

Contextualizing Gender
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Lecture - 46

Cyborg and Feminism in Anne Balsamo's 'Technologies of the Gendered Body' I

Welcome dear friends, in this week we will discuss the work of Anne Balsamo, a critic whose work introduces us to newer possibilities in the intersecting areas of gender and technology. Balsamo analyzes cyber bodies, female body building, discourses on cosmetic surgery, challenges faced by female bodies in the virtual cyberspace. And feminist cultural studies of science and technology, to develop alternate modes of narration and truth telling.

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Anne Marie Balsamo (1959-)

- Anne Balsamo is the former Dean of the School of Arts, Technology and Emerging Communication at the University of Texas at Dallas. Her work explores the cultural possibilities of emergent technologies in the context of gender dimensions of the body/machine interface.
- Veronica Hollinger in her article "The Techno-body and Its Discontents" comments that Balsamo is interested in exploring how gender remains a vigilantly guarded border concept within the context of burgeoning biotechnologies".*
- She examines some of the features of techno-culture which work to keep gender divisions in place, to maintain the gendered status quo in spite of advances through which bodies are routinely (re)tailored in almost every other respect.

*<https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/4240580.pdf>



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bodies are routinely retailed in almost every other respect. Her 1996 book title 'Technologies of the Gendered Body' is a highly significant study. It describes a contemporary cultural conjecture in which the body and technology are conjoined in a literal sense.

Balsamo aims to examine the techno body in the cartography of female subjectivities embedded in the cyborgian narrative. In order to explain her idea in detail, she reads the female body through five discourses in her book.

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Anne Balsamo's *Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women* (1996)

- Anne Balsamo scrutinizes the following ways of interpreting the human body in contemporary culture:
 1. Reading the Cyborg and Feminism
 2. Reading the Female Bodybuilding
 3. Reading the discourses on Cosmetic Surgery
 4. Reading the Virtual body in the Cyber sphere.
 5. Reading the body in Feminist Cultural Studies of Science and Technology.



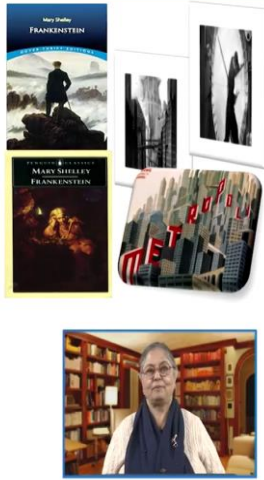
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The five different discourses which she has taken up in her 1996 publication are; 'reading the cyborg and feminism', 'reading the female body building as a subculture', 'reading the discourses on cosmetic surgery' including issues like the medical gaze, 'reading the virtual body in the cyber sphere' and its connotations with the gender, and 'reading the body in feminist cultural studies of science and technology'. In the five modules of this week, we will look at these five perspectives in detail.

Balsamo reads the body as technologically advanced, biotechnologically evolved, and media mediated society where culture and discourses on body are more gendered than ever. Balsamo suggests that body is the site of its struggle and not a blank canvas with agency. In a technologically driven society machines may assume organic functions and the body may be materially redesigned; yet the society may still perpetuate the conventional gender binary.

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- Balsamo examines ways in which the “techno-body” is gendered, incorporating examples and processes from the everyday to acknowledge the evolved “body”.
- Before mapping the cyborg body, Balsamo establishes the literary lineage of the *body* as a discourse.
- She begins by quoting the cyborg figures already present in the popular domain:
 - Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*
 - Maria the Robot from Fritz Lang’s film *Metropolis*



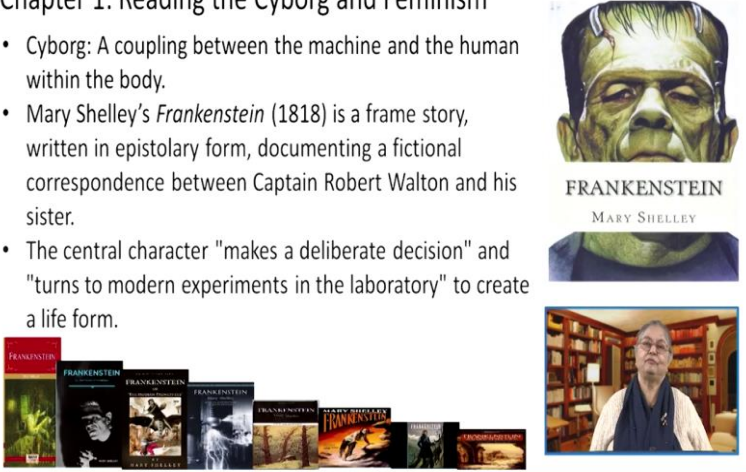
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Balsamo examines ways in which the techno body is gendered, incorporating examples and processes from the everyday to acknowledge the evolved body. Before mapping the cyborg body, Balsamo establishes the literary lineage of the body as a discourse. She begins by quoting the cyborg figures already present in the popular domain particularly referring to Mary Shelley’s ‘Frankenstein’ and ‘Maria the Robot’ from Fritz Lang’s film ‘Metropolis’.

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Chapter 1: Reading the Cyborg and Feminism

- Cyborg: A coupling between the machine and the human within the body.
- Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) is a frame story, written in epistolary form, documenting a fictional correspondence between Captain Robert Walton and his sister.
- The central character "makes a deliberate decision" and "turns to modern experiments in the laboratory" to create a life form.

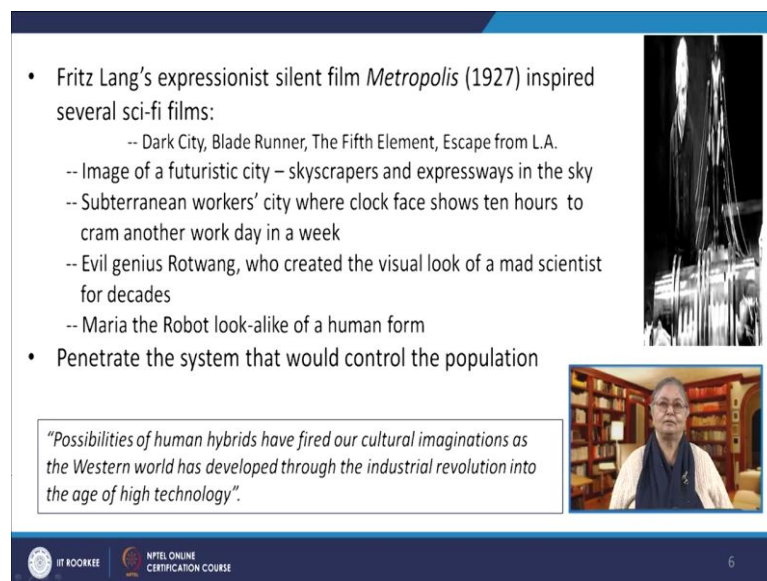


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Cyborg is a coupling between the machine and the human within the body. Mary Shelley's 'Frankenstein' which was published in 1818 is a frame story, written in epistolary form, documenting a fictional correspondence between Captain Robert Walton and his sister. The central character "makes a deliberate decision" and turns to modern experiments in the laboratory to create a life form.

Another example quoted by Balsamo is that of Fritz Lang's expressionist silent film 'Metropolis' which was released in 1927; various prints of this movie with various lens are available to us now. It has been an inspiration to several science fiction movies like 'Blade Runner', 'The Fifth Element' etcetera; it presents the image of a futuristic city with skyscrapers and expressways in the sky.

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- Fritz Lang's expressionist silent film *Metropolis* (1927) inspired several sci-fi films:
 - Dark City, Blade Runner, The Fifth Element, Escape from L.A.
 - Image of a futuristic city – skyscrapers and expressways in the sky
 - Subterranean workers' city where clock face shows ten hours to cram another work day in a week
 - Evil genius Rotwang, who created the visual look of a mad scientist for decades
 - Maria the Robot look-alike of a human form
- Penetrate the system that would control the population


"Possibilities of human hybrids have fired our cultural imaginations as the Western world has developed through the industrial revolution into the age of high technology".

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Metropolis has also presented the figure of the Evil genius Rotwang, who has created the visual look of a mad scientist for decades. It also presents to us Maria the Robot look alike of a human form; it suggests how to penetrate the system that would control the population

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- 1980s are taken as the historical phase of the cyborg due to the presence of cyborgs in comics.
- Cyborg (Victor Stone) is a fictional superhero appearing in American comic books published by DC Comics.
- The character was created by writer Marv Wolfman and artist George Pérez.
- Originally known as a member of the Teen Titans, Cyborg was established as a founding member of the Justice League in DC's 2011 reboot of its comic book titles.
- TV series, films, animations, toys, comics.



Source: <https://www.cbr.com/>



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1980s are taken as the historical phase of the cyborg due to the presence of cyborgs in comics. Cyborg played by Victor Stone is a fictional superhero appearing in American comic books published by DC Comics.

The character was created by writer Marv Wolfman and artist George Perez. Originally known as a member of the 'Teen Titans', Cyborg was established as a founding member of the Justice League in DC's 2011 reboot of its comic book titles. It has resulted in several TV series, films, animations, toys, comics etcetera; different types of cultural products have been based on it.


The presence of the cyborg figures in the popular culture denotes the presence of an other than the human entity. While foregrounding the evolving nature of post human subjectivities other than the male and the female. AI technologies are part of our cultural lived realities today, Sophia the humanoid robot by Hanson Robotics, the Ironman series, daily life gadgets; like, smart watches, smart phones, Alexa, links etcetera, all these are part of our cultural discourse now.

And Frankenstein happens to be the earliest example of it, cyborg transcends human limitations and also our cultural imagination.


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Defining the *Cyborg*

- Portmanteau of cybernetic and organism.
- It suggests a being with both organic and biomechatronic body parts.
- The term was coined in 1960 by Manfred Clynes and Nathan S. Kline.
- Alternate labels: Android, Replicants, Bionic Humans. Mediated through popular culture (primarily American techno- science).
- According to Gregory Bateson, the cyborg body “is not bounded by the skin but includes all external pathways along which information can travel”. (*Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, 1972).



Source:
<https://www.thewrap.com/>



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Cyborg is a portmanteau word, a combination of cybernetic and organism. It suggests a being with both organic and biomechatronic body parts. The term was coined in 1960 by Manfred Clynes and Nathans Kline. There are certain alternate labels also with which we can identify a cyborg; for example, Android, Replicants, Bionic Humans etcetera. The concept of the cyborg has been mediated through popular culture primarily through American techno science.

According to Gregory Bateson, the cyborg body is not bounded by the skin, but includes all external pathways along which information can travel. The cyborg figures of ‘Frankenstein’ and ‘Maria’ represent a hybrid. Neither completely technical nor completely organic they transgress the dominant cultural court. Figure of the cyborg is an alternative to the normative culture in the society, as core of this imagination also represents an act of subversion. It is a production of counter narrative on the man as the supreme beyond and above all.

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Reading the *Cyborg* Body

- Cultural theorists like Michel Foucault, Mary Douglas, and Donna Haraway interpret the body as a “cultural text”.
- Balsamo feels that the female body is related to the cyborg body and is a fundamental part of the contemporary cyborg-ian narrative as it was considered and categorized as a “lack” and “lacking”, historically.
- Balsamo rereads Foucault through various feminist studies to acknowledge the historical construction of the gendered body, and revisits Douglas's treatment of material body as a generative symbolic system to elaborate the foundational axioms of what Elizabeth Grosz has referred to as a new “corporeal feminism”. (“Notes Towards a Corporeal Feminism”, 1987).



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Cultural theorists like Michel Foucault, Mary Douglas, and Donna Haraway interpret the body as a cultural text. Balsamo feels that the female body is related to the cyborg body and is a fundamental part of the contemporary cyborgian narrative as it was considered and categorized as a lack and lacking historically. Balsamo rereads Foucault through various feminist studies to acknowledge the historical construction of the gendered body.

And revisits Douglas’s treatment of material body as a generative symbolic system to elaborate the foundational axioms of what Elizabeth Grosz has referred to as a new ‘corporeal feminism’. Balsamo supplements Foucauldian notion of body as a cultural text and suggests that the cyborg does not necessarily represent a development.


The cyborg has a hybrid design, it has a part material body and also a cultural fiction and; therefore, suitable for studying gender identity. Drawing methods and interpretive practices broadly from feminist cultural studies, Balsamo suggests a critical framework.

It postulates that the body is a central symbolic resource for cultural work, discursive symbolic body, and material body are mutually determining. Gender is often a subsumed discourse within many studies of the body and the culture. This underlying structure both enables and constrains our engagement with new technologies. It can propagate binaries limiting; therefore, the revisionary potential of new technology.

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Discourse on the body

- Historically body is “inscribed”, “painted”, “written”, “mutated” etc. It broadens the cultural discourse on the *body*.
- Therefore, it makes sense to write of the discourse of the body, i.e., the patterned ways that the body is represented according to broader cultural determinations and also the way that the body becomes a bearer of signs and cultural meaning.
- The explication of meaning can be found in the works of Michel Foucault, Bryan Turner, Catherine Gallagher, Laqueur, Emily Martin, Haraway, Rosi Braidotti etc. , who have studied the modes of representation of body.
- Balsamo addresses the relationship between the body, culture, and technology to enumerate the ways in which the body is put into discourse.



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Historically body is inscribed, painted, written, mutated etcetera and it broadens the cultural discourse on the body. Therefore, it makes sense to write of the discourse of the body that is the patterned ways that the body is represented according to broader cultural determinations in also the way that the body becomes a bearer of science and cultural meanings.

The explication of meaning can be found in the works of Michel Foucault, Bryan Turner, Catherine Gallagher, Laqueur, Emily Martin, Haraway, Rosi Braidotti etcetera, who have studied the modes of representation of body. Balsamo addresses the relationship between the body, culture, and technology to enumerate the ways in which the body is put into discourse. Modes of representing the body through discourse can be through iconography, aesthetics, symbolic functions, and repression etcetera.

We can refer to Emily Martin who focuses on the medical gaze on the ordinary American women, as segregated due to their social and economic backgrounds.

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- Modes of representing the body through discourse can be through iconography, aesthetics, symbolic functions, or/and repression.
- Example: In her 1987 work Emily Martin focuses on the medical gaze on the ordinary women in the American context as segregated due to their social and economic backgrounds.
 - Martin observes that the women belonging to diverse social and economic strata construct different views on women's reproductive cycles as opposed to the views of medical science.
- Balsamo establishes a relationship between the body, culture and ideas of otherness, also found in the discourses on cyborgs.
- The female and the cyborg bodies are united through demarcations of otherness, not part of the dominant cultural hierarchies of control and surveillance, rejected by male-centric pedagogies.



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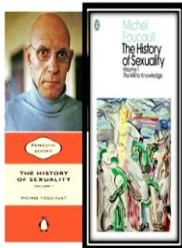

Martin has observed that women belonging to diverse socioeconomic strata construct opposite and different views on women's reproductive cycles as opposed to the views of medical science. Balsamo establishes a relationship between the body, culture and ideas of otherness, also found in the discourses on cyborg. The female and the cyborg bodies are united through demarcations of otherness, not part of the dominant cultural hierarchies of control and surveillance, rejected by male centric pedagogies.

The body is a site of a struggle and an apparatus producing scientific and cultural knowledge and genealogy, theoretical understanding of body proves its textual nature.

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Foucauldian notions on the "Body as Apparatus"

- In his genealogical project Foucault annotates the intelligibility of the body in terms of the discursive, social, and political practices that construct it as an object/subject with meaning. Body to him is a truth producing apparatus.
- In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault elaborates on four apparatuses of control that produce systems of power and control, also marking the transition between a traditional order and one constituted by "scientific biopower":
 1. The hysterization of the female body
 2. Construction of homosexuality
 3. Infant/ Child/ Adolescent sexualities
 4. Discursive of perversion
- Balsamo suggests that these apparatuses identify a "conjunction" that produce body knowledges.

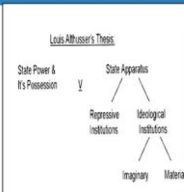
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In his genealogical project Foucault annotates the intelligibility of the body in terms of the discursive, social, and political practices that construct it as an object or a subject with meaning; body to him is a truth producing apparatus. In the history of sexuality, Foucault elaborates on four apparatuses of control that produce systems of power and control, also marking the transition between a traditional order and one constituted by scientific biopower.

The first is the hysterization of female body, the second is construction of homosexuality, the third is infant, child or adolescent sexualities, and the fourth is discursive of perversion. Balsamo suggests that these “apparatuses” identify a conjunction that produce body knowledge. Balsamo also quotes Althusser’s concept of the ISA and RSA to explicate the discursive nature of the body and the politics associated with it.


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- Althusser’s ISA’s and RSA’s produce specific knowledge through control. (*Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*; 1970).
 - “Ideological State Apparatuses” function through ideology such as education, religion, family whereas the “Repressive State Apparatuses” function through repression such as police, army, etc.
- However, Foucault uses the term “apparatus” and then “technology” to denote “specific knowledge”, meaning its production. (*The History of Sexuality*; 1976).
- For Balsamo, technology/apparatus also produces a system of communication.






Louis Althusser's Thesis

State Power & its Possession → State Apparatus
 State Apparatus → Repressive Institutions, Ideological Institutions
 Ideological Institutions → Imaginary, Material



Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (1970)
Louis Althusser






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Althusser’s concept of ISA that is “ideological state apparatuses” and RSA that is the “repressive state apparatuses” produce is specific knowledge through control. ISA functions through ideology such as education, religion, family whereas, the RSA function through repression such as through the police force army etcetera. However, Foucault has used the term apparatus and then technology to denote specific knowledge meaning its production.

For Balsamo, “technology or apparatus” also produce a system of communication. She thinks that technology names the process whereby discursive practices work interdependently with other cultural forces to produce effects at the level of the body.

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- Michel Foucault is not so much interested in the truth of the body as in elaborating the apparatus that produces truth effects at the level of the body.
- For Balsamo, Foucault’s elaborations on the “apparatus” / “technology” are culturally rooted in practices and institutions. They can be categorized as:
 1. Differentiation and Basis
Beings are differentiated on the basis of category - gender, age, race
 2. Power and Beings
Beings are influenced under a condition -- through ideology or repression
 3. Types of Objectives
Power can be used to fulfil distinctive objectives in a state
 4. Degrees of realizations



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Foucault is not so much interested in the truth of the body as in elaborating the apparatus that produces truth effects at the level of the body. For Balsamo, Foucault’s elaborations on the apparatus or technology are culturally rooted in practices and institutions; and they can be categorized as differentiation and basis, power in beings, types of objectives, and degrees of realizations.

When we talk of differentiation and basis, we talk of beings who are differentiated on the basis of their categories; like, gender, age, race etcetera. We talk of power in ‘beings’, when beings are influenced under a condition either through ideology or through repression. In types of objectives, he discusses power which can be used to fulfill distinctive objectives in a state. Foucault’s argument of ‘technologies of the self’ is close to the one presented by Teresa De Lauretis in her ‘Technologies of Gender’ or by Balsamo in ‘Technologies of the Gendered Body’.

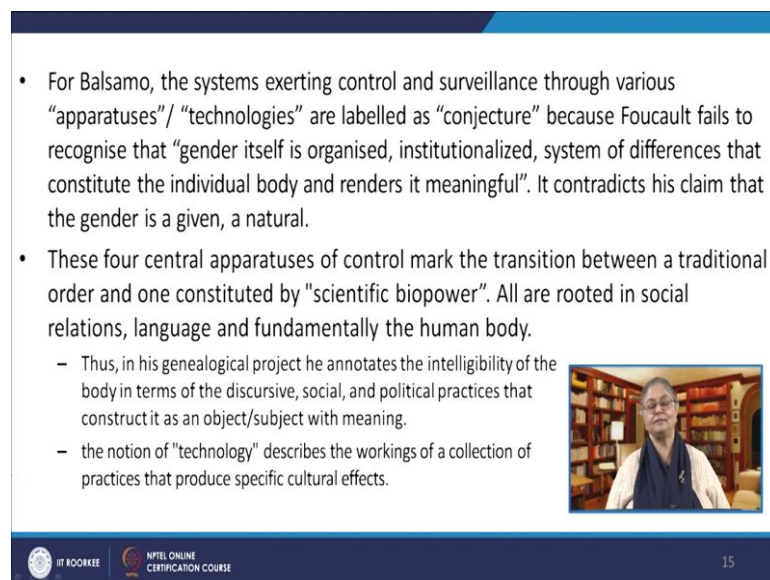
Foucault’s delineates the means by which power is exercised, and his central argument is that the means of production of discourse follows an ambiguous process of the construction of knowledge claims. For example, if we take the historization of women’s bodies, it was accomplished through; firstly, the exercise of new discursive practices that

is of science and of psychoanalysis. Secondly, through institutionalized social relations that of the family, and thirdly the knowledge claims that is medicalization of the female body.

In this manner the meaning of the female body as a hysterical entity, a corporeal being which is susceptible to hysteria owes a meaning which was constructed through discursive practices. Not only through the discourses of science and medicine, but also through the establishment of social institutions. These institutions in turn reproduce specific knowledge claims through practices established by the profession and as part of the education and socialization of practitioners themselves.

It is a way in which scientific biopower is organized and refight. Foucault suggests the term “apparatus” and later “technology” to name the process of connection between discursive practices, institutional relations, and material effects that work together to produce a meaning or a truth effect for the human body.

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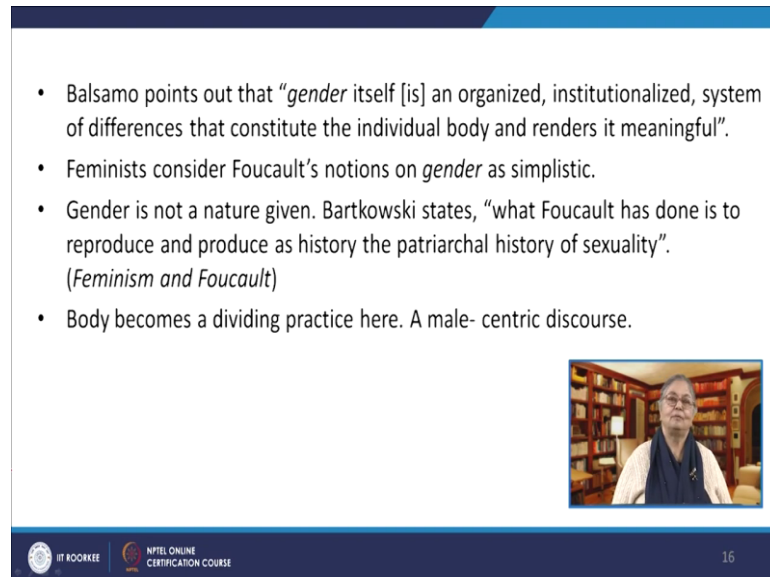


- For Balsamo, the systems exerting control and surveillance through various “apparatuses”/ “technologies” are labelled as “conjecture” because Foucault fails to recognise that “gender itself is organised, institutionalized, system of differences that constitute the individual body and renders it meaningful”. It contradicts his claim that the gender is a given, a natural.
- These four central apparatuses of control mark the transition between a traditional order and one constituted by “scientific biopower”. All are rooted in social relations, language and fundamentally the human body.
 - Thus, in his genealogical project he annotates the intelligibility of the body in terms of the discursive, social, and political practices that construct it as an object/subject with meaning.
 - the notion of “technology” describes the workings of a collection of practices that produce specific cultural effects.

For Balsamo the systems exerting control and surveillance through various “apparatuses or technologies” that are labelled as ‘conjecture’. Because, Foucault fails to recognize that gender itself is organized, institutionalized system of differences that constitute the individual body and renders it meaningful. It contradicts his claim that the gender is a given, a natural. These four central apparatuses of control mark the transition between a traditional order and one constituted by scientific biopower.

All are rooted in social relations language and fundamentally the human body. Thus, in his genealogical project Foucault annotates the intelligibility of the body in terms of the discursive, social and political practices that construct it as an object or a subject of meaning. The notion of technology describes the working of a collection of practices that produce a specific cultural effect.

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- Balsamo points out that “*gender* itself [is] an organized, institutionalized, system of differences that constitute the individual body and renders it meaningful”.
- Feminists consider Foucault’s notions on *gender* as simplistic.
- Gender is not a nature given. Bartkowski states, “what Foucault has done is to reproduce and produce as history the patriarchal history of sexuality”.
(*Feminism and Foucault*)
- Body becomes a dividing practice here. A male- centric discourse.


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Balsamo points out that gender itself is an organized, institutionalized, system of differences that constitute the individual body and renders it meaningful. Feminists consider Foucault’s notions on gender as simplistic. ‘Gender’ is not a nature given; it would be pertinent here to refer to Borkowski who says that, and I quote “what Foucault has done is to reproduce and produce as history the patriarchal history of sexuality” unquote.

Body becomes a dividing practice here; a male centric discourse. Balsamo notes that body has been a male centric discourse and the female body is historically marginalized. And she quotes Susan Suleiman to raise questions on how the body has become a male dominant symbolic construct.

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- Susan Suleiman's collection of essays *The Female Body in Western Culture* (1985) forwards the following inquiries in her critique of Foucault:
 1. What is the place of the female body in the discourse/s on body?
 2. What place has the female body occupied in the Western Imagination, and in the symbolic productions of Western culture over the past two thousand years?
 3. Where is the "she"?
- However, reading the body as a "symbolic discursive construction" is present in both Foucault and Suleiman.
- According to Suleiman, "the cultural significance of the female body is not only [...] that of a flesh- and- body entity, but that of a *symbolic construct*."



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Susan Suleiman's collection of essays 'The Female Body in Western Culture' which was published in 1985, to forward certain inquiries in her critique of Foucault. First, what is the place of the female body in the discourses on body? Second, what place has the female body occupied in the western imagination and in the symbolic productions of western culture over the past two thousand years? Thirdly, where is the "she"?


However, reading the body as a symbolic discursive construction is present in both Foucault and Suleiman. Suleiman says that the cultural significance of the female body is not only that of a flesh and body entity; but, that of a symbolic construct. Everything we know about the body, particularly the female body exists for us in some form of discourse; discourse cannot be segregated from material forms.

Balsamo suggests that this approach inadvertently ends up invoking a dualistic logic that the female body is either a flesh and blood entity or a symbolic construct. Balsamo corrects the historical inaccuracy with respect to the female body and elaborates on the technologically constructed gendered body.

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Corporeal Feminism to Gendered Bodies

- By reworking Foucauldian standpoint of the historical construction of the gendered body and Mary Douglas's analysis of the material body, Balsamo elaborates on the following:
 1. Body- A symbolic resource for cultural work.
 2. Mutual Interdependence- Of the discursive, symbolic and material bodies
 3. Gender- Wrongfully submerged within literary discourses on body and culture.
- The aforementioned are the fundamentals of "corporeal feminism" by Elizabeth Grosz.
- Balsamo uses this emergent framework to move into the domain of the technologically gendered body.



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By reworking Foucauldian standpoint of the historical construction of the gendered body and Mary Douglas analysis of the material body, Balsamo elaborates on the following. Firstly; body, a symbolic resource for cultural work; second, the idea of mutual interdependence of the discursive symbolic and material bodies; thirdly, gender which is wrongfully submerged within literary discourses on body and culture.

The aforementioned are the fundamentals of "corporeal feminism" suggested by Elizabeth Grosz. Balsamo uses this emergent framework to move into the domain of the 'technologically gendered body'. As a part of this argument Balsamo elaborates on the material construction of the body as a symbolic cultural resource and she refers to Mary Douglas in this context

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Material Body as “Symbolic Cultural Resource”

- Mary Douglas formulates social relations and functions as a resource for human body. Notion of the physical body is at the center of her account of the cultural construction of the symbolic body.
- Douglas in *Natural Symbols*, explains that body is embedded in culture, and never out of it. Human body is *always* defined by the set cultural beliefs of a particular social relation.
- The physical body is structured but the social experiences of the body are not modified according to the physical.
 - Douglas argues that “...the meaning of the body, and thus the meaning of different systems of body symbols, is, [...], constructed through a system of exchange - of the physical body and of the social (or symbolic) body.” (Douglas, 1984)




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Mary Douglas formulates social relations and functions as a resource for human body. Notion of the physical body is at the center of her account of the cultural construction of the symbolic body. In a work natural symbols Douglas explains that body is embedded in culture and never out of it. Human body is always defined by the set cultural beliefs of a particular social relation. The physical body is structured, but the social experiences of the body are not modified according to the physical.


And Douglas argues that the meaning of the body, and thus the meaning of different systems of body symbols constructed through a system of exchange of the physical body, and of the social or symbolic body. So, there is nothing given or natural about the body, the meaning of the physical body is not naturally determined. It can be said that there are no natural symbols; although there are plentiful symbolic representations of nature and the natural body, this notion denaturalizes the body and the body discourse.

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- “Gender identity can be redefined as a body attribute that is assigned, organized, and acquired through the process of social perception...” (Douglas, 1970)
- Balsamo also cites Thomas Laqueur to establish a relation to Douglas’s arguments. The 18th century radicals re-interpreted patriarchal social order.
 - Shifted away from the degree of metaphysical perfection of men and women, towards a new model of biological divergence.
 - Female body was no longer inferior, or an infantile version of the male. Complementary relationship between men and women based on discoverable biological distinctions.
- An anatomy and physiology of incommensurability replaced a metaphysics of hierarchy in the representation of women in relation to men.



Thomas Laqueur
Source:
<https://en.wikipedia.org/>



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Douglas suggests that gender identity can be redefined as a body attribute that is assigned, organized, and acquired through the process of social perception. Balsamo also cites in this context Thomas Laqueur to establish a relation to Douglas’s argument. The 18th century radicals reinterpreted patriarchal social order. They shifted away from the degree of metaphysical perfection of men and women towards a new model of biological divergence. And female body according to the 18th century radicals was no longer inferior or an infantile version of the male.

They thought of complementary relationship between men and women based on discoverable biological distinctions. An anatomy and physiology of incommensurability replaced a metaphysics of hierarchy in the representation of women in relation to men. However, the hierarchy was not demolished as the female body was defined through reproductive terminologies only.


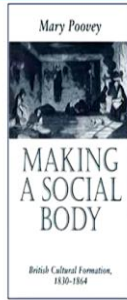
This biological explanation establishes a relationship between body and social control and it made the issue of control even more volatile. For female bodies are fundamentally different from male bodies and not just an inferior version, the issue of control becomes more critical.

For example, how does one control a body that is not entirely knowable? Balsamo uses not only the arguments of Thomas Laqueur, but also of Mary Poovey; For example,

Poovey's examination of the medical construction of the female body is built on further by Balsamo.

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- To put the discourse on violence and control into the headline, Balsamo quotes Mary Poovey's examination of the medical and historical construction of the female body as an object of medical attention and control.
 - Poovey explicates how medical discourse constructed the female body as excessive and threatening to the prevailing social order.
- The female body is silenced. Poovey takes the example of the use of chloroform for pregnant women in the 19th century as a way of administering control over the female body among medical practitioners, midwives and obstetricians.
- Poovey implies that conventional definition of a female body being governed only by the reproductive capacity, establishes a definition of the female body as "always lacking and needing control".



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Poovey has explicated how radical discourse constructed the female body is excessive and threatening to the prevailing social order. The female body is silenced, and Poovey has cited the example of the use of chloroform for pregnant women in the 19th century as a way of administering control over the female body among medical practitioners, midwives and obstetricians.


Even though later on it proved to be highly risky and resulted in several untimely deaths. By citing this example Poovey implies that conventional definition of a female body being governed only by the reproductive capacity establishes a definition of the female body is always lacking and needing control. On the one hand, representing women as an inherently unstable female body authorizes ceaseless medical monitoring and control.

On the other hand, this representation of woman as always requiring control produces her as always already exceeding the control that medicine can exercise. The female body constructs identity, a site of potential transgression against the boundaries determined by science and technology, but threatening to the male centric discourses.

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- Balsamo establishes the marginalization of the female body in the field of medicine, socio- cultural domain.
- A similar treatment of the female body can be witnessed in the field of media and the popular discourse.
- Balsamo describes the condition of being represented as a women rather than being a woman which manufactures a gendered person.
- Marleen Barr comments in her article that Balsamo's "elaboration of a map of contemporary cyberculture" is a needed feminist signpost for the mostly uncharted technology highway upon which humans now drive toward ever more cultural and biological interchanges with machines.*

*<https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/20719613.pdf>



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Balsamo establishes the marginalization of the female body in the field of medicine, and socio-cultural domains. A similar treatment of the female body can be witnessed in the field of media in the popular discourse. Balsamo describes the condition of being represented as a woman rather than being a woman which manufactures a gendered person.



Marleen Barr comments in her article that Balsamo's elaboration of a map of contemporary cyber culture is a needed feminist sign post for the mostly uncharted technology highway upon which humans now drive towards even more cultural and biological interchanges with machines. Balsamo foregrounds Arthur Kroker's and McLuhan's understanding of technology in this context. We shall take it up in the next module, along with the mechanical reconstruction of the gendered body through female body building as a subculture.

Thank you.

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