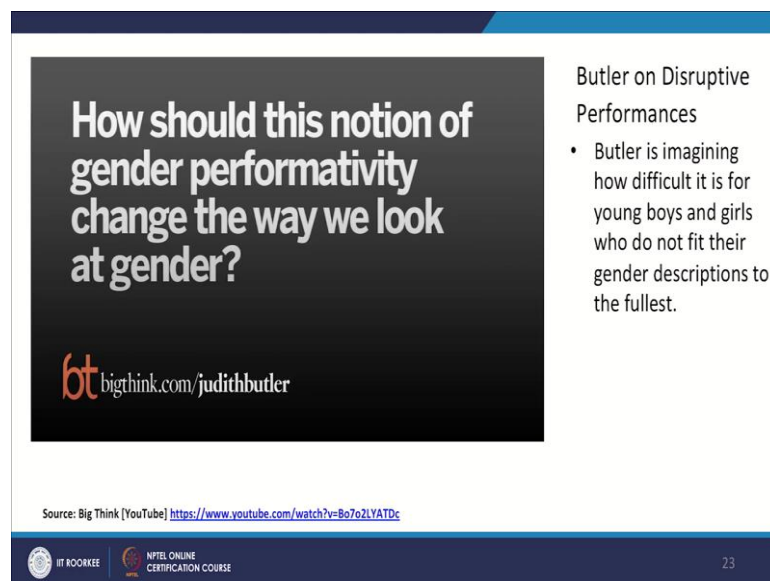


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Butler holds the same mechanism as Foucault to focus on the construction of the gendered body on the body's surface. She says and I quote "genders can be neither true nor false, but are only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity." Unquote. Gender is the per-formative fabrication of an inner self through the repetition of acts, gestures, and desire. It is the performance which gives rise to the gendered subject.

According to Butler, these performative repetitions are regulated by the taboos against incest and homosexuality which are the tools of the heterosexual matrix and its reproductive aims. The fabricated appearance of inner identity conceals the origin of gender in political regulations and disciplinary practices.


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The slide features a central black box with white text that reads: "How should this notion of gender performativity change the way we look at gender?" Below this box is the logo for "bt bigthink.com/judithbutler". To the right of the box, the text "Butler on Disruptive Performances" is followed by a bullet point: "Butler is imagining how difficult it is for young boys and girls who do not fit their gender descriptions to the fullest." At the bottom of the slide, there is a source citation: "Source: Big Think [YouTube] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bo7oZLYATDc>". The footer of the slide includes the logos for "IIT ROORKEE" and "NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE", along with the page number "23".

In this YouTube interview, Butler has imagined how difficult it is for young boys and girls who do not fit their gender descriptions to the fullest.

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big think

Butler on Disruptive Performances

- Butler is imagining how difficult it is for young boys and girls who do not fit their gender descriptions to the fullest.

Source: Big Think [YouTube] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bo7o2LYATDc>

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I think about how difficult it is for sissy boys.

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big think

Butler on Disruptive Performances

- Butler is imagining how difficult it is for young boys and girls who do not fit their gender descriptions to the fullest.

Professor of Rhetoric & Comparative Literature,
UC Berkeley

Source: Big Think [YouTube] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bo7o2LYATDc>

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Or how difficult it is for 'tomboys' the function socially without being bullied or without being teased or without sometimes suffering threats of violence or without their parents intervening to say maybe you need a psychiatrist or why cannot you be normal. So, you know there are institutional powers like psychiatric normalization and there are informal kinds of practices like bullying which try to keep us in our gendered place.

There is a real question for me about how such gender norms get established and policed and what the best way is to disrupt them and to overcome the police function? It is my

view that gender is culturally formed, but it is also a domain of agency or freedom. It's most important to resist the violence that is imposed by ideal gender norms especially against those who are gender different, who are nonconforming in their gender presentation.


So, in this 2011 YouTube interview, Butler has taken the examples of 'tomboys' which is a term used to refer to those girls who exhibit characteristics of behaviors considered to be typical of a boy. These young individuals can face aggressive behavior from their parents owing to the need to confirm and oblige by traditional customs.

This kind of bullying is also accompanied by unethical medical practices like psychiatric normalization. To escape this kind of bullying, individuals present disruptive in subversive performances of gender and Butler concludes gender trouble with the example of 'drag'.


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The Drag Performance

- Butler analyses the performance of drag as a potentially subversive parody of gendered identity.
- Drag plays with the elements of bodily sex, gender identity, and gender roles, configuring them into contradictory patterns.
- Drag performance suggests a feminine exterior and a masculine interior essence, while at the same time suggesting a masculine exterior and a feminine interior essence.



Maya the Drag Queen
Source: Alex Mathew, 2017



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Butler analyses the performance of drag as a potentially subversive parody of gendered identity. Drag plays with the elements of bodily sex, gender identity and gender roles configuring them into contradictory patterns. Drag performance suggests a feminine exterior and a masculine interior essence while at the same time suggesting a masculine exterior and a feminine interior essence.

On the right-hand side of this right there is a photograph which shows Maya the Drag Queen. Maya the Drag Queen is portrayed by Alex Mathew. According to Butler, drag


which posters as an imitation mocks not only the gender binary, but also the very concept of originality or authenticity.

The photograph shown on the slide of Alex Mathew suggests the idea of a Drag performance character of Maya who has been defined as the mother of illusions. Alex has tried to raise awareness and also to clear misconceptions revolving around Drag. For example, he claims that the notion of drag being an art only performed by the LGBT community is a myth.

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Conclusion: From Parody to Politics

- Although stylized repeated acts of gender are historically reified and naturalized, gender norms are “impossible to embody” fully in absolute terms; because they are not the outward expression of a stable inner essence.
- Inevitably, there are times when the act fails to comply with the norm. The means of gender transformation lies in this space, which holds “the possibility of a failure to repeat, a deformity, or a parodic repetition.”
- Through *Gender Trouble*, Butler deconstructs the forces of culture which shape individuals, notably through the elements of discourse, taboo and language,
- She concludes that gender, identity, cultural values and power are all congruent.



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Although stylized repeated acts of gender are historically reified and naturalized, gender norms are impossible to embody fully in absolute terms; because they are not the outward expression of a stable inner essence. Inevitably, there are times when the act fails to comply with the norm.

The means of gender transformation lies in this space which holds the possibility of a failure to repeat a deformity or a parodic repetition. Through ‘Gender Trouble’, Butler deconstructs the forces of culture which shape individuals notably through the elements of discourse, taboo, and language.


She concludes that gender identity, cultural values, and power are all congruent. Butler finds resolution regarding the text’s guiding questions on the nature of identity and the possibility of rendering identities that do not comply with the gender sex binary as culturally intelligible. Through a critical genealogy inspired by Foucault, Butler also

investigates the history of patriarchal elements in the society or what she refers to as the heterosexual matrix.

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Critical Commentary on *Gender Trouble*

- *Gender Trouble* challenged many assumptions and methods of first and second-wave feminism, and hence invited some reactionary responses as well.
- American philosopher Susan Bordo argues that Butler reduces gender to language and has contended that the body is a major part of gender.
- Similarly, American critic Martha Nussbaum argued that Butler misreads J. L. Austin's idea of performative utterance and provides no "normative theory of social justice and human dignity."
- Critical theorist Nancy Fraser accused Butler of elitism due to her difficult prose style.
- Butler responded to her critics in the new Preface to the second edition of *Gender Trouble* published in 1999.



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‘Gender Trouble’ had challenged many assumptions and methods of first and second-wave feminism and hence also invited some reactionary responses. American philosopher Susan Bordo argues that Butler reduces gender to language and has contended it that the body is a major part of gender.

Similarly, American critic Martha Nussbaum argued that Butler misreads J. L. Austin’s idea of performative utterance and provides no normative theory of social justice and human dignity. Critical theorist Nancy Fraser accused Butler of elitism due to her difficult prose style. Butler responded to her critics in the new Preface to the second edition of ‘Gender Trouble’ which was published in 1999.

Butler has responded to Susan Bordo by putting a larger focus on the aspects of the body in her second major work ‘Bodies that Matter’ which was published 2 years after ‘Gender Trouble’. Nancy Fraser had argued that Butler’s style in focusing on performativity distances the commoners from everyday ways of talking and thinking about themselves.


To take the idea of troubling gender categories and to execute it with a Foucauldian critique, Butler notes that such language of radical writing which aims to subvert the



mainstream ought to be difficult. This difficult writing is also meant to shock the placid readers out of their expectations.

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Reception

- Despite the criticism, *Gender Trouble* is an impressive work of post-structuralist feminism. When it was first published in 1990, it was part of a new approach to feminism.
- The book has been considered as one of the primary roots of queer theory, and some of its ideas have entered into legal scholarship and practice.
- The American Psychological Association (APA) revised their position on homosexuality in response to *Gender Trouble*.
- Critic Anthony Elliot writes that with the publication of *Gender Trouble*, Butler established herself at the forefront of feminism, and lesbian and gay studies.



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The American Psychological Association APA revised their position on homosexuality in response to ‘Gender Trouble.’ The famous critic Anthony Elliot writes that with the publication of ‘Gender Trouble’, Butler established herself at the forefront of feminism as well as lesbian and gay studies.

This critical masterpiece has enjoyed widespread popularity outside of the traditional academic circles as well. Because of its ground breaking approach to understanding the very nature of identity, ‘Gender Trouble’ has remained relevant ever since its publication. In the coming two modules, we will be looking at Butler’s critical work ‘Bodies that Matter’ which was published in 1993, where she clarifies some of the misreadings of gender performativity and investigates the relationship between gender and body.

Thank you.

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