

**Contextualizing Gender**  
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**Lecture - 37**  
**Gender Politics and the Right to Appear**

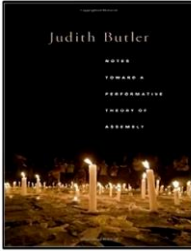
Good morning and welcome dear participants to this module. In the preceding module, we had looked at Butler's essay 'Precarity, Performativity and Sexual Politics.' In this essay, Butler looks at how vulnerability becomes a crucial factor in the case of gender performativity and resistance against discriminative norms. In this final module on Judith Butler, we would review her critical essay, 'Gender Politics and the Right to Appear.'

This essay was featured in her renowned essay collection *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly*, which was published in 2015.


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### A Performative Theory of Assembly

- Judith Butler published *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* in the year 2015.
- In this critical work, she draws upon her influential theorizations of performativity and precarity to examine the ethics and politics of public assembly.
- She discusses several themes such as the vital bodily component to acting in concert as well as the role of the media.
- She elucidates the dynamics of public assembly under prevailing economic and political conditions, and focuses on what they signify.



Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly  
Source: Harvard University Press




In this 2015 critical work, Butler draws upon her influential theorizations of performativity and precarity to examine the ethics and politics of public assembly. She discusses several themes, such as the vital bodily component to acting in concert as well as the role of the media. She elucidates the dynamics of public assembly under prevailing economic and political conditions and focuses on what they signify.

In the context of gender, gender minorities who face discrimination persistently join together to form different modes of alliance against instances of violence.

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- Butler broadens the theory of performativity beyond speech acts to include the concerted actions of the body.
- Understanding assemblies as plural forms of performative action, Butler extends her theory of performativity to argue that precarity—the destruction of the conditions of livability—has been a galvanizing force and theme in today’s highly visible protests.
- She also revisits the role of the body in politics because assemblies of physical bodies have an expressive dimension that cannot be reduced to speech.
- The mere presence and assemblage of the concerted bodies can become an effective mode of communication.



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Butler broadens the theory of performativity beyond speech acts to include the concerted actions of the body.

Understanding assemblies as plural forms of performative action, Butler extends her theory of performativity to argue that precarity, that is the destruction of the conditions of livability has been a galvanizing force and theme in today’s highly visible protests.

She also revisits the role of the body in politics, because assemblies of physical bodies have an expressive dimension that cannot be reduced to speech. The mere presence and assemblage of the concerted bodies can become an effective mode of communication.

Butler says that embodied ways of coming together, including forms of long-distance solidarity imply a new understanding of the public space of appearance, which is essential to politics.

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- Butler links assembly with precarity by pointing out that a body suffering under conditions of vulnerability resists more effectively under the ambit of mobilization.
- Gender minorities such as trans people are at a major disadvantage: being small in number and being exposed to mental and physical torture.
- Butler believes that such communities, when amassed together, are a form of assemblage of suffering bodies who can highlight and battle against prevalent injustices.
- Because assemblies make visible and audible the bodies that require basic freedoms of movement and association.



Source: Britannica



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Because assemblies make visible and audible the bodies that require basic freedoms of movement and association. Assemblies also expose coercive practices in prison-like atmospheres and expose the instances which are aiding the dismantling of social democracy.



Furthermore, a continuing demand for establishing equal worthiness can also enact a radical form of solidarity. This solidarity formed through assembly is an opposition to political and economic forces, which are aiding various forms of discrimination. A new sense of the people emerges from large gatherings of people who suffer. This newly formed group identity will be based on interdependency, persistence, and democratic leveling of what Butler calls grievability.

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### Gender Politics and the Right to Appear

- Butler says that her book on *Assembly* has been formed from a series of 2011 lectures, which was originally titled “Bodies in Alliance”.
- The first chapter of the book “Gender Politics and the Right to Appear” is a stand- alone essay which connects the topics of concerted action and gender.
- She says that bodies assembling in the streets – their right to appear and bodily demand – have a performative dimension to them.
- When people trouble the heterosexual matrix or demands of patriarchy, their gender performance is a manifestation of the fact that their situation is shared.
- This feeling of ‘sharedness’ is the commencement of an alliance that makes the resistance possible.



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Butler says that her book on ‘Assembly’ has been formed from a series of 2011 lectures, which was originally titled ‘Bodies in Alliance.’ The first chapter of the book ‘Gender Politics and the Right to Appear’ is a stand-alone essay which connects the topics of concerted action and gender.

She says that bodies assembling in the streets, their right to appear in bodily demand have a performative dimension to them. When people trouble the heterosexual matrix or demands of patriarchy, their gender performance is a manifestation of the fact that their situation is shared. The feeling of sharedness is the commencement of an alliance that makes the resistance possible. This is also the phase where negotiable demands are formed and the call for justice is enacted.

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Butler on Identity Politics and Bodies in Public Space

- In 2021, Butler participated in the Holberg Debate on 'Identity Politics and Culture Wars' with Glenn Greenwald and Cornel West.
- The debate was moderated by British philosopher Simon Critchley.

Source: [Holberg Prize \(YouTube\)](#)

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In 2021, Butler had participated in the Holberg debate on Identity Politics and Culture Wars with Glenn Greenwald and Cornel West. This debate was moderated by British philosopher Simon Critchley. This is a very significant take on her opinions presented in the essay under discussion.

“Does identity politics as it is currently manifesting itself of a suitable avenue towards social justice or has it become a recipe for cultural antagonism, political polarization, and new forms of injustice?”

If trans people believe they should be able to walk the streets of any street in Poland or any street in Hungary without or Brazil without harassment or arrest or violence or potential criminalization or pathologization.

Are we talking about identity politics that; oh, those are those are cultural politics that belong to trans people or are we saying hey, this is public space, this is a public freedom movement through the streets that is a, that is a public freedom. You know take back the night, was that just women, women’s identities, is that cultural... like no, no this is actually about being able to move freely in the world without violence.


Now, that is that is not merely cultural, that is about our bodies in public space and what our substantial freedoms are and how society is organized either to let us exercise that freedom or to stop us from exercising that freedom as their political power, their political

movement emerges from the suffering; it is like they know where it came from, they know what how it is being continued and they and they struggle and gather and they also make and this is extremely important, solidarity with any number of groups, that are also struggling against corporate power or brutal prisons or state violence or the failure of states to intervene when there is violence against women, trans people, LGBTQIA people. We need to actually open up to new social movements and to hear what they are saying and to find ways of linking, if our movements are going to be transnational and fulfill radical ideals.”


As we can see in the debate, Butler explains the limited nature of performing identity politics. She believes that identifying unique differences among the individuals of a group is something that identity politics fails to accomplish, as it may paint the whole group with the same brush.

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- Bodies struggle and gather by elements of common experience like suffering, and they oppose the failure of the state in protecting them from such instances of violence.
- Declaring solidarity with these vulnerable populations is equally important for Butler as they empower social movements such as the #MeToo movement.
- She also highlights the importance of public freedom in social spaces. The autonomy to move freely is a substantial right that everyone deserves irrespective of one's gender identity.



Source: Holberg Prize [YouTube]



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Bodies struggle and gather by elements of common experiences like suffering, and they oppose the failure of the state in protecting them from such instances of violence. Declaring solidarity with these vulnerable populations is equally important for Butler, as they empower social movements such as the MeToo movement.


She also highlights the importance of public freedom in social spaces. The autonomy to move freely is a substantial right that everyone deserves irrespective of one's gender

identity. This freedom of walking in the street is something that Butler explores in the essay we have selected and we will analyze it at a later part of this module.

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**From Gender Performativity to Public Assembly**

- In the beginning of the essay, Butler explains the connectivity of her original theory of gender as performance with her conceptualization of public assembly:
  - In *Gender Trouble*, it sometimes seemed that certain acts that individuals could perform would or could have a subversive effect on gender norms. Now I am working the question of alliances among various minorities or populations deemed disposable. More specifically, I am concerned with how precarity might operate as a site of alliance.  
(Butler, 2015, p. 27)
- Butler, here, highlights the ethical turn in her philosophy from linguistic subjectivity to the importance of understanding precarity and alliance.



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In the beginning of the essay, Butler explains the connectivity of her original theory of gender as performance with her conceptualization of public assembly and I quote from her.

“In ‘Gender Trouble,’ it sometimes seemed that certain acts that individuals could perform would or could have a subversive effect on gender norms. Now, I am working the question of alliances among various minorities or populations deemed disposable. More specifically, I am concerned with how precarity might operate as a site of alliance” unquote. Butler here highlights the ethical turn in her philosophy from linguistic subjectivity to the importance of understanding precarity and alliance.

For Butler, precarity is a middle term or a mediating term between gender performance and performative theory of assembly. So, precarity is that politically induced condition of maximized vulnerability and exposure. For populations exposed to arbitrary state violence to street or domestic violence or other forms not enacted by states; but for which the judicial instrument of states failed to provide sufficient protection or redress.

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- Butler contends that “identity politics fails to furnish a broader conception of what it means to live together across differences” (27).
- Living together in unchosen proximity, however difficult it may be, remains an ethical and political imperative.
- Moreover, freedom exercised with others is not necessarily in the shape of a universal or unified way.
- Therefore, living together does not presume or produce a collective identity, but “a set of enabling and dynamic relations that include support, dispute, breakage, joy and solidarity” (27).



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Butler contends that identity politics fails to furnish a broader conception of what it means to live together across differences. Living together in unchosen proximity, however difficult it may be, remains an ethical and political imperative. Moreover, freedom exercised with others is not necessarily in the shape of a universal or unified way.

Therefore, living together does not presume or produce a collective identity, but a set of quote “enabling and dynamic relations that include support dispute, breakage, joy and solidarity”, unquote. Butler here explains the dynamics of living together and how identifying an entire group as one does not do justice to the reality within the group.


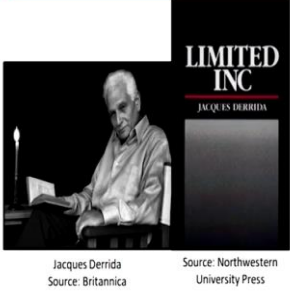
In the essay, Butler revisits the concept of performativity and reflects on how several other critics have taken up the theory in different ways, since Austin’s initial conception of it.



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### Evolution of Performativity

- In the essay, Butler traces the evolution of the performativity in the last few decades.
- She notes that although J. L Austin is responsible for the term, it has gone through “many revisions and alterations” (Butler, 2015, p. 28).
- She names three critics in particular: Jacques Derrida, Pierre Bourdieu and Eve Sedgwick.
- Derrida’s essay “Signature Event Context” was originally a French conference speech and then later published in his 1988 critical work *Limited Inc.*



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Butler traces the evolution of the performativity in the last few decades; she notes that although it is J. L Austin who is responsible for generating the term, it has gone through many revisions and alterations. And she refers to three critics in particular; Jacques Derrida, Pierre Bourdieu and Eve Sedgwick.


Derrida’s essay ‘Signature Event Context’ was originally a French conference speech and it was later published in his 1988 critical work ‘Limited Inc.’ Derrida argues that Austin does not take into consideration ordinary circumstances, as he does not designate all utterances as performative.

Derrida disagrees with this approach. He is of the belief that the possibility of repetition or what he terms as ‘citationality’ is foundational to language. And therefore, language itself is performative, where it acts by its repetition of established discourses.

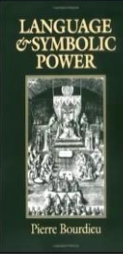
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- Similar to Derrida, the element of repetition is something that Butler incorporates when she claims that gender is the 'repeated stylization' of the body.
- Another thinker who engaged with performativity is Pierre Bourdieu who asserts that the authority of performatives derives from social institutions.
- He connects it with his concept of 'habitus' or regulated improvisation, which was a reaction against the structuralist notion of culture as a system of rules.\*


\* Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power*. Harvard University Press.



Pierre Bourdieu  
Source: Britannica



LANGUAGE & SYMBOLIC POWER  
Pierre Bourdieu  
Source: Harvard University Press




Similar to Derrida, the element of repetition is something that Butler incorporates when she claims that gender is the “repeated stylization of the body.” Another thinker who engaged with performativity is Pierre Bourdieu, who asserts that the authority of performatives derives from social institutions. He connects it with his concept of ‘habitus’ or regulated improvisation, which was a reaction against the structuralist notion of culture as a system of rules.

As we know habitus is the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinate ways which then guide them. For Bourdieu, the constructed nature of social reality is dependent on the continued reiteration of its performance. This notion of the bodily habitus as a formative site has been a source of inspiration for performance theorists.


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- Eve Sedgwick suggests that words like 'queer' can form a deviation in relation to social norms.
- The repetition or citation of similar words can expose a history of oppression and can provide a special force to terms which were used as insults.
- The performatives accumulate the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior, authoritative set of practices.
- The oppressive signification in 'queer' is redirected from the weight of its past, and the homosexuals themselves have adopted it.\*

\* Sedgwick, E. K. (1990). *Epistemology of the closet*. University of California Press.



Eve Sedgwick  
Source: The Centre for the Humanities



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The performatives, the performatives accumulate the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior, authoritative set of practices. The oppressive signification in queer is redirected from the weight of its past and the homosexuals themselves have adopted it.

For Sedgwick, the historical character of the performative process creates the possibility of a political struggle. Butler has been inspired by these developments in the understanding of the term performativity, especially when she shifted her focus to bodies in alliance.

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### Primary Interpellations

- After tracing the evolution of the term performativity, Butler demonstrates how “does a performative theory of speech-acts become a performative theory of gender” (Butler, 2015, p. 28).
- She takes the case of how medical professionals declare a wailing infant as a boy or a girl.
- This is an event which inaugurates gender with exclamatory statements such as “it’s a boy” or “it’s a girl”. This becomes problematized in the case of intersexed children.
- Butler says, in the case of adoption, someone has to “check off” a gender preference before they can proceed.




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After tracing the evolution of the term performativity, Butler demonstrates how does a performative theory of speech acts becomes a performative theory of gender. She takes the case of how medical professionals declare a wailing infant as a boy or a girl. This is an event which inaugurates gender with exclamatory statements such as “it’s a boy” or “it’s a girl.” This becomes problematized in the case of intersexed children.

And Butler says, in the case of adoption someone has to “check off” a gender preference before they can proceed. All such instances, for Butler, are discursive moments at the inception of our gendered lives. There is no one single sovereign power with extraordinary linguistic authority. Instead, it is diffused through complicated set of institutional powers.

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- She says,
  - Those primary inscriptions and interpellations come with the expectations and fantasies of others that affect us in ways that are at first uncontrollable: this is the psychological imposition and slow inculcation of norms... Such norms are simply not [only] imprinted on us, [but] they also produce us. (Butler, 2015, p. 29)
- Norms have a crucial role in influencing the modes of embodiment we acquire over time.
- Although gender is enacted, time and again, the enactment is not always in compliance with the norms.




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She thus says that those primary inscriptions and interpolations come with the expectations and fantasies of others, that and I quote “affect us in ways that are at first uncontrollable. This is the psychological imposition and slow inculcation of norms, such norms are simply not only imprinted on us, but they also produce us,” unquote.


So, norms have a crucial role in influencing the modes of embodiment we acquire over time. Although gender is enacted, time and again, the enactment is not always in compliance with the norms. By acts of naming and the powers of social norms, individuals are taught a form of compliance with gender expectations. The stability of this compliance is often challenged as the young adults grow up.

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- Butler highlights this in her essay:
  - We find ourselves veering from the designated path, wondering whether we did on some occasion act like a girl, or act like enough of a girl or act enough like a boy, or whether we have somehow missed the mark, and find ourselves dwelling either happily or not so happily between the established categories of gender.
- Therefore, the possibility of 'missing the mark' is always there in the enactment of gender.



Source: [feminisminindia.com](http://feminisminindia.com)



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Butler highlights this in her essay when she says that, “when we find ourselves veering from the designated path, wondering whether we did on some occasion act like a girl or act like enough of a girl or act enough like a boy or whether we have somehow missed the mark and find ourselves dwelling either happily or not so happily between the established categories of gender.”


Therefore, the possibility of missing the mark is always there in the enactment of gender. These gaps in Butler’s opinion represent a failing to accommodate an ideal norm. Gender then becomes a foreign fantasy relate through interpolation of various norms and voices. In fact, these gaps between the ideal cultural norms of gender and the conflict of embodiment initiates the acts of non-compliance.

During this phase of reproducing the norms, there can be conflicts and confusions in Butler’s opinion; more importantly new forms of desire and resistance may develop another set of cultural conventions.

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### Law, Medicine and Recognition

- Butler argues that authoritative discourses on gender like the law, medicine, and psychiatry seek to launch and sustain human life within discrete gendered terms.
- But they do not always succeed in 'containing' the effects and expressions of those discourses of gender as they 'play' out in social spaces.
- Butler cites the examples of the emergence of "transgender, genderqueer, butch, femme" and other hyperbolic or dissident forms of masculinity and femininity (Butler, 2015, p. 32).



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Butler also argues that authoritative discourses on gender like the law, medicine, and psychiatry seek to launch and sustain human life within discrete gendered norms. But they do not always succeed in containing the effects and expressions of those discourses of gender as they play out in social spaces.


Butler cites the examples of the emergence of transgender, gender queer, butch, femme and other hyperbolic or dissident forms of masculinity and femininity. The society for Butler has to be open minded to receive and accept zones of gendered lives, that may not fit into any categorical distinctions; because the social norms governing gender cannot only be repeated, but also can be deconstructed.

This can enable undoing of discriminative conventions and enable a remaking of gendered reality along new lines.


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**Law**

- Butler argues that the law of a state is immensely powerful, as it can criminalize individuals merely on the basis of their public appearance.
- It can also refuse and stigmatize those who are requesting protection from acts of violence leading to mental and physical injury.
- If we cannot find our way within the unwritten laws of gender, we are exposed to what it means to be at the limits of recognition.
- To exist at such a limit means that the very viability of one's life is called into question.



Source: royalsociety.org



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In Butler's opinion, as the law of a state can criminalize individuals merely on the basis of their public appearance, it remains to be immensely powerful.



It can also refuse and stigmatize those who are requesting protection from acts of violence leading to mental or physical injury. If we cannot find our way within the unwritten laws of gender, we are exposed to what it means to be at the limits of recognition. To exist at such a limit means that the very viability of one's life is called into question.

Butler notes that in some liberal discourses, subjects are thought of as the kind of beings who come before an existing law.




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- To elaborate on the issue of law and recognition, Butler asks the following question: “what makes it possible to come ‘before’ the law?” (40)
- Butler notes that this is “a Kafkan question”.
- The Czech novelist Franz Kafka is considered as one of the most important literary figures of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- Kafkan or ‘Kafkaesque’ has become a usage to represent the oppressive or nightmarish qualities of a surreal world, where all of one’s control patterns begin to fall apart, especially when faced against a tremendous force.



Source: Verlag Die Schmiede



Source: biography.com

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To elaborate on the issue of law and recognition, Butler asked the following question; what makes it possible to come ‘before’ the law? And she notes that this is “a Kafkan question.” The Czech novelist Franz Kafka is considered as one of the most important literary figures of the 20th century.

Kafkan or Kafkaesque has become a usage to represent the oppressive or nightmarish qualities of a surreal world, where all of one’s control patterns begin to fall apart, especially when faced against a tremendous brutal force. With a reference to Kafka’s novel ‘The Trial,’ Butler takes the example of a defendant preparing to stand trial in a courtroom.


The defendant can produce oneself as a human subject and yet requires recognition before the law such as citizenship to claim basic rights. Butler notes that the law is already working before the defendant enters the courtroom; here the legal domain overlaps the political field and the law establishes who can be seen, heard and recognized.

Looking at how bodily acts become performative, Butler explores the ways that lives and bodies are connected to one another and also to larger systems.

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## Medicine

- Similar to how law can determine the fate of individuals, Butler engages with how the field of medicine approaches gender expressions as a form of pathology.
- Pathology here refers to changes in a person which are deemed as characteristics of a disease.
- Butler does acknowledge that there is a difference between criminalizing transsexuality and pathologizing them as ill.
- Because the first position is a moral one, while the “pathologization model” works to shift certain embodied modes of existence as ‘illnesses’.



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Similar to how law can determine the fate of individuals, Butler also engages with how the field of medicine approaches gender expressions as a form of pathology.

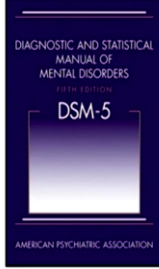
Pathology here refers to changes in a person which are deemed as characteristics of a disease. Butler acknowledges that there is a difference between criminalizing transsexuality and pathologizing them as ill.

Because the first position is a moral one, while the pathologization model works to shift certain embodied modes of existence as ‘illnesses.’ Butler contends this strongly and claims that such psychiatric model or illness model often comes up with only pseudo scientific explanations.


If such institutions are controlled by larger forms of power, then their primary aim can also be to undermine political movements and alliances among gender minorities.

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- Previously Butler had criticized the American *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* and its definition of 'Gender Identity Disorder' in her work *Undoing Gender* (2004).
- In this 2015 essay ("Gender Politics and the Right to Appear"), Butler highlights that the updated version of the manual still contains certain serious problematic elements.
- She notes that the trans people must go through "stipulated modes of transition to establish a pathological condition in order to be eligible for financial support" for their medical requirements and also for "legal recognition as trans" (Butler, 2015, p. 54).



Source: American Psychiatric Association



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Previously in her work 'Undoing Gender,' which was published in 2004, Butler had criticized the official definition of Gender Identity Disorder or GID by the American diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders and its definition.


In this 2015 essay under discussion, Butler highlights that the updated version of the manual still contains certain serious problematic elements. She notes that the trans people must go through "stipulated modes of transition to establish a pathological condition in order to be eligible for financial support" for their medical requirements and also for "legal recognition as trans."

In other words, trans people have to pass through pathologization to establish an embodied way of life that is livable. This is the major constraint and mediation on their fundamental freedom to appear as a normal individual without a stigma.


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### Walking in the Street

- To elucidate performative politics and the struggle against precarity, Butler looks at the most common and everyday activity of walking in the street.
- The freedom of this singular movement cannot always be taken for granted.
- She says,
  - If and when it does become possible to walk unprotected and still be safe for daily life to become possible without fear of violence, then it is surely because there are many who support that right even when it is exercised by one person alone. (Butler, 2015, p. 51)



Source: istockphoto.com




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To elucidate performative politics and struggle against precarity, Butler looks at the most common and everyday activity of walking in the street. The freedom of this singular movement of walking in the street cannot always be taken for granted. And she says I quote; if and when it does become possible to walk unprotected and still be safe for daily life to become possible without fear of violence, then it is surely because there are many who support that right even when it is exercised by one person alone.


When an individual finds oneself in an unprotected enclosure or exposed out there on the street, one should have the freedom to move freely without any threat of violence.

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- Butler engages with Hannah Arendt to understand how to affirm human freedom as a political reality in a world with neither control nor certainty in protection.
  - Freedom, for Arendt, begins with political community. If an attack occurs while walking on the street, it not only targets the individual, but the social category as well.
- Butler examines the work of the Arendt scholar Linda Zerilli who authored the famous work *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom* (2005).
- She articulates a non-sovereign conception of political freedom and explores a variety of feminist understandings of freedom in the twentieth century. She argues that we cannot imagine politics without agency because we cannot imagine politics outside the subject-centered frame.



Linda Zerilli  
Source: University of Chicago



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Butler engages with Hannah Arendt to understand how to affirm human freedom as a political reality in a world with neither control nor certainty in protection. Freedom, for Arendt, begins with political community. If an attack occurs while walking on the street, it not only targets the individual, but the social category as well.


At this point, Butler examines the work of the Arendt scholar Linda Zerilli, who authored the famous work ‘Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom’ in 2005. She articulates a non-sovereign conception of political freedom and explores a variety of feminist understandings of freedom in the twentieth century.

She argues that we cannot imagine politics without agency, because we cannot imagine politics outside the subject centered frame. So, even when we talk about bodies and alliance and resistance in assembly, the aspects of individual agency and freedom are basic and cardinal.


So, Butler in concurrence with Arendtian model of freedom and agency, believes that to be a political actor is a function, a feature of acting on terms of equality with other human beings and Butler explains this with an example.

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- Butler shares her experience of attending a conference against homophobia and transphobia in 2010 in Ankara, Turkey.
- Ankara is the capital of Turkey and in 2010, transgendered people were often served with fines for appearing in public and also frequently beaten by the police.
- Butler was quick to point out that her example of 'Turkey' is not to show that "Turkey is behind" – because similar things have happened in "Los Angeles and Detroit, in Baltimore and New York City".



Ankara, Turkey  
Source: commons.wikimedia.org




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She shares her experiences of attending a conference against homophobia and transphobia in Ankara, Turkey in 2010. Ankara is the capital of Turkey and in 2010 transgendered people were often served with fines for appearing in public and also were frequently beaten by the police.


Butler was quick to point out that her example of Turkey is not to show that "Turkey is behind;" because similar things have happened "in Los Angeles and Detroit, in Baltimore and New York City."

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- Butler explains that in Turkey, to prevent the violence against the trans community, feminist organizations worked with queer, gay/lesbian and trans people.
- This remarkable alliance resisted together not only instances of transphobia, but also "militarism, nationalism and the forms of masculinism" by which such forms of violence were enacted.
- So, on the street, after the conference, feminists lined up with the drag queens, and genderqueers, and chanted "we will not be soldiers, and we will not kill" (Butler, 2015, p. 53).



Ankara LGBT Pride March  
Source: commons.wikimedia.org

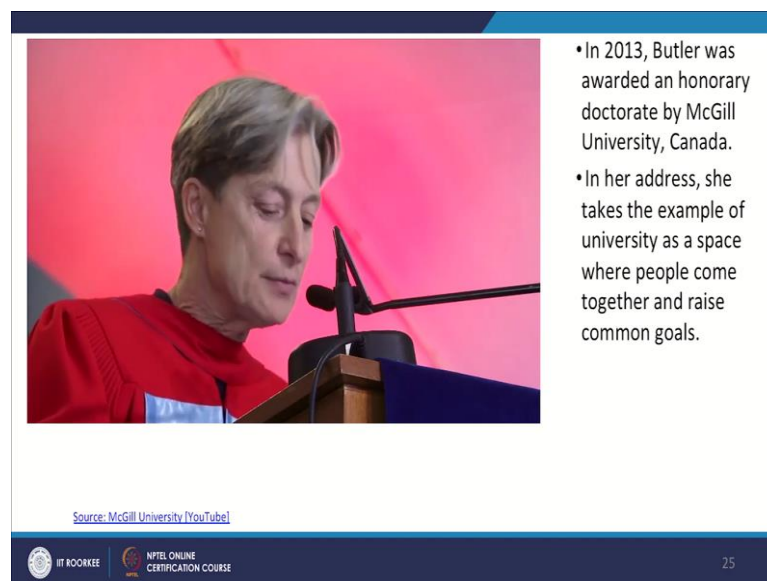


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Butler explains that in Turkey, to prevent the violence against the trans community, feminist organizations worked with queer, gay or lesbian and trans people. This remarkable alliance resisted together not only instances of transphobia, but also militarism, nationalism and the forms of masculinity by which such forms of violence were enacted.

So, on the street, after the conference, feminists lined up along with the drag queens and gender queers and chanted: “we will not be soldiers and we will not kill.” To oppose police violence against the trans community was thus to openly oppose military aggression. This freedom to appear was enabled by the power of assembly and this freedom is central to any democratic struggle, according to Butler.

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- In 2013, Butler was awarded an honorary doctorate by McGill University, Canada.
- In her address, she takes the example of university as a space where people come together and raise common goals.

Source: McGill University | YouTube

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In 2013, Butler was awarded an honorary doctorate by McGill University. In her address, she is taking the example of university as a space, where people come together and raise common goals.

“It may not be altogether clear that studying the humanities and critical thinking has something to do with becoming a citizen or becoming publicly engaged or learning how best to change and to preserve this world; yet these are precisely the immeasurable values that critical thinking brings to the university.

We cannot quantify such knowledge without losing the very value that such knowledge has for us. To continue learning as we even as we leave the university and to take those critical practices with us onto the street, into those spaces of work and love and into our public lives, for as important as freedom of expression is and it most surely is.

So, too it is important to know what it is we want to express and why and as important as freedom of assembly is and it most surely is as we saw so dramatically in Montreal's student movement last year. It remains equally important, it remains equally important to know it is why we assemble and for what purpose; this means that even in the space of activism, there has to be time for reflection.

And in the world of practical matters, there has to be a way to consider what we do and why and how it affects our world.


As much as the university is inevitably politicized and we can think of many political issues, effective policies on sexual and racial harassment, funding for the study of native peoples, investment policies, the damage the environment or contribute to the to or contribute to the subjugation of others. The university is also a place where we can actually learn about gender, sexuality, the environment, race, indigeneity, economics and justice to name, but a few of those issues.”

University is a space for Butler where critical practice is undertaken thoroughly. The values derived from the debates and discussions can influence the world outside of academia as well. She underlines the importance of freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, with a caution that one should be aware of the purpose and consequence of the demands raised.



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- Butler says,
  - Even in the space of activism, there has to be time for reflection. And in the world of practical matters, there has to be a way to consider what we do and why, and how it affects our world. (Butler, 2013)
- Butler refers to the 2012 Quebec student protests. The 100-day protest was against a tremendous tuition fee hike which would have increased the student debt up to 61 percent.



Source: CBC News

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She opines that there has to be a time for reflection even in the space of activism. And in the world of practical matters, there has to be a way to consider what we do and why and how it affects our world.

She has referred to the 2012 Quebec student protests. The 100-day protest was against a tremendous tuition fee hike which would have increased the student debt up to 61 percent. Close to 300,000 students joined the movement with a temporary coalition. It was dubbed as ‘maple spring,’ a nod to the term Arab spring. Although Butler supports the cause and its historic victory, she warns against the potential violent turn resulting in acts of vandalism and police brutality.

This could be avoided by all concerned as she calls for non-violent modes of resistance.

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- She notes that the university can also be an effective space for dialogue on gender politics, sexual and racial harassment, and on how certain populations are subjugated from the mainstream resources.
- This way one can learn the importance of 'recognition' and the endangerment with non-recognition.
- Butler highlights that an active democracy requires the wealth of education on how to read well – not just texts – but to translate lives of people across languages and cultures.



Source: McGill University




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She notes that the university can also be an effective space for dialogue on gender politics, sexual and racial harassment, and on how certain populations are subjugated from the mainstream resources. This way one can learn the importance of recognition and the endangerment with non-recognition. She highlights that an active democracy requires the wealth of education on how to read well; not just texts, but to translate lives of people across languages and cultures.

This insistence of Butler on the significance of non-violence is stressed again in her latest work, 'The Force of Non-Violence,' which was published in 2020. Non-violence, for Butler, is an important element of legitimizing a resistant movement with precarious bodies in alliance.

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- Thus, gender is an exercise of freedom according to Butler. This does not mean that there is complete choice and freedom in choosing our sexuality or gender.
- We are formed by language and culture, by history and social struggles, by forces which are both psychological and historical.
- We should be aware of the citational force of gender norms as they are instituted by medical, legal and psychiatric institutions.
- This is crucial when it comes to objecting to the effect these institutions have on the formation and understanding of gender in pathological or criminal terms.



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So, gender is an exercise of freedom according to Butler. This does not mean that there is a complete choice and freedom in choosing our sexuality or gender. We are formed by language and culture, by history and social struggle, by forces which are both historical and psychological.

We should be aware of the citational force of gender norms; as they are instituted by medical, legal and psychiatric institutions. This is crucial when it comes to objecting to the effect; these institutions have on formation and understanding of gender in pathological or criminal terms.

The dependency of the human on support and relations, expose a specific vulnerability, which is intensified when we are unsupported.

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- Those who find themselves in the positions of radical exposure to violence, are deprived of agency due to the lack of basic political protection in the form of laws.
- Precarity is the rubric that brings together not only women, queers, transgender, poor, differently abled, and the stateless, but also religious and racial minorities.
- For effective form of gender politics, precarious bodies should form alliances which will create gender mobilizations that can seek to establish the rights of gender minorities or people of nonconforming genders.



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Precarity is the rubric that brings together not only women, queers, transgender, poor, differently abled, and the stateless, but also religious and racial minorities. For effective form of gender politics, precarious bodies should form alliances which will create gender mobilizations; that can seek to establish the rights of gender minorities or people of non-conforming genders.

So, this 2015 essay, ‘Gender Politics and the Right to Appear’ is a significant step in Butler’s philosophical progression. The evolution in Butler’s philosophy shows the importance of freedom in gender expression and safeguarding lives from different modes of discrimination and violence.

We can see numerous instances of gender violence in the form of structural inequality and against gender non-conforming individuals. In her latest work, ‘The Force of Non-Violence,’ she shows how an ethics of non-violence must be connected to a broader political struggle for social equality. The power of non-violence is also manifested in global gender movements, which we shall analyze in the coming modules.

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Thank you.