

**Contextualizing Gender**  
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**Lecture - 29**  
**Bodies that Matter I**

Welcome dear friends to this module. In this module, we are looking at ‘Bodies that Matter,’ the second major critical work written by Judith Butler. In the last two lectures, we discussed gender trouble where she inquired into the politics and power structures behind gender performance. ‘Bodies that Matter’ is divided into two parts containing 8 chapters in total. In this lecture, we will be looking at the first 4 chapters of this influential work.

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*Bodies that Matter:*  
On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”

- Butler wrote *Bodies That Matter* to explore the questions of sex and gender in terms of both the human psyche and the physical body. It was published in 1996 by Routledge.
- She examines ways by which the notions of sex and gender can be reinterpreted and reappropriated to discover various fluidities within each of them.
- Butler uses a multidisciplinary approach that employs literary and film criticism as well as philosophical theory and psychoanalysis.

Source: Routledge

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‘Bodies that Matter’ was published in 1993\* by Routledge. Butler has written this book to explore the questions of sex and gender in terms of both the human psyche and the physical body. She examines ways by which the notions of sex and gender can be reinterpreted and reappropriated to discuss various fluidities within each of them.

Butler has used a multidisciplinary approach that employs literary and film criticism as well as philosophical theory and psychoanalysis. Butler places the body at the centre to explain the effects of subjectivity. She deconstructs the cultural norms which govern the materialization of bodies over time.

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### The Title

- The title comes from Butler's extensive study of the human body and its cultural representation discussed in this book.
- Butler initially focuses on the "materiality of the body" in this text. However, she notes in her preface that she was unable to limit the text to this bodily domain in its entirety.
- The body is thus a starting point, a framework, or boundary from which she begins to question other frameworks, both real and imaginary.
- This starting point leads her to consider the phallus, the role of language, representations of gender and sex in literature and film.



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The starting point leads her to reconsider the phallus, the role of language, representations of gender and sex in literature as well as in film. Butler is taking her readers attention to a focused critical account which explains why the current representations of sex and gender need to be rethought. To achieve this, she engages with various thinkers ancient as well as contemporary such as Plato, Aristotle, Freud, Foucault and Irigaray.

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**Context**

- The American AIDS epidemic peaked in the early 1990s and *Bodies that Matter* was published during this time, in 1993.
- The virus was initially prominent within the male homosexual community. But it quickly spread to a global populous that was both homosexual and heterosexual.
- Butler underlines that certain groups misidentified AIDS as the result of a disordered, homosexual lifestyle even though it was clearly not so.




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In order to further contextualize the significance of this book, we should note that the American AIDS epidemic had peaked in the early 1990s and *Bodies that Matter* was published immediately afterwards, in 1993. The virus was initially prominent within the male homosexual community, but it quickly spread to a global populous that was both homosexual and heterosexual.

Butler underlines that certain groups misidentified AIDS as a result of a disordered homosexual lifestyle even though it was clearly not so. HIV is the virus that causes AIDS and was largely misunderstood at the time Butler was writing. Butler has responded passionately to the rhetoric surrounding HIV and AIDS in the early 1990s by rejecting the heteronormative worldview. She has taken a strong stand in *Bodies that Matter* which does not abide by any heterosexual ideals.

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- Gender performativity is an important element of Butler's overall work, including *Bodies that Matter*.
- In *Gender Trouble*, Butler established that gender is not something innate or natural but something that humans perform.
- *Bodies that Matter* seeks to expand upon the idea of gender performativity in terms of how sex might also be created, maintained, and ultimately materialized within a body to perpetuate heteronormative aims.



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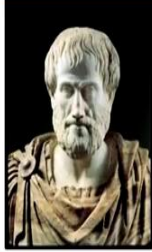
In Butler's overall work, including 'Bodies that Matter', we find that gender performativity is an important element. In 'Gender Trouble,' Butler established that gender is not something innate or natural, but it is something that human beings perform. 'Bodies that Matter' seeks to expand upon the idea of gender performativity in terms of how sex might also be created, maintained and ultimately materialized within a body to perpetuate heteronormative aims.

'Bodies that Matter' presumes the readers familiarity and acceptance of gender as a performative act described in her previous works. Predetermined by social conventions gender performance creates the illusion of stability which is not necessarily rooted in an individual's desire. Butler begins a critique of other philosophers and their constructs of sex, gender and femininity. She closely analyzes various perceptions surrounding femininity, which have been derived from ancient Greek philosophy.


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### Bodies that Matter

- In the first chapter, Butler seeks to deconstruct categories of bodily representation such as "woman".
- She explains that she is not seeking to negate the materiality of the category of woman but rather to "free it from its metaphysical lodgings" (p. 6).
- Butler refers to Aristotle, who argued that all material substances are matter and form.
- In reproduction, women are said to contribute the 'matter' and men are considered as the 'form'.
- Such a view relegates women to potential and not an actuality of being. The title of Butler's book is a pun on Aristotle's theory on matter.



Aristotle  
Source: Britannica.com




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In the first chapter, Butler seeks to deconstruct categories of bodily representation such as 'woman'. She explains that she is not seeking to negate the materiality of the category of woman, but rather to "free it from its metaphysical lodgings." Butler refers to Aristotle who argued that all material substances are matter and form.

In reproduction, women are said to contribute the 'matter' and men are considered as the 'form'. Such a view relegates women to potential and not an actuality of being. The title of Butler's book is a pun on Aristotle's theory on matter. By noting the apparent limitation in Aristotelean philosophy regarding body and soul Butler proceeds to compare Aristotle's conception with that of Foucault.

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- Aristotle further sees a human "soul" as the actualized potential of matter.
- In Aristotle, Butler finds no clear distinction between materiality and intelligibility. Therefore she concludes that Aristotle does not supply us with the kind of "body" that feminism seeks to retrieve.
- Butler notes how Foucault developed on Aristotle's assertions.
- Foucault saw the soul as the way the "body is effectively materialized" through a process of shaping the body into some imaginary ideal prescribed by history or society.
- Butler sees both explanations as reinforcing the notion that the soul has great power over the body.



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Aristotle has seen a human soul as the actualized potential of matter. In Aristotle, Butler finds no clear distinction between materiality and intelligibility. Therefore, she concludes that Aristotle does not supply us with the soul of body that feminism seeks to retrieve. She now notes how Foucault has further developed on the assertions made by Aristotle.


Foucault sees the soul as the way the body is effectively materialized through a process of shaping the body into some imaginary ideal prescribed by history or society. Butler sees both explanations as reinforcing the notion that the soul has great power over the body.

Since the philosophy surrounding the soul cannot account for the materiality of the body Butler finds the views of Aristotle and also Foucault as being restricted and insufficient. She then moves to Luce Irigaray, the famous French feminist and her account of the Greek philosopher Plato. Butler refers to Irigaray's 1974 critical work 'Speculum of Other Woman.'


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### Irigaray's Critique of Plato

- Butler considers how Irigaray has analyzed Plato's distinction of form and matter.
- Irigaray sees the entire notion of matter as the space in which philosophy has excluded the feminine.
- Thus she employs a methodology in which she reads "a philosophical text for what it refuses to include" (p. 11).
- Irigaray opens up a space for analysis by mimicking the same language which privileges the masculine in ancient Greek philosophy.



Speculum of Other Woman (1974)  
Source: Cornell UP



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Butler considers how Irigaray has analyzed Plato's distinction of form and matter. Irigaray sees the entire notion of matter as the space in which philosophy has excluded the feminine. Thus, she employs a methodology in which she reads I quote, "a philosophical text for what it refuses to include." Unquote. Irigaray opens up a space for analysis by mimicking the same language which privileges the masculine in ancient Greek philosophy.

In other words, by opening this space for analysis. Irigaray engages closely with phallogocentrism in western philosophy which can be traced back to Plato. Phallogocentric refers to the use of language or a style of thought or a speech employed to reinforce male dominance.

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- Irigaray finds that the feminine only appears in *catachresis*, which refers to the figures that function improperly or words that are used incorrectly.
- She says, women are portrayed as either “inert” or “procreative”, or “always already dead” or “ever-living.”
- Such a facile binary is in strong contrast to how men have been associated with the principle of rational mastery in the same texts.
- She argues that a distinction of form and matter is offered within a phallogocentric language.



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Irigaray finds that the feminine only appears in catachresis, which refers to the figures that function improperly or words that are used incorrectly. She says that women are portrayed as either “inert or pro creative or always already dead or ever-living”. Such a facile binary is in strong contrast to how men have been associated with the principle of rational mastery in the same texts.

She argues that a distinction of form in matter is offered within a phallogocentric language. Therefore, Plato’s philosophical approach does not include any actual description of women as per Irigaray and consequently, the feminine form is excluded from the discourse of traditional metaphysics.



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- Butler agrees with Irigaray's analysis of the ancient Greek philosophers and their fallacious representation of women.
- She says that "this prior cosmology", where "man is at the top of an ontological hierarchy, and woman is a poor or debased copy of man", needs to be "rewritten" (Butler, 1993, p. 17).
- Butler appreciates Irigaray on how she "inhabits, penetrates, occupies, and redeploys ... the paternal language itself" (p. 19).



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Butler appreciates Irigaray on how she, to quote, "inhabits, penetrates, occupies and redeploys the paternal language itself." Unquote. Butler concludes that by reading Plato's text in a new way, Irigaray creates a foundation for opening discussion around the ethics of sexual difference and how women should be treated as full subjects by naturalizing discourses about female bodies.

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### Phantasmatic Identification and the Assumption of Sex

- Butler begins this chapter with a question: "Is sexuality so highly constrained that it ought to be conceived as fixed?" (p. 58).
- Butler explains that attempts to "denaturalize" sex and gender have sought to reject heteronormativity and the norms associated with it.
- She believes that such a strategy is mistakenly rooted in the notion that sex is "either constructed or determined" and thus, either fixed or free.
- This binary fails to account for the full spectrum of conditions that lead to the assumption of sex and gender.
- Butler defines performativity as the acting out of sex or gender through "a regularized repetition of norms."



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Butler begins this chapter on 'Phantasmatic Identification and the Assumption of Sex' with a question: "Is sexuality so highly constrained that it ought to be conceived as fixed?" Butler explains that attempts to denaturalize sex and gender have sought to reject heteronormativity and the norms associated with it.

She believes that such a strategy is mistakenly rooted in the notion that sex is either constructed or determined and thus either fixed or free. This binary fails to account for the full spectrum of conditions that lead to the assumption of sex and gender. Butler defines performativity as the acting out of sex or gender through a regularized repetition of norms. In other words, "becoming sexed," for Butler, happens in a space that is highly regulated by the law of social norms.

These laws influence and control the possible forms of gendered acts and also its repetitions.

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- Butler sees sexual desire and sexual identification as phenomena that are not mutually exclusive. She says, "to identify is not to oppose desire" (p. 64).
- According to Butler, past interpretations of "becoming sexed" are rooted in notions of fearing castration.
- She explains that this binary limits the individual "to a single identification."
- A sexed position in culture is thus influenced by "heterosexual positioning" and exclusion of gay and lesbian possibilities.
- Butler questions the fixity of such heterosexist constraints and how to rework this sexed positionality out of its repressive rigidity.



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Butler does see sexual desire and sexual identification as phenomena that are not mutually exclusive. She says "to identify is not to oppose desire". According to her opinion, past interpretations of "becoming sexed" are rooted in notions of fearing castration.

She explains that this binary limits the individual to a single identification. A sexed position in culture is thus influenced by heterosexual positioning and exclusion of gay and lesbian possibilities. Butler questions the fixity of such heterosexual constraints and how to rework this sexed positionality out of its repressive rigidity.

In psychoanalysis, the fear of castration motivates the assumption of masculine sex while the fear of not being castrated results in the assumption of the feminine. Butler rejects this patriarchal and hierarchical world view of gender.

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- Butler explains that sexual identification is in some ways an assumption of place with an object.
- A woman who desires "woman" will thus become a woman. However, there is a threat of punishment in such a situation because of heteronormative social regulation.
- Such a threat is "phantasmatic" or imaginary according to Butler. She says,  
"To identify with a sex is to stand in some relation to an imaginary threat, imaginary and forceful, forceful precisely because it is imaginary" (pp. 64-65).



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Butler explains that sexual identification is in some ways an assumption of place with an object. A woman who desires “woman” will thus become a woman. However, there is a threat of punishment in such a situation because of heteronormative social regulation. Such a threat is imaginary or “phantasmatic” according to Butler. She says and I quote, “to identify with a sex is to stand in some relation to an imaginary threat, imaginary and forceful, forceful precisely because it is imaginary.” Unquote.

This world view or law that operates in the symbolic sphere of language compels the shape and direction of sexuality through the instillation of fear. Butler here questions what is it, that is restricting any individual to a single identification. Gender identifications, for Butler, are multiple and fluid.

This is the revolutionary statement for 1993 the year this book was published. She also notes that her reference to multiple identifications does not suggest that everyone is compelled to having such identificatory fluidity.

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- Butler notes that the symbolic is the realm in which “a series of demands, taboos, sanctions, injunctions, prohibitions, and impossible idealizations” enact tremendous power to produce and maintain subjects (p. 70).
- Assuming sex is, thus, a way, that a norm or symbol is repeated.
- By “becoming” a certain sex, the very law that constrains such a process is re-invoked.
- Butler is looking for a way which combats this process.
- The entrance of homosexuality into the symbolic will alter very little if the symbolic itself is not radically altered.




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Butler notes that the symbolic is the realm in which “a series of demands taboos sanctions injunctions prohibitions and impossible idealizations enact tremendous power to produce and maintain subjects.” Assuming sex is, thus, a way that a norm or a symbol is repeated. By “becoming” a certain sex, the very law that constrains such a process is re-invoked. Butler is looking for a way which combats this process. The entrance of homosexuality into the symbolic will alter very little if the symbolic itself is not radically altered.

So, as a first major issue in the way of proper gender identification, Butler underlines the problem of heteronormativity. Heteronormativity is the concept that heterosexuality is preferred and prioritized it assumes the gender binary. Butler refutes this view that only distinct and opposite genders can have sexual and marital relations because heteronormativity can be oppressive, stigmatizing and marginalizing which often leads to homophobia.

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- She says, “the legitimization of homosexuality will have to resist the force of normalization for a queer resignification of the symbolic” (p. 73).
- Because a normalization coming out of a hegemonic and exclusionary domain can only create a binary opposition.
- A binary that pits the homosexual against the heterosexual is ill-advised in Butler’s view.
- A single homosexual identity is also problematic, according to Butler.
- While an effort at unity can help create a political space, such a universal identity fails to account for the other multiple identities such as race and class.




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She says, I quote, “the legitimization of homosexuality will have to resist the force of normalization for a queer resignification of the symbolic.” Unquote. Because a normalization coming out of a hegemonic and exclusionary domain can only create a binary opposition. A binary that pits the homosexual against the heterosexual is ill advised in Butler’s view. A single homosexual identity is also problematic in her opinion.

While an effort at unity can help create a political space, such a universal identity fails to account for the other multiple identities such as race and class.

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**How does cultural discourse influence homosexuality?**

bt bigthink.com/judithbutler

Source: Big Think (YouTube) [www.youtube.com/watch?v=3VovCndtYCs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3VovCndtYCs)


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Butler on the Discourse of Homosexuality

- The discourse of homosexuality, makes it a cultural possibility.

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big think

**Judith Butler**

Source: Big Think (YouTube) [www.youtube.com/watch?v=3VovCndtYCs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3VovCndtYCs)

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16

Butler on the Discourse of Homosexuality

- The discourse of homosexuality, makes it a cultural possibility.

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Butler on the Discourse of Homosexuality

- The discourse of homosexuality, makes it a cultural possibility.

Professor of Rhetoric & Comparative Literature,  
**UC Berkeley**

Source: Big Think (YouTube) [www.youtube.com/watch?v=3YovCndtYCs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3YovCndtYCs)

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“If we look at the development of the gay lesbian bi trans movement in the United States, the more its cultural acceptance, the more cultural discourse, the more media presentation, the more proximity that people have to gay lesbian bi trans people: the more that life becomes thinkable. It becomes a cultural possibility that one can consider because it’s already in the world.

You could say that the discourse of homosexuality as it becomes more popular makes it more possible for people to become gay or lesbian. My sense is that there was always something about desired fantasy, that is may be partially unconscious or not fully realizable. Although certain kinds of cultural movements might make it possible to be to lead a lesbian or gay life they do not determine that they do not produce homosexuals.”

This discussion is reinforced in the following video. Butler explains how cultural discourse creates homosexuality making it a cultural possibility. In the interview held in 2011 for the YouTube channel Big Think, Butler says that ever since the period in which she published ‘Gender Trouble’, that is 1990, there has been a larger acceptance towards non heterosexual gender identities.

Better exposure through factors like media representation will familiarize people with the existence of different gender expressions. The discourse of homosexuality as it becomes more popular makes it a cultural possibility, but it is also important to note that media




representations should not become a foundation for creating homosexual ideals; homosexual ideals or traits that ordinary people can find it hard to live up to.

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**Gender is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion**

- In the final chapter of Part I of *Bodies that Matter*, Butler considers the ways by which power is constituted and perpetuated.
- Butler begins by considering Althusser on the mechanism of hailing or 'interpellation'.
- Althusser's term 'Interpellation' is used to describe a mechanism whereby the human subject is 'constituted' by pre-given structures.
- Interpellation describes the process by which ideology embodied in major social and political institutions (ISAs – Ideological State Apparatuses, and RSAs – Repressive State Apparatuses), constitutes the very nature of individual subjects' identities through the process of "hailing" them in social interactions.




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In the final chapter of part 1 of 'Bodies that Matter' Gender is Burning, Butler considers the ways by which power is constituted and perpetuated. Butler begins by considering Althusser on the mechanism of hailing or "interpellation". Interpellation describes the process by which ideology embodied in major social and political institutions and Althusser uses the terms ISAs and RSAs; that is Ideological State Apparatuses and Repressive State Apparatuses, constitutes the very nature of individual subject's identities through the process of hailing them in social interactions.

So, Althusser's term 'interpellation' is used to describe a mechanism whereby the human subject is constituted by pre-given structures. By being named or hailed as a member of a group, a person is led to see oneself as an ideological subject. For example, when a politician addresses a crowd as citizens or a teacher addresses a class as students, the people in those situations are being asked to adopt a certain subject position or a certain social role.

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- By being named or 'hailed' as a member of a group, a person is led to see themselves as an ideological subject.
- An addressing from a position of authority is supported by the force of law and the potential power of punishment for disobedience.
- In the case of gendered addressing, Butler explores how people can refuse the conformity through a parody of dominant norms.




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By being named or hailed as a member of a group, a person is led to see themselves as an ideological subject an addressing from a position of authority is supported by the force of law and the potential power of punishment for disobedience. In the case of gendered addressing, Butler explores how people can refuse the conformity through a parody of dominant norms.

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- Butler says,  
Where the uniformity of the subject is expected, where the behavioral conformity of the subject is commanded, there might be produced the refusal of the law in the form of the parodic inhabiting of conformity, a repetition of the law into hyperbole, a rearticulation of the law against the authority of the one who delivers it.  
(Butler, 1993, p. 82)
- Certain "hegemonic forms of power" can thus be re-signified through a failure to repeat them loyally.



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Butler says, and I quote, “Where the uniformity of the subject is expected, where the behavioral conformity of the subject is commanded, there might be produced the refusal

of the law in the form of the parodic inhabiting of conformity, a repetition of the law into hyperbole a rearticulation of the law against the authority of the one who delivers it.”


Certain hegemonic forms of power can thus be re-signified through a failure to repeat them loyally. Thus, what might be intended as a path to injure or violate a subject can also be redirected anew. In this quotation, Butler has highlighted the nonviolent ways by which laws can be protested.

The importance of nonviolence in resistance in gender politics is something that Butler stresses in her later works which have been published after 2010. As part of the final chapter, she also analyses one documentary titled ‘Paris is Burning,’ which was released in 1990.


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*Paris is Burning*

- Within this framework of failing to "repeat loyally," Butler examines the 1990 American documentary film *Paris Is Burning* directed by Jennie Livingston.
  - The title takes its name from the 'Paris Is Burning ball' held annually by artist Paris Dupree who appears in the film.
- It is a documentary about the drag culture of New York City and particularly those who participate in drag pageants known as balls.
- In 2016, the film was selected for preservation in the U.S. National Film Registry by the Library of Congress as being "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant".



Paris is Burning  
Source: Off White Productions




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Within this framework of failing to repeat loyally, Butler examines the 1990 American documentary film ‘Paris Is Burning,’ which has been directed by Jennie Livingston. It is a documentary about the drag culture of New York City and particularly those who participate in drag pageants known as balls. The title of this documentary takes its name from the ‘Paris is Burning ball’ held annually by artist Paris Dupree who also appears in the film. In 2016, the film was selected for preservation in the US National Film Registry by the Library of Congress as being “culturally, historically or aesthetically significant.”

Filmed in the 1980s, it is an intimate portrait of a culture that provided disenfranchised young people, which were often black or Latino or transsexual or gay an opportunity to be whatever they wanted for a night. Critics consider the film to be an invaluable documentary representing the end of the golden age of Harlem drag balls and a thoughtful exploration of race, class, gender and sexuality in America.

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- The film explores the elaborately-structured ball competitions in which contestants, adhering to a very specific "category" or theme, must "walk" or parade a runway like a fashion model.
- Contestants are judged on criteria including their dance talent, the beauty of their clothing, and the "realness" of their drag -- especially their ability to pass as a member of the group or sex they are portraying.
- Butler asserts that *Paris Is Burning* presents a space where "annihilating norms" that surround "gender and race are mimed, reworked, re-signified" (p. 84).
- The documentary calls into question whether parodying the dominant norms is enough to displace them.



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The film explores the elaborately structured ball competitions in which contestants adhering to a very specific category or theme must walk or parade a runway like a fashion model. Contestants are judged on criteria including their dance talent, the beauty of their clothing, and the realness of their drag, that is their ability among other things to pass as a member of the group or sex they are portray.

Butler asserts that this documentary 'Paris is Burning' presents a space where annihilating norms that surround gender and race are mimed, reworked, re-signified. The documentary also calls into question whether parodying the dominant norms is enough to displace them. In the drag ball productions, we witness a subject who mimes the legitimating norms and disrupts its own repetitions.

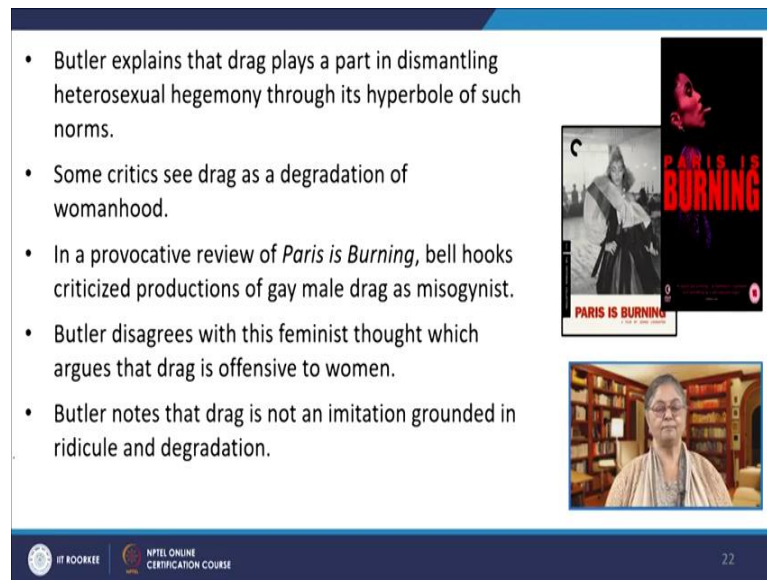
For example, the category 'banjee realness' comprises gay men portraying tough masculine archetypes such as sailors, soldiers and street hoodlums. Banjee boys are judged by their ability to pass as their straight counterparts in the real world. Writing for

Z magazine feminist writer bell hooks criticized the film for depicting the ritual of the balls as a spectacle to pleasure white spectator.

Hooks also questioned the political efficacy of the drag balls themselves, citing her own experiments with drag and suggesting that the balls themselves lack political, artistic, and social significance. Hooks criticizes the production and questions gay men performing drag suggesting that it is inherently misogynistic and degrading towards women.

Judith Butler, on the other hand, focuses on the drag queens desire to perform and present realness. Realness can be described as the ability to appropriate an authentic gender expression.

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- Butler explains that drag plays a part in dismantling heterosexual hegemony through its hyperbole of such norms.
- Some critics see drag as a degradation of womanhood.
- In a provocative review of *Paris is Burning*, bell hooks criticized productions of gay male drag as misogynist.
- Butler disagrees with this feminist thought which argues that drag is offensive to women.
- Butler notes that drag is not an imitation grounded in ridicule and degradation.


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Butler explains that drag plays a part in dismantling heterosexual hegemony through its hyperbole of such norms. Some critics see drag as a degradation of womanhood. We have referred to bell hooks who has criticized productions of gay male drag as misogynist. But Butler has disagreed with this feminist thought, and notes that drag is not an imitation grounded in ridicule and degradation. Butler says that drag is an acknowledgment of the ambivalent nature of gender identification under contemporary regimes of power and hence refutes the claims made by bell hooks.


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### Venus from *Paris is Burning*

- The character of Venus Xtravaganza in the documentary is important for Butler as a representation that combines race, economic status, and sexual identification.
- Venus is a Latino transsexual, cross-dresser performer and an aspiring model.
- In the documentary, Venus is shown as a person attempting to choose another gender in order to escape from oppressions of race and class.
- At the end of the documentary, she is eventually murdered by her client in her apartment.



The character of Venus Xtravaganza  
Source: Indie Magazine



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Butler finds that the character of Venus Xtravaganza in this documentary is particularly important as it represents a combination of race, economic status and sexual identification. Venus is a Latino transsexual, a cross dresser, performer and an aspiring model.

In the documentary, Venus is shown as a person attempting to choose another gender in order to escape from oppressions of race and class. At the end of the documentary, however, she is murdered by her client in her apartment. At the age of 23, she was the victim of hatred and fear of those who ascribe to traditional notions of gender; a phobia that has claimed the lives of many persons like Venus.

The film indicates that it is possible to parody dominant norms, but also that parody may not suffice to displace them completely.

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- Butler responds to Venus's death by saying that this conclusion is a powerful statement about the "fatal social constraints" that accompany heteronormativity.
- bell hooks had accused the director as being an outsider who is capturing the subject matter from afar. Her presence as a white, lesbian filmmaker is absent in this 'ethnographic film'. This, for hooks, has been a cinematic masking of reality.
- Butler on the other hand, praises the film and its director Jennie Livingston, appreciating how her "disembodied gaze" reached a wider audience.
- The film effectively portrays drag and shows how heterosexuality itself is always a performance, an attempt to 'imitate its own idealizations', leaving it perpetually anxious and threatened by alternative possibilities.



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Butler responds to the death of Venus by saying that this conclusion is a powerful statement about the fatal social constraints that accompany heteronormativity. In her article, bell hooks had accused the director of being an outsider who is capturing the subject matter from afar.

Her presence as a white, lesbian filmmaker is absent in this ethnographic film. This for hooks has been a cinematic masking of reality. Butler, on the other hand, praises the film and also its director Jennie Livingston appreciating how her disembodied gaze reached a wider audience. The film effectively portrays drag and shows how heterosexuality itself is always a performance, an attempt to imitate its own idealizations leaving it perpetually anxious and threatened by alternative possibilities.

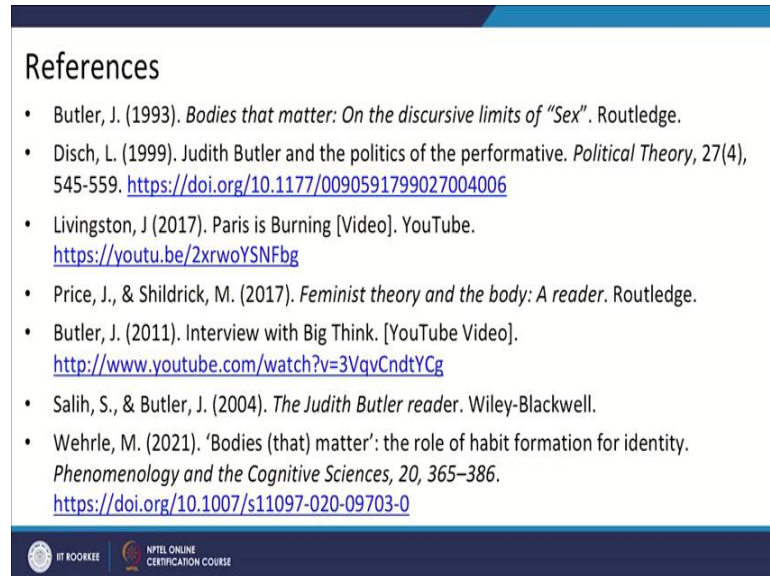
The drag ball contests in the film involve an exposure of how the norms of realness are themselves imaginarily created and perpetuated. Through the first part of 'Bodies that Matter,' Butler effectively addresses the critics, who wanted her to discuss the factor of body and its relation to gender. For Butler, the body cannot exist outside the discourse of cultural construction.

Inspired by Foucault, she contends that the body discourse is based on power relations and manipulated by those who control the sources of knowledge. Butler also goes back to the concept of performativity and confirms that repeatedly performed acts normalize an attributed gender as well as marks of race, class and sexuality.

In the next module, we shall look at the second part of Butler's 'Bodies that Matter', where she looks into novels by Willa Cather and Nella Larsen. She examines the intersections of race sex and gender.

Thank you.

(Refer Slide Time: 29:04)



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