

Introduction to Cultural Studies
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Lecture - 22

Judith Butler Gender Trouble - V Conclusion Lecture 2 - From Parody to Politics

So hello and welcome to this Introduction to Cultural Studies NPTEL course where we are looking at Judith Butler's Gender Trouble and we have finished with the main text. We are looking at the conclusion at the moment and on your screen you find page 183 on this particular book which starts with the language of appropriation.

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how questions of knowability and agency are to be determined? What kinds of agency are foreclosed through the positing of an epistemological subject precisely because the rules and practices that govern the invocation of that subject and regulate its agency in advance are ruled out as sites of analysis and critical intervention? That the epistemological point of departure is in no sense inevitable is naively and pervasively confirmed by the mundane operations of ordinary language—widely documented within anthropology—that regard the subject/object dichotomy as a strange and contingent, if not violent, philosophical imposition. The language of appropriation, instrumentality, and distanciation germane to the epistemological mode also belong to a strategy of domination that pits the “I” against an “Other” and, once

And obviously right before this lecture and previous lecture we saw how she is critiquing and she is critical of this idea of the Western metaphysical tradition and object as a dichotomy and she says as long as we have the dichotomy, as long as we have that kind of a dualism in subject position then the politics of representation the problematic of representation cannot be solved, right. So she is critical of any idea of a prediscursive I.

Any idea of an existential I which is prediscursive in quality and she is critical of that. She is critique in that kind of a tradition and she say that comes down from Marx, that comes down from Lukacs and it informs lot of liberatory discourses in the Western tradition but as long as we

have that kind of a tradition it is difficult to do away with or to solve the problematics of representation.

And also what she did in the when we examined the previous lectures that she looks at how the feminist identity politics with this illegitimacy with this inexhaustibility the fact that it is you know it is limitless you know there is no limitation in terms of the variables that a feminist identity politics can posit instead of looking at the limitlessness of variables as a problem, as a as a you know paradox, as an ambiguity she looks at the way in which that becomes a possibility of subversion, right.

The fact that we can add variables, add infinitum you know at different points of time different variables come in and that becomes an important condition for Butler and she celebrates that condition. She celebrates that centerlessness in terms of feminist identity and this idea of centerlessness the celebration of centerlessness makes Butler sort of attitudinally allied to postmodernism.

And that is why I keep saying that Butler as a figure who can expose modernism with poststructuralism and also obviously she is you know one of the seminal figures in gender politics, the gender theory, right okay. So we come to page 183 on your screen. She looks at the language of appropriation and she says, the language of appropriation instrumentality and distanciation germane to the epistemological mode also belong to a strategy of domination that pits the I against an other, right.

So again she is back to sort of critiquing the dualism the Western metaphysical tradition and says the language of appropriation, the language of instrumentality, the language of domination obviously allied in epistemological way the strategy of domination it pits the I against the other, right. So the I and the other exists at a ontological remove from each other, right and that can obviously be a binaristic way of looking at the subject position as a prediscursive you know self, okay.

And once that separation is effected it creates an artificial set of questions about the knowability and recoverability of the other that other, right. So obviously the language of appropriation it requires, it necessitates a separation from the I and the other and once the separation is effected according to Butler it creates a set of artificial set of questions. You might say it is an artificial you know discursive field which is constructed in order to sort of find out the or in order to theorize the knowability and recoverability of the other.

So you know you can go back to Bhabha, you can go back to Bhabha's idea of the other question which is exactly about this where he says quite clearly that the other is actually manufactured through discursive processes. The other is constructed through epistemological processes that you know that aim to sort of contain the other, to make the other a knowable construct something which can be knowable, something which can be known at any given point of time, something which can be classified at any given point of time.

At the same time the other can be recovered at any given point of time because the other is formed mind you from the position of privilege from the hegemonic position, from the hegemonic subject position. It requires the formation of the other, right. And Butler says quite clearly over here that as long as you have the self other dichotomy, the subject object dichotomy and this language of appropriation will always succeed in popular discourses in different discursive conditions, okay.

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Gender Trouble

hat separation is effected, creates an artificial set of questions about the knowability and recoverability of that Other.

As part of the epistemological inheritance of contemporary political discourses of identity, this binary opposition is a strategic move within a given set of signifying practices, one that establishes the "I" in and through this opposition and which reifies that opposition as a necessity, concealing the discursive apparatus by which the binary itself is constituted. The shift from an *epistemological* account of identity to one which locates the problematic within practices of signification

And then she goes on to say as part of the epistemological inheritance of contemporary political discourses of identity, this binary opposition is a strategic move within a given set of signifying practices, one that establishes the I in and through this opposition and which reifies that opposition as a necessity concealing the discursive apparatus by which the binary itself is constituted.

So this should be clear to you by now because this is something we have been talking about since this very inception of this particular course and how you know that any construction of a binary, any economy of a binary system it relies on certain signifying practices and those signifying practices are reified right so they are ritualized and reified in a way which conceals its constructed quality.

So obviously any dominant discourse which becomes a grand narrative obviously we are looking at the grand narrative of the I and the self, the I and the other over here. That is the grand narrative that is being talked about over here. So any grand narrative would require its rituals, would require its repeatable rituals. You know any grand narrative becomes a grand narrative by repeatability. So repeatability becomes a condition for any grand narrative, right.

And the constructed quality must be concealed to repeatability and this is what Butler says over here it conceals the discursive apparatus by which the binary itself is constituted. So the very fact

that it is a binary which is artificially created, this fact must be concealed and how this concealment happened. This concealment happens through acts of repetition, right. So repetition, replicability reification so these are procedures through which the constructed quality is effaced.

So efface in the constructed quality becomes a necessary condition for any dominant discourse. And I probably said this a dozen times already in this course but it is one of the most important things one must remember that effacing the constructed quality must be a necessary condition for any dominant discourse in order to be a grand narrative it must be able to successfully efface its constructed quality.

If you discover its constructed quality, if you know if you find out its constructed quality is a construct then obviously the very claim to be a grand narrative, the very claim to be a prediscursive narrative will fail, will collapse, okay. Then you know, you find out, you figure out this is discursive in quality and then we are going to question discursive quality and then you find the apparatus which had informed the discursive conditions and then obviously the deconstruction can happen.

But in order for that not to happen it must conceal its discursive, constructed quality, okay. The shift from an epistemological account of identity to one which locates the problematic within practices of signification permits an analysis that takes the epistemological mode itself as one possible and contingent signifying practice. Further the question of agency is reformulated as a question of how signification and resignification works.

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itself is constituted. The shift from an *epistemological* account of identity to one which locates the problematic within practices of *signification* permits an analysis that takes the epistemological mode itself as one possible and contingent signifying practice. Further, the question of *agency* is reformulated as a question of how signification and resignification work. In other words, what is signified as an identity is not signified at a given point in time after which it is simply there as an inert piece of entitative language. Clearly, identities *can* appear as so many inert substantives; indeed, epistemological models tend to take this appearance as their point of theoretical departure. However, the substantive “I” only appears as such through a signifying practice that seeks to conceal its own workings and to naturalize its effects. Further, to qualify as a substantive identity is an arduous task, for such appearances are rule-generated identities, ones which rely on the consistent

In other words, what is signified as an identity is not signified at a given point in time after which it is simply there as an inert piece of entitative language. Clearly identities can appear as so many inert substantives. Indeed the epistemological models tend to take this appearance as their point of theoretical departure. However, the substantive I only appears as such through a signifying practice that seeks to conceal its own workings and to naturalize its effects.

So what this entire section which I just read out you know shows us that how agency is formulated and reformulated with certain signifying practices. However, those signifying practices, those workings, those constructed quality must be naturalized, right. So the question of agency obviously is related to the question of dominance, to the question of superiority because agency comes with a sort of supposed hierarchy, someone has more agency than someone else, right.

And this idea of a inequal agency obviously must is an artificial creation, is an artificial condition, is a deeply discursive condition. However, the discursive condition, the workings within this particular discursive field must be naturalized. If you cannot naturalize it obviously then you begin to question it. Then you begin to ask questions with the hierarchy, ask questions about the inequality of agency and then obviously the discursive condition, the discursive quality will be revealed, okay.

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Further to qualify substantive identity is an arduous task, for such appearances are rule-generated identities ones which rely on the consistent and repeated invocation of rules that condition and restrict culturally intelligible practices of identity. So again the question of repetition becomes crucial over here. So such rules, such rule-generated identities which are obviously artificial identities, this artificial rule-generated identities must be you know repeated over and over again.

So there is a degree of infinity in repetition and the more you can repeat it the more visibly the more spectacularly you can repeat it the more successful you will be in terms of concealing its constructed quality, right. So indeed to understand identity as a practice and as a signifying practice is to understand culturally intelligible subjects as the resulting effects of a rule-bound discourse that inserts itself in the pervasive and mundane signifying acts of linguistic life, right.

So linguistic life obviously is a language condition of life around this which is deeply discursive in quality. Language is one of the most discursive things which we consume which we inhabit and which we perpetuate in daily lives and that kind of a linguistic feel, a linguistic life is embedded with rule-bound discourses and those discourses which are rule-bound you know are culturally produced and those discourses which are culturally produced actually inform identity or the production of identity.

In other words identity, there can be no such thing as a prelinguistic, prediscursive, precultural identity. So identity is part of a process of cultural production, right. So this is again going back to the idea of reification and Butler actually alludes the reification in this particular section. It is an act of commodification. It is an act of cultural production. So identities are acts of cultural production, linguistic production which are deeply embedded with discursive fields.

So we cannot possibly divorce the discursivity from identity and this brings us back to what we said in the previous lecture that identity and discursivity are attitudinally and ontologically embedded with each other. They are entangled with each other. We cannot separate out the two, okay. And then she talks about language as being you know an entanglement of abstraction and materiality and this is something again we have been saying since the very inception of this particular course.

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qualify as a substantive identity is an arduous task, for such appearances are rule-generated identities, ones which rely on the consistent and repeated invocation of rules that condition and restrict culturally intelligible practices of identity. Indeed, to understand identity as a *practice*, and as a signifying practice, is to understand culturally intelligible subjects as the resulting effects of a rule-bound discourse that inserts itself in the pervasive and mundane signifying acts of linguistic life. Abstractly considered, language refers to an open system of signs by which intelligibility is insistently created and contested. As historically specific organizations of language, discourses present themselves in the plural, coexisting within temporal frames, and instituting unpredictable and inadvertent convergences from which specific modalities of discursive possibilities are engendered.

Abstractly considered, language refers to an open system of signs by which intelligibility is insistently created and contested. As historically specific organizations of language, discourses present themselves in the plural, coexisting within temporal frames, and instituting unpredictable and inadvertent convergences from which specific modalities of discursive possibilities are engendered. So the word key word over here is engendered, produced.

So discursive possibilities are produced through certain temporal frames through certain you know specific organizations of language, through certain specific signifying practices, right. So language is actually an open system of science by which intelligibility is insistently created and contested. Intelligibility is meaning production, meaningfulness. So meaningfulness becomes an active production. Meaningfulness becomes an active contestation.

So what is meaningful, what is not meaningful is a contested categories. These are produced categories, productive categories, reifying categories. These acts of reification, these acts of production, these acts of contestation can take place only in certain discursive fields, discursive frames. This is what Butler says quite clearly.

As historically specific organizations of language, discourses present themselves, so you know she defines discourses in a very interesting way. She said discourses are historically specific organizations of language, right. So language and discourse go hand in hand because language and you can substitute language with representation, right discursively specific organizations of representation. Those are discourses, right.

So specific organizations of language, historically specific organizations of language are discourses and those discourses present themselves in a plural, coexisting with temporal frames. So each discourse is temporal in quality right. Each discourse is historical in quality. They occupy certain temporal frames. They inhabit certain temporal frames and it cannot possibly look at discourses as a temporal condition a temporal category.

There is no such thing as a temporal discourse. Each discourse is temporally constructed. Temporally constituted right. So this temporality of discourse is something which should be foregrounded, highlighted with the way that Butler does in a poststructuralist way of looking at discursivity. And you know this institute, this instituting unpredictable and inadvertent convergences from which specific modalities of discursive possibilities are engendered.

So discursive possibilities are produced through certain convergences, convergences of discourse, language, apparatus of power, systems of signification, etc. Those come together,

those converge together to create certain modalities of discourse and discursive possibilities which are produced by this particular convergences, okay.

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From Parody to Politics

logical discourse refers to as “agency.” The rules that govern intelligible identity, i.e., that enable and restrict the intelligible assertion of an “I,” rules that are partially structured along matrices of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality, operate through *repetition*. Indeed, when the subject is said to be constituted, that means simply that the subject is a consequence of certain rule-governed discourses that govern the intelligible invocation of identity. The subject is not *determined*

So as a process signification harbors within itself what the epistemological discourse refers to as agency. The rules that govern intelligible identity that is that enable and restrict the intelligible assertion of an I. So every act of I every intelligible identity formation is sort of bound by meaningfulness in order for any active assertion, the active assertion must be intelligible in quality.

And we talked about if you remember a couple of lectures ago we talked about intelligible genders by Butler, described by Butler. Genders which conform to certain narratives of expectation, to certain economy of expectation etc., right. So those intelligible assertion of an I rules that are partially structured along matrices of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality operate through repetition.

And you know this is a bit of a you know it is a cliché in cultural studies. It is a very crucial cliché. I mean it sounds from oxymoron but clichés are very important and this is what Butler says over here that gender hierarchy or gender identity you know obviously the dominant gender, the dominant gender hierarchy is the compulsory heterosexuality and this supposed compulsory

nature, the compulsory quality of heterosexuality is operated through repetition, right. So that becomes a grand narrative of sexual identity.

That becomes a grand narrative of gender identity, a compulsory heterosexuality, right. So that compulsory heterosexuality becomes a grand narrative and that grand narrative operates through repetition. And also what Butler does not say over here but she has said it before many times it also operates through concealment, right. So concealment and repetition become the sort of crucial conditions, the necessary condition for compulsory heterosexuality to operate as a grand narrative.

So any act of grand narrative formation, any operation of a grand narrative relies on repetition and concealment. These become the two very important categories you know according to Butler and of course you can relate back to Bhabha, you can go back to Bhabha as well and there too we have seen a compulsory hierarchy, a compulsory racial supremacy over there. That was a grand narrative in a colonial condition that Bhabha had explored. And over to there too we had seen how repetition and permanence fixity and repetition fixity and play become very crucial conditions for that grand narrative to be operative in the first place, okay.

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From Parody to Politics

logical discourse refers to as “agency.” The rules that govern intelligible identity, i.e., that enable and restrict the intelligible assertion of an “I,” rules that are partially structured along matrices of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality, operate through *repetition*. Indeed, when the subject is said to be constituted, that means simply that the subject is a consequence of certain rule-governed discourses that govern the intelligible invocation of identity. The subject is not *determined* by the rules through which it is generated because signification is *not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition* that both conceals itself and enforces its rules precisely through the production of substantializing effects. In a sense, all signification takes place within the orbit of the compulsion to repeat: “agency.” then is to be located with-

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identity. So you know identity becomes an act of intelligible invocation. So unless you can invoke the identity intelligibly you will not make any sense, you will not be accepted as an identity, you will not be part of this grand narrative of identity which obviously is dominant in quality, right.

So it requires certain causal relationship a certain causal sort of interaction with a rule-governed discourses. So this rule-governed discourses are there as artificial constructions and every active signification, every active subjectification is a process of negotiation with those rule-governed discourses, right. So that rule-governed discourses are the only ones which you know invoke the intelligible identities, okay.

The subject is not determined by the rules through which it is generated because signification is not a founding act but rather a regulated process of repetition that both conceals itself and enforces itself its rules precisely through the production of substantializing effects. So subject is not determined by the rules by which it is generated because signification is not a founding act. Signification does not want to create a subject. Signification is a regulatory act.

Signification is a containing mechanism. It is a regulatory mechanism which will try to contain a subject in a certain discursive field. The discursive fields predetermine and subject must be contained within a discursive field through acts of repetition, right, through acts of concealment, through acts of artificiality which are concealed, right. And of course that becomes very important and we are back again to the idea of repetition and concealment being crucial categories in any identity politics.

In a sense, all signification takes place within the orbit of compulsion to repeat. So every act of signification also entails a compulsion to repeat. So repetition and signification go hand in hand in discursive fields. So that is something that Butler points out very radically.

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Agency, then is to be located within the possibility of a variation of that repetition. So agency becomes and this is you know going back to Lyotard little bit, if you remember Lyotard’s idea of language games. So agency becomes an active language game over here. The rules are preestablished but how do you negotiate with the rules, how do you sort of pollute and combine the rules and that would create and that would generate agency in the first place.

So agency is basically a variation of that repetition. So that repetition is a compulsory condition and agency becomes a variation within a narrative of repetition right. That is what Butler points out very clearly over here.

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subject is a consequence of certain rule-governed discourses that govern the intelligible invocation of identity. The subject is not *determined* by the rules through which it is generated because signification is *not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition* that both conceals itself and enforces its rules precisely through the production of substantializing effects. In a sense, all signification takes place within the orbit of the compulsion to repeat; “agency,” then, is to be located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition. If the rules governing signification not only restrict, but enable the assertion of alternative domains of cultural intelligibility, i.e., new possibilities for gender that contest the rigid codes of hierarchical binarisms, then it is only *within* the practices of repetitive signifying that a subversion of identity becomes possible. The injunction *to be* a given gender produces necessary failures, a variety of incoherent configurations that in their multi-

If the rules governing signification not only restrict, but enable the assertion of alternative domains of culturally intelligibility, that is new possibilities for gender that contest the rigid codes of hierarchical binarisms then it is only within the practices of repetitive signifying that a subversion of identity becomes possible. So the subversion of identity only becomes possible within the rules which are preestablished.

So you know it is a combination of rules, it is a permutation of rules through which a subversion of identity becomes possible in the first place. So the subversion cannot be a prediscursive phenomenon. Subversion cannot be a metadiscursive phenomenon. Subversion is embedded in discursivity, right. It is only within those rules can actually can subvert your meaning, your identity, your sexuality, your gender politics, your acts of representation etc.

The injunction to be given to be a given gender produces necessary failures, a variety of incoherent configurations that in their multiplicity exceed and defy the injunction by which they are generated. So again we are back to the idea of failure. But over here failure to conform, failure to be complete, failure to be you know total to Butler becomes a possibility, right. So the injunction to be to exist a given gender produces necessary failures.

So the injunction to conform to certain preestablished gender rules and gender codes gender bodies, they entail certain failures because conformity is an incomplete act. We saw that in a couple of lectures ago when we saw Butler quite clearly said that every act of conformity becomes an act of incompleteness. However, that incompleteness produces a gap or contains a gap from which subversion can be produced, subversion can be sort of enacted from that gap that sort of the incompleteness, that limitlessness.

So the injunction to be to exist a given gender produces necessary failures, a variety of incoherent configurations that in their multiplicity exceed and defy the injunction by which they are generated. So the only defiance that can be produced is within the rules, within the game, within the narrative, right. So the injunctions can be defied, injunctions can be deconstructed only by acts of failures; failure to conform, failure to abide, failure to be complete.

Only in acts of failures that injunctions be you know subversions be generated within those injunctions, okay.

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orbit of the compulsion to repeat; agency, then, is to be located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition. If the rules governing signification not only restrict, but enable the assertion of alternative domains of cultural intelligibility, i.e., new possibilities for gender that contest the rigid codes of hierarchical binarisms, then it is only *within* the practices of repetitive signifying that a subversion of identity becomes possible. The injunction *to be* a given gender produces necessary failures, a variety of incoherent configurations that in their multiplicity exceed and defy the injunction by which they are generated. Further, the very injunction to be a given gender takes place through discursive routes: to be a good mother, to be a heterosexually desirable object, to be a fit worker, in sum, to signify a multiplicity of guarantees in response to a variety of different demands all at once. The coexistence or convergence of such discursive injunctions produces the pos-

Further, the very injunction to be a given gender takes place through discursive rules, right. So the very injunction, the very command, the very ordering to be a given gender is a discursive ordering, a discursive command in quality. To be a good mother, to be heterosexually desirable object, to be a fit worker in some to signify a multiplicity of guarantees in response to a variety of different demands all at once.

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So if we look at the definitions over here, the desirable categories over here, the desirable discursive categories, good mother, heterosexually desirable object, a fit worker. So all part of the productive matrix, the matrix of production, mothering you know to parent a child, to produce a child, to parent a child, to be a good worker, to produce well, to produce capital etc., a fit worker, a heterosexual desirable object, part of the commodity production process etc.

All these definitions, all these categories are very much embedded in a narrative of commodification, in a narrative of reification. That for Butler becomes a grand narrative of gender identity as well. So in a very prism sense we can see how Butler draws in Marxism. How Butler draws an idea of reification and alienation in terms of looking at gender identity production and reproduction and that is a very radical thing to bring in Marxism, to bring in postmodernism, to bring in poststructuralism, in terms of looking at gender politics and gender identity productions, okay.

The coexistence or convergence of such discursive injunctions produces the possibility of a complex reconfiguration and redeployment. So reconfiguration and redeployment become very crucial categories for Butler. Because only through reconfigurations and redeployment can we have possibilities of subversion. So again we are back to this Lyotardian idea of language games. It is only within the language games can we permute and combine or produce different acts of subversion which can be potentially subversive in quality, which can deconstruct potentially.

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—What constitutes a subversive repetition within signifying prac-

It is not a transcendental subject who enables action in the midst of such a convergence. There is no self that is prior to the convergence or who maintains integrity prior to its entrance into this conflicted cultural field. There is no sense, there is no self which is integrity, which is integral in quality, which is interiorized in quality, which is prediscursive in quality, right. Then there is no such exist you know removal an example of removal, as a position of removal from this kind of convergence, the different kind of discursive fields.

So there is no self that is prior to the convergence or who maintains integrity prior to the entrance into this conflicted cultural field. So this cultural field and this sense of self are embedded with each other, are synchronous with each other, right. So there is no sequential relationship, there is no sequentiality over here. It is part of a synchronicity, right. So Butler is looking at the synchronicity rather than sequentiality.

She is looking at the self and the discursive fields more of a distributed phenomenon rather than a hierarchical top down phenomenon, okay. There is only a taking up of tools where they lie, where the very taking up is enabled by the tool lying there. Is how you take up the tools. How you play with the tools. How you appropriate the tools. How you misappropriate the tools that determine your subjectivity, that determine your agency, right.

So where the very taking up is enabled by the tool lying there. So you can only take up the tools because the tools are lying there already. So there is no condition of the tools are not there. The tools are already always there and it is a question of how you take up the tools, how you play with the tools, how what are the possibilities or playful possibilities that you can create by your appropriation of the tools. That determines your agency. That determines your subjectivity.

So the evil subject can never exist at a prediscursive condition, right. The tools are always there, the discursive instruments are always there, the instrumentality is always there. It is how you negotiate with the instruments, how do you sort of deal with the tools that determine the human subjectivity that determine your agency and that according to Butler is a true subjectivity the true agency that must be examined, that must be understood not as a prediscursive given but as very much a part of discursivity.

So again we are back to this condition of identity and discursivity embedded with each other, entangled with each other in this particular reading. So I conclude this lecture today and we will continue and hopefully finish up this particular text in a couple of lectures to come. Thank you for your attention.