

Introduction to Cultural Studies
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Lecture - 20
Judith Butler Gender Trouble - III

Hello and welcome to this Introduction to Cultural Studies lecture on NPTEL. So we, looking at, now at the very beginning of this particular text Butler talked about representation, naturalization.

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tural possibilities can and cannot become mobilized through any further analysis. The limits of the discursive analysis of gender presuppose and preempt the possibilities of imaginable and realizable gender configurations within culture. This is not to say that any and all gendered possibilities are open, but that the boundaries of analysis suggest the limits of a discursively conditioned experience. These limits are always set within the terms of a hegemonic cultural discourse predicated on binary structures that appear as the language of universal rationality. Constraint is thus built into what that language constitutes as the imaginable domain of gender.

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She talked about the idea of you know authenticity, legitimacy how representation can be a two-way process. It can be emancipatory, you know it can be liberational at the same time it can be conforming to the cultural codes which are dominant in structure and she had also looked at the way in which the body, the body emerges at the site which can consolidate representation as well as subvert representation.

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possibilities are open, but that the boundaries of analysis suggest the limits of a discursively conditioned experience. These limits are always set within the terms of a hegemonic cultural discourse predicated on binary structures that appear as the language of universal rationality. Constraint is thus built into what that language constitutes as the imaginable domain of gender. Although social scientists refer to gender as a "factor" or a "dimension" of an analysis, it is also applied to embodied persons as "a mark" of biological, linguistic, and/or cultural difference. In these latter cases, gender can be understood as a signification that an (already) sexually differentiated body assumes, but even then that signification exists only *in relation* to another, opposing signification. Some feminist theorists claim that gender is "a relation," indeed, a set of relations, and not an individual attribute. Others, following Beauvoir, would argue that only the feminine gender is marked, that the universal person and the masculine gender are conflated, thereby defining women in terms of

So the body becomes a potentially a subversive site as well as the site where you know it can be a passive receptacle as well and she says it is crucial to understand the body as not a passive receptacle to dominant discourses put aside in contest those discourses through process of embodiment, through process of performativity etc.

Now she goes on to talk about the boundaries of analysis over here and this is highlighted on your screen where she says, the boundaries of analysis suggest that the limits of a discursively conditional experience. These limits are always set within the terms of a hegemonic cultural discourse predicated on binary structures that appear as the language of universal rationality. Constraint is thus built into what that language constitutes as the imaginable domain of gender.

So the entire idea of universal rationality or the language of universal rationality becomes a very important way to restrict subversion. To limit subversion and to limit analysis because she goes on to say over here the boundaries of analysis are actually embedded in the discursively conditioned experience. So the discursively conditioned experience obviously is overdetermined by discursivity, is overdetermined by dominant codes.

And this dominant codes are legitimized themselves through use in a rhetoric of the language of universal rationality which obviously is a construct and again we are back to this idea of universalizing and Butler had warned us as we examined in the previous lecture of any

universalizing tendencies in the way of looking at patriarchy in the way of looking femininity or masculinity or gender etc.

So she had warned us against a universalizing tendencies and she says over here that the way in which discursively conditioned experiences consolidate themselves is by referring or drawing on or by evoking a language of universal rationality which is a construct but then which appears as a given as a matter category which is universal in quality and is rational as well. So if you question that you essentially question rationality.

And you are essentially questioning humanity or humanness which are obviously a very constructed category so colluding with each other in terms of you know restricting any potential sites of subversion. So constraint is thus built into what the language constitutes as a imaginable domain of gender. So the domain of gender has constraint built into it because this constraint is part of this entire rational discourse, part of the entire you know discursively conditioned discourse etc. right.

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And then she goes on to say, although social scientists refer to gender as a factor or dimension of an analysis, it is also applied to embodied persons as a mark of biological, linguistic, and or cultural difference. In these latter cases, gender can be understood as a signification of an already

sexually differentiated body assumes, but even then that signification exists not only in relation to another opposing signification.

Some feminist theorists claim that gender is in relation indeed, a set of relations and not an individual attribute. Others, following Beauvoir would argue that only the feminine gender is marked and a universal person and the masculine gender are conflated thereby defining woman in terms of their sex and extolling men as the bearers of body-transcendent universal personhood.

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their sex and extolling men as the bearers of a body-transcendent universal personhood.

In a move that complicates the discussion further, Luce Irigaray argues that women constitute a paradox, if not a contradiction, within the discourse of identity itself. Women are the "sex" which is not "one." Within a language pervasively masculinist, a phallogocentric language, women constitute the *unrepresentable*. In other words, women represent the sex that cannot be thought, a linguistic absence and opacity. Within a language that rests on univocal signification, the female sex constitutes the unconstrainable and undesignatable. In this sense, women are the sex which is not "one," but multiple.¹⁶ In opposition to Beauvoir, for whom women are designated as the Other, Irigaray argues that both the subject and the Other are masculine mainstays of a closed phallogocentric signifying economy that achieves its totalizing goal through the exclusion of the feminine altogether. For Beauvoir,

So she looks at the way Butler over here examines the different ways in which gender is argued so and she looks at the different feminist arguments of gender in terms of looking at the gender of woman as a relational construct, as a construct of difference and the way in which the male gender is sometimes considered to be the universal transcendent phenomenon of humanity personhood etc.

So you know this is something which we see in language as well where we talk about human beings, the homosapiens we refer to them as man and it is always with the pronoun he which obviously is a universalizing transcendental tendency, right. The entirety of humanity or humanism or you know human beings in it is conflicted with the idea of the male gender and so maleness and humanity are oftentimes indistinguishable in this particular discourse.

And Butler is sort of alerting us to these kind of phenomena in this particular section and then she goes on to say, in a move that complicates the discussion further Luce Irigaray argues that women constitute a paradox if not a contradiction within the discourse of identity itself. Women are the sex which is not one. Within language, within a language pervasively masculinist, a phallogocentric language women constitutes the unrepresentable.

So she is drawing on the French feminist Luce Irigaray over here and very interestingly Luce Irigaray talks about woman as being an aporia. What is an aporia? An aporia is something which is a space which cannot be passed, a space which cannot be analyzed, a space which cannot be crossed or you know classified etc. So woman become the aporia, the interruption in the entire masculinist phallogocentric discourse and phallogocentric obviously is a combination of phallogocentric and logocentric. So it is male logic.

So language becomes a very phallogocentric discourse, a dominant language, rational language, the idea of rationality is very phallogocentric. So in this kind of an idea, in this kind of a discourse woman become an aporia, woman become the unrepresentable. Woman become a condition of absence you know a subversion to a certain extent according to Irigaray. In other words a woman represents the sex that cannot be thought a linguistic absence an opacity.

So it is both an absence and an opacity. It sort of interrupts or basically problematizes the supposed transparency of language, the supposed transparency of phallogocentric language through a very deliberately designed opacity, a very deliberately designed absence. So absence and opacity become political categories over here which interrupt the seamless process of phallogocentric language.

And we need to be aware of the fact that this entire seamlessness of phallogocentric language is invested into producing gendered identities or dominant gendered identities by process of historical or process in which are historical, economic, materialistic, linguistic etc. right. So within a language that rests on univocal signification the female sex constitutes the unconstrainable and the undesignatable.

So this undesignatable quality, this unconstrainable quality of the female sex becomes for Irigaray precisely a liberation of potential for femininity that it can escape the boundaries of patriarchal or patriarchal language or phallogocentric language. So language which is itself patriarchal in origin, language which is phallogocentric in origin can be interrupted or can be deconstructed by the unconstrainable and undesignatable quality of femininity of female sex according to Irigaray.

So Irigaray of course belongs to this you know French feminism sort of and a very poststructuralist feminism so Irigaray, (()) (07:33) you know so these people were sort of looking at language as a phallogocentric discourse you know as you know a discourse which is designed to contain a woman, a discourse which is designed to extend patriarchy etc. and butler draws on Irigaray quite a bit in this particular book.

And this is what makes the book quite poststructuralist in quality. The way she sort of draws on poststructuralism in a way of looking at gender and production of gender identities is quite deconstructive and poststructuralist in quality right. So within a language that rests on univocal signification the female sex constitutes the unconstrainable and the undesignatable. In this sense women are the sex which is not one but multiple.

This multiplicity of meaning, this multiplicity of identity is something which can be potentially subversive in quality according to Irigaray. So women you know the category of women or the gendered identity of women in this particular narrative which is phallogocentric in quality is not one but multiple. In opposition to Beauvoir, for whom women are designated as the other, Irigaray argues that both the subject and the other are masculine mainstays of a closed phallogocentric signifying economy that achieves its totalizing goal through the exclusion of the feminist altogether or the feminine altogether.

So Butler over here you know delineates the difference between Irigaray and Beauvoir over here. For Beauvoir the women are the other and you know Beauvoir basically celebrates the other, the otherness of the women which she not so which she reads or investigates or examines as a

subversive sign but for Irigaray and for Butler over here the other two is embedded in a patriarchal discourse.

So the other is obviously relational in comparison or apropos of the main centrist idea of patriarchy or phallogocentricity. So that is not subversive enough for Irigaray or Butler over here. It is rather than looking at women as the other you know Irigaray would argue that woman could be seen as a problem and means a paradox the unrepresentable in a phallogocentric discursive formation.

So and because the other two is part of the totalizing process the other two is part of the binaristic process with which phallogocentrism operates with which phallogocentrism proceeds and obviously being an other means getting trapped in the same process of binarism the same process of logic formation and you know logical figuration etc. And Irigaray questions that. Irigaray wants an interruption rather than othering of this process of phallogocentrism.

So interruption becomes a more important or the process of becoming a paradox, a paradox production and becomes more important for Irigaray and Butler than the process of othering because the process of othering too can be reified quite conveniently by the phallogocentric system which is something that you know Butler questions throughout this particular book.

So we are looking at and this is one of the really complex things in gender trouble that Butler does very effectively I think. She talks about the different arguments of feminism, the different sort of you know feminist theories who come together and she delineates the difference in terms of looking at how feminism could be understood in different points of time compared to patriarchy.

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IV. THEORIZING THE BINARY, THE UNITARY, AND BEYOND

Beauvoir and Irigaray clearly differ over the fundamental structures by which gender asymmetry is reproduced; Beauvoir turns to the failed reciprocity of an asymmetrical dialectic, while Irigaray suggests that the dialectic itself is the monologic elaboration of a masculinist signifying economy. Although Irigaray clearly broadens the scope of feminist *feminine*. The opening discussion in this chapter argued that this globalizing gesture has spawned a number of criticisms from women who claim that the category of "women" is normative and exclusionary and is invoked with the unmarked dimensions of class and racial privilege intact. In other words, the insistence upon the coherence and unity of the category of women has effectively refused the multiplicity of cultural, social, and political intersections in which the concrete array of "women" are constructed.

And again she goes on to say and this is the section which is highlighted on your screen over there and the subsection is entitled Theorizing The Binary, The Unitary And Beyond where Butler goes on to say that Beauvoir and Irigaray clearly differ over the fundamental structures by which gender asymmetry is reproduced. So again she is back in terms of describing the difference between Beauvoir and Irigaray over here.

So Beauvoir turns to the failed reciprocity of an asymmetric dialectic where Irigaray suggests that the dialectic itself is the monologic elaboration of masculinist signifying economy. So whereas Beauvoir talks about the dialectic between the self and the other and how the women should be considered to be the other, Irigaray would say that the dialectic itself is patriarch in quality. So being the other is actually being getting trapped in its patriarchal economy.

It is not really liberation in public sense because you are actually part of the patriarchal process. You are still very much a part of the patriarchal economy by being the other because the other is part of the productive formation. So rather than being a part of this patriarchal process Irigaray would demand a complete liberation from the dialectic or self another. And Butler over here is delineated in the difference between Irigaray and Beauvoir in this particular section.

So and then she goes on to say in the concept of womanhood and how the womanhood becomes a very contested you know subject formation which must be which must be used against

universalizing tendencies and she goes on to say over here the opening discussion in this chapter this is highlighted on your screen. The opening discussion in this chapter argue that this globalizing gesture has spawned a number of criticism from women who claim that the category of woman is normative and exclusionary and is invoked with the unmarked dimensions of class and racial privilege intact.

So she talks about the criticism which is directed against any universalizing tendency and universalizing idea of women because that universalizing idea of women often does away with the micro categories of race, racial privilege, class, language, etc. Because in a way if you make women as one universal category then that obviously does away with a lot of other micro contestation sites like race, and racial privilege, and language and class and different sort of even in discursive situations.

So these situations must be taken into account according to Butler in terms of looking at the you know the idea of femininity as different micro categories. And the point over here is something which Lyotard had also argued in the postmodern condition that in order to do away with the grand narrative which is patriarch over here we must then another grand narrative which is that of a woman, or the woman. So there is no the woman according to Butler.

The woman is always a contested side, is always a performative side which should issue which should do away with any kind of universalizing tendency, any totalizing tendency altogether. In other words the insistence upon the coherence and unity of the category of woman has effectively refused the multiplicity of cultural, social, and political intersection in which the concrete array of women are constructed.

So this entire of having this one idea this one univocal idea of woman which is unitary and you know homologous in quality is done away with the concrete array of multiplicities through which the idea of women is constructed or are constructed. So multiplicity becomes more important for Butler. Plurality becomes more important on Butler rather than any idea of coherence and unity and this again (()) (14:19) would in the postmodern condition.

Because and this is what I said in the very beginning of this particular text when we started looking at it from the previous lecture we saw how Butler is one of those really key figures to connect postmodernism, poststructuralism and feminism and gender studies because her way of looking at gender is as a contested category. Is as a category which is always the process of becoming right.

Which celebrates multiplicity, which celebrates plurality and which resists any idea of a grand narrative, which resists any idea of a grand other which is something that some feminist incorporate and obviously we can see Butler quite clearly siding with Irigary as against Beauvoir so she has problems with Beauvoir and Beauvoir's understanding of the women as the other, of the man.

And she says this whole process of being the other and the self is part of this patriarchal dialectic and the dialectic is you know contained within a patriarchal economy. So if you really want a liberation from this patriarchal economy we must liberate ourselves, the women should liberate themselves from this dialectic altogether. Okay, so multiplicity becomes a very important category for Butler and obviously she is drawing on the French feminist in this particular case.

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democratization. The very notion of "dialogue" is culturally specific and historically bound, and while one speaker may feel secure that a conversation is happening, another may be sure it is not. The power relations that condition and limit dialogic possibilities need first to be interrogated. Otherwise, the model of dialogue risks relapsing into a liberal model that assumes that speaking agents occupy equal positions of power and speak with the same presuppositions about what constitutes "agreement" and "unity" and, indeed, that those are the goals to be sought. It would be wrong to assume in advance that there is a cate-

And then this **this** particular section which is on your screen is very important and she talks about the very discursive quality of dialogue because dialogue oftentimes, dialogue is used as a

mark of liberation. As a mark of emancipation, as a mark of a true radical you know systems but she says dialogue actually can be quite discursive in quality. Dialogue actually be part of the discursive conforming quality.

And dialogue can actually conform the status quo rather than liberate the self from the status quo and how so and she goes on to say highlighted on your screen, the notion, the very notion of dialogue is culturally specific and historically bound and while one speaker may feel secure that a conversation is happening, another may be sure it is not. The power relations that condition and limit dialogic possibilities need first to be interrogated.

Otherwise, the model of dialogue to risks relapsing into a liberal model that assumes that speaking agents occupy equal positions of power and speak with the same presuppositions about what constitutes agreement and unity and indeed that those are the goals to be sought. So this I think is a really important section is often overlooked you know in Butler's works, how deconstruction and dialogue is very important.

Because she says dialogue can be very quickly consumed by this entire liberal patriarchal economy where you know we can have this very easy association between dialogue and agency where you can just say that you know if you have a dialogue going that means everyone is equal that means you know the solution is being arrived at, an agreement is being arrived at etc. But she says that the more important question is when a dialogue is happening.

The power relations which you know limit and condition dialogic possibilities need to be interrogated first. So obviously when there is a dialogue happen there are different human subjects you know inhabit in different human conditions and that subject position, those subject positions, those process of inhibitions need to be examined and interrogated before we interrogate the dialogue because a dialogue can just be a very can be a covering mechanism really.

It can be a mechanism through which an agreement is achieved and then that does away with all kinds of multiplicities. That does away with all kinds of pluralities. That does away with all

kinds of dissent. So dialogue can be used as a tool, an instrument to sort of resist dissent. It can be used as an instrument to kill dissent. So it can very quickly become a liberal strategy which can obviously be part of this entire patriarchal phallogocentric process.

And Butler obviously resist this kind of a easy liberal meaning of the dialogue, any liberal understanding of the dialogue. And she says before we really give too much credit to dialogue we must you know spend some time looking at the power relations you know the discursive relations across the different agents in a dialogue, right. Unless we do that, unless we question, unless we examine the possibilities or the limits of a dialogue pertaining to different human subjects who are participating in the dialogue, the dialogue cannot be seen as a liberational strategy at all.

So you know it can risk relapsing into a liberal model and this is what she said over here on your screen. It can risk relapsing into a liberal model that assumes that speaking agents occupy equal positions of power and this assumption that just because a dialogue is happening all speaking agents occupy equal positions of power. That is a very erroneous assumption according to Butler. You can assume that all you speak would have seemed presuppositions about what constitutes agreement and unity.

So obviously the question of agreement, the issue of agreement and unity can have different you know ramifications depending on different human subject positions. But one of the risk of a dialogue is it can become a totalizing tendency where it can have a universal idea of agreement, a universal idea of unity just because the dialogue has happened. So she wants to break dialogue down into a micromodel rather than a some kind of a grand narrative of resolution. So dialogue becomes a very contested category in Butler's analysis, okay.

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Is "unity" necessary for effective political action? Is the premature insistence on the goal of unity precisely the cause of an ever more bitter fragmentation among the ranks? Certain forms of acknowledged fragmentation might facilitate coalitional action precisely because the "unity" of the category of women is neither presupposed nor desired. Does "unity" set up an exclusionary norm of solidarity at the level of identity that rules out the possibility of a set of actions which disrupt the very borders of identity concepts, or which seek to accomplish precisely that disruption as an explicit political aim? Without the presupposition or goal of "unity," which is, in either case, always instituted at a conceptual level, provisional unities might emerge in the context of concrete actions that have purposes other than the articulation of identity. Without the compulsory expectation that feminist actions must be instituted from some stable, unified, and agreed-upon identity, those actions might well get a quicker start and seem more congenial to a number of "women" for whom the meaning of the category is

So we can see how one of the things which Butler does in this particular book, she takes up issues which are contested. But at the same time she takes up issues which are assumed to be you know sort of liberal assumed to be revolutionary, assumed to be emancipatory and she questions how those seemingly emancipatory models, those seemingly liberational models are actually embedded in a phallogocentric discourse, right.

And sometimes the phallogocentric discourse allows this liberation models to take place just to look good, just to sort of tick a box in terms of saying that okay we will have a dialogue so obviously you know now we have an agreement so there can be no further question. So dialogue can often be used as a closure, as a design for closure okay and that is something that Butler warns us against.

So this particular section which is on your screen, I am going to wind up with this, this lecture with this particular section. There is a series of questions that Butler asks. Questions which are really relevant in terms of looking at how identities are produced, constructed and reconstructed and deconstructed through political process of representation and she asks a series of questions and the first question is, is unity necessary for effective political action?

Is the premature insistence on the goal of unity precisely the cause of an ever more bitter fragmentation among the ranks? Certain forms of acknowledged fragmentation might facilitate

coalitional action precisely because the unity of the category of women is neither presupposed nor desired. Does unity set up an exclusionary norm of solidarity at the level of identity that rules out the possibility of a set of actions which disrupt the very borders of identity concepts or which seek to accomplish precisely that disruption as an explicit political aim?

Without the presupposition or goal of unity which is in either case always instituted at a conceptual level, provisional unities might emerge in the context of concrete actions that have purposes other than the articulation of identity. Without the compulsory expectation that feminist actions must be instituted from some stable, unified, and agreed-upon identity, so Butler over here obviously is looking at unity in a very interesting sense.

And she is questioning the question of unity and then she is questioning the very ontology of unity over here and then she goes on to say that without the compulsory expectation that feminist actions must be instituted from some stable, unified, and agreed-upon identity **whose** those actions might well get a quicker start and seem more congenial to a number of women for whom the meaning of the category is permanently moot.

So this is obviously very postmodernist and this is in relation this is in connection to the previous analysis on dialogue and she says we must not look at unity as a grand narrative because we must be more interested in micro agreements rather than one universal unity because the idea of universal unity or solidarity can be very exclusionary in quality, can be very exclusive in quality and might rule out certain other possibilities of contestation, certain other possibilities of subversion etc.

So Butler warns us against the grand narrative of unity over here. So unity can again it can be a liberal strategy which can quickly sort of convert itself into the patriarchal strategy of granting or permitting or allowing certain kinds of agency to the human subject rather than being a truly subversive, a truly you know in the contested category.

So you know unity can actually sometimes come with a compulsive expectation you know it can come with the conforming sort of expectations which conform to this dogmatic and dominant

discourses which overdetermine gender identity. So unity is something that Butler resists over here and she says that you know true revolutionary action, true subversive identity cannot come, it should not come from a stable, unified and agreed-upon identity.

So this agreed-upon identity can very quickly can sort of connect itself to liberal strategies, connect itself to phallogocentric strategies and then that does away with the entire idea of subversion altogether, right. So you know she is more interested in microcontestation, in little narratives, in local narratives rather than one grand narrative of unity.

And this of course has very interesting bearings with if you remember with Lyotard's problem, with Habermas at the end of the postmodern condition because there too Lyotard says quite clearly that he is not really interested in a public space where unity or agreement happens because that can very quickly convert itself into a grand narrative which does away with any kind of local voices, which does away with any kind of micro possibilities or micro voices and aim at some kind of a hegemonic solidarity right.

So solidarity or you know emancipation or agreement can very quickly become hegemonic in quality at a conceptual level and that can do away with a real human situation at a micro level. So unity is something that Butler warns us against in this particular section. So I will end with this lecture with this particular section this particular point and obviously we are looking at a very poststructuralist way of looking at unity, dissent, consent, gender.

So these terms are broken down by Butler and deconstructed by Butler and she is sort of constantly warning us against how these seemingly liberal revolutionist subversive terms can actually become very handy instruments in the umbrella term of dominant discourses and hegemonic discourses and these can actually become and very quickly consumed by the status quo unless we are really sort of you know resisting it, unless we are really you know cautious of this kind of unity.

Unless you are really aspiring for micro consensus, for micro agreements and disagreements unity can actually be a very risky business because it can very quickly be reified into a grand

narrative which Butler obviously warns us against in gender trouble. So I conclude this lecture today with this particular section and I will continue with this in the lectures to come. Thank you for your attention.