

Feminist Writings
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Gender Trouble – Part 3

So, Hello and welcome to this NPTEL course entitled feminist writings. We are looking at Judith Butler's text gender trouble through we finished the first chapter. We will look at certain selected sections from the first chapter which are directly relevant for the purpose of this course. Now we move on to another chapter which is titled subversive bodily act. Now obviously subversive is a very political performance in Butler especially when it is done through the body and we have seen already how Butler looks at body as a performance as a process of becoming, unbecoming and re becoming. It is not really a passive entity it is a productive entity, is something which produces meanings, produces affect. So, affect becomes a very important issue in Butler's analysis of gender.

Now, we come to subversive bodily act. We see how Butler is looking at subversion through the body in scripted to the body, embedded in the body as well as extend onto the discursive imperatives around the body. So again we are looking at a very important and interesting loop between embeddedness and extendedness, right. So the body is embedded, it is embedded in a social system and is embedded in a biologically about the same time it is also extend it. So there is an extended quality of prosthetic quality by the body that is performed through gestures, writes language in a (())(1:26) politics etc.

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al signification. In other words, acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality. This also suggests that if that reality is fabricated as an interior essence, that very interiority is an effect and function of a decidedly public and social discourse, the public regulation of fantasy through the surface politics of the body, the gender border control that differentiates inner from outer, and so institutes the "integrity" of the subject. In other words, acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality. If the "cause" of desire, gesture, and act can be localized within



Now this is what Butler says and this should be on a screen highlighted in yellow where she is saying “Acts, gestures and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body”. So, surface becomes the key thing, the surface becomes a key space for Butler. It is (1:46) of subversion surface, so it is superficiality or the surface quality of the body is something which Butler is celebrating and this is very very (1:55) as I am sure most of you would know that it is not really looking for in depth, it is not what you are looking for in a substance or any metaphysics or substance but rather what is interested in is a performative Presidio, (2:07) surface becomes, re becomes or un becomes all the time. So produces on the surface of the body to the play of signifying absences that suggests but never reveal the organizing principle of identity as a cause. So identity becomes you know it just becomes a performative thing.

And the other important phrase the Butler uses over here as a play of signifying absences. So it is a place so there is a ludic quality about the body, it is a playful activity. And of course we know play can actually become very very political and quality, play can be subversive in quality, play can be you know dismantling. So, play you know is that kind of a performance which is a mixture of seriousness and flippant quality. So, that that kind of mixture that very very bastard quality about play is something which Butler is celebrating over here, it is not really a pure thing, it is a mixture as an entanglement, it is a compound of different things.

So it is a play of signifying absences and is very important term “signifying absences”, so absences which signify things. So it is not really about any metaphysics of presence, it is actually about a play of signifying absences. So what is said, what is not said all become equally important in this kind of a discourse analysis Butler is doing. Now that kind of signifying absence, that kind of a play of signifying absence it does not reveal the organizing principle of identity as a cause, it is not really about an organizing principle, it is not really about a core unity or a causal unity or a causal core that is being revealed to that place, that is not really the issue away, that is not really the point of this play.

The point of this play is to produce you know signifying absences on the surface, but it is not really about looking for a inner unity or an inner core or a causal core. So the causality becomes really very redundant phenomenon and this kind of a play or this kind of an analysis of play the Butler is doing.

So, such acts, gestures and (4:08) generally constructed or (4:10) are performative in the sense that they essence a identity that it otherwise purpose to express are fabrications

manufactured and sustained through corporeal science and other discursive means. So, again there is certain things which Butler has highlighted for us which obviously are the key words over here are performative and fabrications.

So, what is fabrication? So the the whole identity becomes a fabricated process and it is manufactured and sustained to corporeal science, and other discursive means. So again what we are looking at is a very interesting entanglement between corp reality and discursive. So corp reality is a bodyness or the body or the embedded quality of the body which I just mentioned and discursivity it corresponds to the extended quality of the body the way it connects through the discursive imperatives around the body and both become equal important, both enter into some kind of a liminal loop which become a meaning producing mechanism but that meaning producing mechanism is done through a manufacturing process, that is done through a fabrication. So it is not really about authentic meaning production is not really about that inner core of meaning the Butler is examining or interested in but actually these are gestures, enactments and which are performative in the sense they have fabrications which are manufactured and sustained.

So this manufacturing of these identities of fabrications and sustaining these fabrications become equally important. And that process of manufacturing and sustaining these things are done through corporeal science and other discursive means. So corp reality and discursive really become important. They combine together in very important ways and that becomes the process through which this performativity is done is enacted according to Butler.

So that gendered body is performative suggest that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality. This is very very political and radical then to say of the Butler is doing and that is when he is saying that a gendered body is performative. So, what we are essentially saying is there is no essence. There is no ontological status, there is no ontological reality or core that is being produced and protected and promoted that is not what it really is.

But the body becomes a set of activities various acts which constitute its reality. So the activities produce the reality. It is not really the other way around. So it is not really that there is a real core in there which produces the activities, its activities on the outside which produce the body. So what we can see quite clearly is a Butler seems to prioritize the discursivity more than a corp reality, so discursivity produces a corp reality, it is actually coming from the outside, it is how you negotiate with a discursive apparatus, how do you negotiate how do

you navigate with the discursive apparatus around him which makes you produce his acts and activities which then produce the reality it is other way around.

So it is a complete reversal of the ontological argument about the body being you know some kind of ontological core which is to maintained, which is sustained, which is to be protected, but that's not what reality is. It is a complete reversal of that word Butler is saying that there is in reality that ontological reality is produced through activities and of course because it is produced through activities it can be deproduce and reproduce.

So therein lies the text reality of the bodies. So like any text it is the process of construction and anything which can be constructed obviously can be deconstructed and reconstructed. So therein lies the political significance of the word fabrications and manufacture. So this is a manufactured process and metonymic process which brings them together different activities through which reality is produced at any given point of time but that reality of course is on permanent in quality. It is special, temporal quality. It is produce at any given point of time and that point of time is an assemblage of different material conditions right. So it is not really an abstract ontological thing. It is material discursive process through which this whole identity production is done according to Butler in a very performative way.

Okay, so and then she goes on to say “this also suggests that if that reality is fabricated as an interior essence, that very interiority is an effect and function of a decidedly public and social discourse, the public regulation of fantasy through the surface politics of the body, the gender border control that differentiates inner from outer, and so institutes the integrity of the subject”. So you know you can look at these special metaphors Butler is using is really interesting and really complex where she talks about gender border control just like a border control which is a very territorial thing where you allow and disallow certain activities.

So, similarly that permitting and non-permitting of different activities take place at the level of the surface of the body alright and therein lies the liminality of the body, therein lies the surface quality of the body which becomes so important and then Butler is saying what she is essentially saying over here that you know if reality is fabricated as an interior essence, so interior essence is actually a fabricated process it is a performative process. So, that very interiority automatically becomes the function of a public and social discourse. So, social discourse obviously relate to the activities the discursive activities that take place which produce the interiority which produce the cop reality as it work. So, and of course the whole process of producing that cop reality it also entangles regulation, regulation of fantasies right.

So you know this is a ((9:36)) metaphor the Butler is using where the whole process of being civilised, the whole process of being unacceptable or conforming subject relies on your ability to suppress fantasies, your ability to regulate fantasies which can potentially be anarchic in quality and that regulation takes place in a very territorial way. So, butler looks at the body as a territory, the surface of the body as a territory, where you know where in certain functions that allow certain functions that disallow and allowing and not allowing certain functions become a very important thing for you know the whole production of the subject depends on this allowing and not allowing of certain functions and the level of surface that is Butler examined said.

Okay, So it differentiates inner from outer and so ((10:22)) the integrity of the subjects. The whole idea of integrity is institutionalized to this border control mechanism where the body the surface of the body becomes important wherein that that becomes a site of activities allowed activities and not allowed activities to take place. And how would you negotiate with that you know whole idea permissible activities and non-permissible activities. And that negotiation produces the integrity of the subject. So, how entangled the subject is how ((10:49)) the conforming subject or a dissident subject or a transgressive subject depends on the way this is negotiated at the side of the body that is the surface of the body.

So in other words acts and gestures articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior. So it is a ((11:06)) to postmodern, so those of you have read ((11:08)) and the postmodern condition would know that is the exactly the kind of vocabulary that ((11:12)) have to use. So any idea of into reality is a fantasy, any idea of an essence was a fantasy and that of course is a fabricated fantasy which is created through negotiations, which just created there different activities, which is sometimes going to be conforming in quality sometimes, can be subversive in quality etc.

So in other words acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core. So this whole idea of an organized gender core, organize interior is an illusion which is created by these activities and illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality. So again very very loaded political terms and that illusion must be disgustingly maintained so there should be a compulsory discursive maintenance of that illusion, why so? Because of the purpose of regulation of sexuality within the obligatory

frame of reproductive heterosexuality that becomes a compulsory frame the obligatory frame of compulsory reproductive heterosexuality.

So within that frame, within that obligatory, compulsory, discursive frame that illusion of interiority must be discursively maintained. So in other words what Butlers saying that heterosexuality of reproductive heterosexuality which produces children, which produces progeny in a way that becomes the dominant narrative that becomes a ground narrative, and within that grand narrative different sides, different activities are you know conforming to this grand narrative in a way which is you know ensuring a discursive maintenance of that grand narrative so it is like a maintenance of a system, right.

So the big grand system, the mother computer, the mother system you know that that needs to be maintained to different scarce activities, and of course that discursive maintenance can take place only to a certain kind of regulatory sexuality. So, certain sexualities are you know alternative sexualities which are banned which are forbidden. And of course certain kinds of other sexualities that get dominant and dominantly you know discursiviced in a way, right so heterosexuality or compulsory reproductive heterosexuality becomes that kind of a grand narrative within which which consumes all the other kinds of sexualities and of course anything which does not fit in into that category becomes deviant, becomes transgressive by default, right.

So as you can see this passage which I have chosen for this cause is very political and a radical passage where Butler is essentially saying is that you know “we are all surface creatures we are all creatures of the surface so we are always negotiating and navigating with a discursive apparatus through our body on our body right”. So the body becomes the side, the body becomes an activity, the body becomes a play and all that leads onto you know different models of subversion, different models of conformity which are variously negotiated with or by any at any given point of time by the human subject and the whole idea the human subject as a construction as we know is construction which is a fabricated illusion and that illusion is a necessary illusion for the integrity of the subject for the coherence of the core of the subject and it is a (())(14:09) quality of the core, it is a coherent quality about the core which needs to be maintained by the subject, so the subject becomes a very important process you know a very important production process which is which carries integrity coherence etc so all these become very important points within a grand narrative of reproductively heterosexuality and that is something the butler is just highlighting for us.

Okay so as we can see as I have said already that the whole idea of an adult vocabulary the rhetorical Butler is very postmodern and obviously she is drawing a large (14:45) extent from post structure this feminism that is the reason why she seems to have preferred, as she obviously prefers (14:52) over before and we have seen how you know the whole point she is drawing on (14:57), the vocabulary of (14:59), the rhetoric of (15:01) and also the epistemic model (15:04) as a French psycho poststructuralist model that lends itself to this kind of analysis by Butler.

Okay, so we just move on quickly and then we talk about how the last bit where she is talking about the whole idea of the drag. So what is a drag? And how as a drag an important function of gender rights so that is something which Butler is very very interested in.

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of three contingent dimensions of significant corporeality: anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance. If the anatomy of the performer is already distinct from the gender of the performer, and both of those are distinct from the gender of the performance, then the performance suggests a dissonance not only between sex and performance, but sex and gender, and gender and performance. As much as drag creates a unified picture of "woman" (what its critics often oppose), it also reveals the distinctness of those aspects of gendered experience which are falsely naturalized as a unity through the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence. In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency. Indeed, part of the pleasure, the giddiness of the performance is in the recognition of a radical contingency in the relation between sex and gender in the face of cultural configurations of causal unities that are regularly assumed to be natural and necessary. In the place of the law of heterosexual coherence, we see sex and gender denaturalized by means of a performance which avows their distinctness and dramatizes the cultural mechanism of their fabricated unity.

The notion of gender parody defended here does not assume that



So the anatomy of the performer is already distinct from the gender of the performer, and both of these are distinct from the gender of the performance, then the performance suggests are dissonance not only between sex and performance, but sex and gender, and gender and performance. As much as drag creates a unified picture of a woman (What is critics often oppose), it also reveals the distinctness of those aspects of gendered experience which are falsely naturalized as a unity towards regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence. In imitating gender drag implicitly reveals imitative structure of gender itself as well as its contingency.

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So in other words what is what Butler says over here is, that the whole performance of the drag, the imitative performance of gender, it has hyper mimetic quality about it. Now what do you mean by hyper mimetic? It is mimicry about mimicry is mimicking the entire process of mimicking. So, it becomes spectacularly evident that you know this is a process of mimicry that is happening and that that spectacle of mimicry that larger than life quality was mimicry that were no nodes mimicking, the artificiality which is absolutely evident and spectacularly evident in the process of mimicry that becomes a very political performance.

Because what that does essentially is that it shows seem that a woman into the fabricated unity of gender right. So that whole seamlessness of gender. The whole theme lessons of the dualism of gender man versus woman etc that seem lessons is cracked open completely. What we see in this place is a constructed quality which is revealed spectacularly and evidently by that hyper mimetic process by the imitating process is a drag.

So again this is very postmodern because you know if you take up if you make an analogy between this and postmodern meta fiction at an interactive level, that is exactly what meta fiction does that is it completely imitates the process of writing fiction. It completely imitates the process of designing and erected it constantly tells you this is a design, this is an artificial thing and the artificiality is something which is part of the politics of postmodernism that is telling you that any act of narration any act of narrative control is actually an act of construction, but more often than not when it comes to classic realism you know that after construction is effaced away, and what we see instead as a seamless process, a seamless narrative which we consume quite quickly.

Now that seamlessness is also operative agenda and when it comes to the drag. What Butler is saying is that drag is political inequality because it is hyper mimetic and because it is hyper mimetic, it foregrounds the artificiality of gender processes, it foregrounds the artificiality of gender constructions and foregrounding is a political kind that the drag is doing, in fact is telling you spectacularly and evidently that this is an act of construction and anything which can be constructed as textual inequality and that textuality can be you know deconstructed, reconstructed all the time.

So, drag becomes a very very happy mimetic deconstructive process which reveals the seams of gender, which reveals the constructed quality of gender according to Butler that denaturalizes as Butler suggests another cultural mechanism of the fabricated unity. So the whole process of naturalization which is the way in which every grand narrative is formed it becomes naturalized and we see already we have seen already (19:16) Butler of the process of naturalization, it entails a degree of repetition, reiteration and normalization, it keep repeating something, keep reiterating something and then and time comes we do not really realize there is something out there, you internalize it, so every outer naturalization is an act of internalization.

Now what the drag does, because it reveals to you the spectacular quality of the gender constructiveness and that denaturalizes that you become aware and look at a drag performance, you become aware that this is a construction, you become aware that this is a performance and that therein lies a political performative quality of the drag, therein lies the radical quality of the drag, which obviously is celebrated by Butler and a very postmodernist, poststructuralist spirit.

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construction.

According to Fredric Jameson's "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," the imitation that mocks the notion of an original is characteristic of pastiche rather than parody:

Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique style, the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language: but it is a neutral practice of mimicry, without parody's ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter, without that still latent feeling that there exists something *normal* compared to which what is being imitated is rather comic. Pastiche is blank parody, parody that has lost its humor.³¹

The loss of the sense of "the normal," however, can be its own occasion for laughter, especially when "the normal," "the original" is revealed to be a copy, and an inevitably failed one, an ideal that no one can embody. In this sense, laughter emerges in the realization that all along the original was derived.

Parody by itself is not subversive, and there must be a way to under-



Okay! So and then we come to the last bit of Butler's analysis and that is that is very political thing and this is what I mean and the reason why I have selected I have selected the passages quite carefully as you can see because there is a dialogue, there is a narrative going on a way which I would like to sort of convey to my reading of Butler. And this is a point in the book where Butler talks about the relationship between parody and pastiche. And you know she obviously says that there is a different ontological, different performative categories and it is

important to map out the differences and Butler seems to prioritize one or the other which we will see in a moment but then this is how quoting Frederic Jameson's essay "postmodernism and consumer society" where Jameson talks about the Marxist, Jameson talks about the whole idea of postmodernism and how the whole negotiation of parody and pastiche takes place and we see how Butler takes on from that draws on it and then delivers something which is very original, very radical on her own and connects it to the whole idea of performative city in gender. So this is what Butler says about (Jensen) Jameson.

According to Fredric Jameson or Jameson's "postmodernism and consumer society", the imitation that mocks the notion of an original is characteristic of pastiche rather than parody. So pastiche is more important than parody and you know not more important but the imitation is more pastiche than parody and this is what Jameson says and Butler quotes Jameson over here "Pastiche is like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique style. The wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language, but it is a neutral practice of mimicry without parody's ulterior motive without satirical impulse, without laughter, without that still latent feeling that there exists something normal compared to which what is being imitated is rather comic pastiche is a blank parody, parody that has lost its humour.

So you this is a very very political and very complex difference that Jameson is mapping out and Jameson saying that you know "parody although it mocks something, it satirizes something, it subverts something, it deconstruct something, it has its residual presence with that something that is still there". So, there is a degree of at least a spectral presence arrested to a lingering presence of the normal of the core which is being mocked, which is being subverted, which is being derided or whatever or deconstructed but pastiche does not really have an core at all, pastiche has no normal against which it situates itself. So pastiche, parody gone too far, pastiche is parody that has lost as humour, that pastiche does not require any laughter, pastiche does not require any ulterior motive, so there is no ulterior motive in pastiche.

Parody retains an ulterior motive because it retains a sense of an origin, it retains some sense of a normal which is still there, which has been mocked, which has been parodied, which has been subverted but pastiche does away with any sense of original, pastiche does away with any sense of metaphysics. So, Pastiche has a sense of liquidation about it, it is completely exhausted, it is done, it is close, it is shut down, liquidated, there is no interior motive left,

there is no interior core left which is being parodied you know that the necessity of an interior core interior core is done away with and what we have instead that it is a blank parody.

So there is a blankness, there is an exhaustion, there is a complete liquidation which is there in pastiche it does not really require any norm which has been subverted, it does not require an normative presence within its discursive structure. Parody requires a normative presence, parody requires a normative existence, normative structure which it will then parody, deconstruct, divide and move away from that. But pastiche does not even require that, pastiche becomes more extreme extension of parody, it is a parody which has lost its sense of humour. So there is no humour left in pastiche it is a blankness which is pervaded, pervasive and any sense of any performance of pastiche.

Now Butler draws on this and as she offer something which is very very radical as we will see. The loss of the sense of the normal, however can be its own occasion for laughter, especially when the normal, the original is revealed to be a copy and an inevitably failed one inevitably failed one an ideal that no one can embody. Now this is a very key difference that the butler is mapping out because you know Jameson seems to suggest that there is no laughter left and pastiche, there is a normal left in pastiche and Jameson seems to have some sense of nostalgic quality, nostalgic idea about the sense of pasties would not having anything left at all.

Now that nostalgia is completely absent in Butler. Butler actually celebrates the lack of normalcy or the absence of normalcy. Butler celebrates the fact that pastiche reveals to us that there was no normal left and there was no normal at any time, there was no norm active at any time, there is not original at any time, and therein lies the laughter of pastiche, the fact that it reveals to you, there was never any normal. There was never any neutral. There was never any origin point and that neverness which is being conveyed through pastiche becomes for Butler the more radical quality of pastiche the more up the comic, the more ludic quality of Pastiche which have to be celebrated from postmodernist prospective and this is exactly what she is saying that the original in a pastiche is revealed to be a copy, so it is inauthentic so everything becomes everything is revealed to be inauthentic in pastiche, there is no authentic original left, there is no authentic origin at any given point in time in a pastiche.

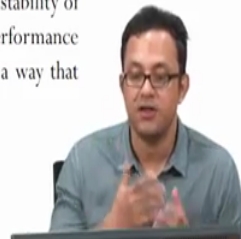
So what parody retains a sense of authentic origin point which is underrated deconstructed and attacked pastiche does not really require or passage reveals that there was nothing which is original. There was nothing which is authentic at any given point of time. And therein lies

its political quality of pastiche. So in this sense laughter emerges in the realization that all along the original was not derived, right. So the realization that there was not original at any given point of time therein lies a laughter of pastiche according to Butler.

So this is a very complex and radical retelling of Frederic Jameson's difference between pastiche and parody that is something that you know we need to bear in mind very very carefully especially looking at all the various configurations of gender the butler is telling.

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stand what makes certain kinds of parodic repetitions effectively disruptive, truly troubling, and which repetitions become domesticated and recirculated as instruments of cultural hegemony. A typology of actions would clearly not suffice, for parodic displacement, indeed, parodic laughter, depends on a context and reception in which subversive confusions can be fostered. What performance where will invert the inner/outer distinction and compel a radical rethinking of the psychological presuppositions of gender identity and sexuality? What performance where will compel a reconsideration of the *place* and stability of the masculine and the feminine? And what kind of gender performance will enact and reveal the performativity of gender itself in a way that



So parody by itself is not subversive. There must be a way to there must be a way to understand what makes certain kinds of Parodic repetitions effectively, disruptive, truly troubling, and which repetitions become domesticated and recirculated you know as instruments of cultural hegemony. So, what Butler is saying that you know parody by itself is not really you know funny all the time, is not really subversive all the time, and what is what needs to be borne in mind what needs to be considered is what certain kinds of (())(26:59) repetitions effectively disruptive, right.

So they disrupt effectively, they are truly troubling, but there are certain other kinds of repetitions which become domesticated, which becomes very much part of the mainstream, and then subsequently recirculated as instruments of cultural hegemony. And that is the very key point that how parody can be consumed within cultural hegemony, something that Butler is examining over here and she is saying we need to be very careful as students of culture, students of gender, to see how certain kinds of parity lend themselves to cultural hegemony, lend themselves to mainstream cultural configurations you know in a far from being radical

they become refined as mainstream mechanisms of culture and that consideration must be always there in our study of parody as examined by Butler.

So, we will stop at this point today I will conclude this text in the next lecture, thank you for your attention.