

Introduction to Cultural Studies
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Lecture - 24

Judith Butler Gender Trouble - VII Conclusion Lecture 4 - 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 this is the final lecture on this particular text where we are looking at the conclusion in some details because you know the conclusion sort of sums up the entire text quite beautifully and also offers some really radical arguments which you know can take us forward in terms of connecting with the other texts that we do subsequently in this course.

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political. How to disrupt the foundations that cover over alternative cultural configurations of gender? How to destabilize and render in their phantasmatic dimension the "premises" of identity politics?

This task has required a critical genealogy of the naturalization of sex and of bodies in general. It has also demanded a reconsideration of the figure of the body as mute, prior to culture, awaiting signification, a figure that cross-checks with the figure of the feminine, awaiting the inscription-as-incision of the masculine signifier for entrance into language and culture. From a political analysis of compulsory heterosexuality, it has been necessary to question the construction of sex as binary, as a hierarchical binary. From the point of view of gender as enacted, questions have emerged over the fixity of gender identity as an interior depth that is said to be externalized in various forms of "expression." The implicit construction of the primary heterosexual

Now on page 188 on your screen we find this paragraph beginning where Butler sort of sets out to define what she had done in this particular book, Gender Trouble, where she says this task has required a critical genealogy of the naturalization of sex and the bodies in general. It has also demanded a reconsideration of the figure of the body as mute, prior to culture, awaiting signification, a figure that cross-checks with the figure of the feminine, awaiting the inscription-as-incision of the masculine signifier for entrance into language and culture.

So quite clearly what Butler says over here is that this is a critique of the idea of a body, the idea of a self which is preculture or prediscursive, right. Similarly, it is a critique of the idea of the feminine as premasculine, right. So the feminine is already embedded in a masculine signifiers you know masculine system of signification and she makes an entrance into it by the very process of being a female.

So you know this idea of a body being mute, prior to culture you know preculture, prediscourse that has been that is critiqued by Butler in this book, throughout this book actually. From a political analysis of compulsory heterosexuality it has become necessary to question the construction of sex as binary, as a hierarchical binary. So you know this is the key question that Butler does for this book as she questions the concept of sex as a binary, heterosexual, homosexual.

This binary obviously which comes as a hierarchy where heterosexualities you know becomes a compulsory privileged condition, a desirable condition, this kind of a binary, this dualism is critiqued and deconstructed by Butler in this particular book. From the point of view of gender as enacted, questions have emerged over the fixity of gender identity as an interior depth that is said to be externalized in various forms of expression, right.

So this idea of gender being sort of you know one of depth or sense of depth or sense of interiority which is articulated through acts of expression. So this just becomes a fallacious argument according to Butler. So Butler says this is an erroneous way of looking at gender and this fallacy in this particular perspective where we assume interiority, where we assume a certain degree of depth from where expressions are enacted through acts of representation etc.

So that kind of a model according to Butler is a invalid is really an erroneous model to look at gender. Because according to her there is no sort of boundary between the inside and the outside. It is always a liminal condition which is neither purely organic, neither purely you know biological determined, neither is it purely arbitrarily artificial. So this is somewhere between the degree of liminality that Butler points out as being one of the necessary conditions of gender identity and gender politics.

So the implicit construction of the primary heterosexual construction of desire is shown to persist even as it appears in the modes of primary bisexuality. So even in modes of primary bisexuality that kind of a hierarchy occurs that is retained where the heterosexual construct is privileged as given degree of desirability etc. or dominance etc. So that becomes a dominant construct, that becomes a dominant discourse even in seemingly radical narratives.

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a figure that cross-checks with the figure of the feminine, awaiting the inscription-as-incision of the masculine signifier for entrance into language and culture. From a political analysis of compulsory heterosexuality, it has been necessary to question the construction of sex as binary, as a hierarchical binary. From the point of view of gender as enacted, questions have emerged over the fixity of gender identity as an interior depth that is said to be externalized in various forms of "expression." The implicit construction of the primary heterosexual construction of desire is shown to persist even as it appears in the mode of primary bisexuality. Strategies of exclusion and hierarchy are also shown to persist in the formulation of the sex/gender distinction and its recourse to "sex" as the prediscursive as well as the priority of sexuality to culture and, in particular, the cultural construction of sexuality as the prediscursive. Finally, the epistemological paradigm that

Strategies of exclusion and hierarchy are also shown to persist in the formulation of the sex, gender distinction and its recourse to sex as the prediscursive as well as the priority of sexuality to culture and in particular the cultural construction of sexuality as a prediscursive right. So again the idea of prediscursivity is exposed as a hollow construct by Butler and is critiqued by Butler and she sort of flexed out as an erroneous category you know as an erroneous conceptual category.

Finally, the epistemological paradigm that presumes the priority of the doer to the deed establishes a global and globalizing subject who disavows its own locality as well as the conditions for local intervention. So this epistemological paradigm that prioritizes the doer from the deed in other words that retains a sense of the pure self as opposed to discursive activity. That kind of a model of the binary between the pure self which is a doer and the discursive activity which is the deed that binary is retained.

As long as the binary is retained that kind of establishes or invests itself to global grand narratives, right which completely conceal its own local quality, which completely conceals its own constructed quality and of course it does away with any possibility of local intervention. So local intervention becomes a true sight of subversion according to Butler.

And again look at the way, notice the way in which this kind of an attitude, this kind of a theory is allied fundamentally, epistemologically, as well as ontologically with the postmodernist theory which is more keen, is more curious, is more interested in micro local narratives rather than the grand narratives of consensus, agreement, culture, etc. right. So that kind of an epistemological paradigm is critiqued by Butler, is deconstructed by Butler, is decried by Butler.

That kind of a paradigm that presumes the priority of the self, that presumes the priority of the prediscursive self as a doer it is prioritized over the deed you know that retains the (()) (06:09), that retains the binary between the romantic reified self with an interiority with a depth etc. which is an opposition to the discursive activity, right. So according to Butler there is no self which is also not on discursive activity.

So every self is also a discursive activity. Is an activity which precedes itself, is a self which precedes activity. It is a form of a loop of production and reproduction that Butler is interested in foregrounding and theorizing and that is what the entire discourse of gender trouble is foregrounding the loop between the self and the activity, right. The self is a product of activity and the activity is a product of the self. It is sort of a loop process of entanglement which goes on asymmetrically, okay, right.

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If taken as the grounds of feminist theory or politics, these “effects” of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality are not only misdescribed as foundations, but the signifying practices that enable this metaleptic misdescription remain outside the purview of a feminist critique of gender relations. To enter into the repetitive practices of this terrain of signification is not a choice, for the “I” that might enter is always already inside: there is no possibility of agency or reality outside of the discursive practices that give those terms the intelligibility that they have. The task is not whether to repeat, but how to repeat or, indeed, to repeat and, through a radical proliferation of gender, to *displace* the very gender norms that enable the repetition itself. There is no ontology of gender on which we might construct a politics, for gender ontologies always operate within established political

If taken, this is page 189 on your screen now. If taken as the grounds for feminist theory or politics, these effects of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality are not only misdescribed as foundations but the signifying practices that enable this metaleptic misdescription remain outside the purview of a feminist critique of gender relations.

So this kind of a misrepresentation of hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality manages to escape feminist criticism, manages to escape feminist critique by appearing as metadiscursive by appearing as a universalizing totalizing narrative which is outside of discursive field which is outside of discursive activity. So this is a misdescription obviously a manipulated misdescription you know which is designed in a way as not to be discursive.

So the very design resist in a discursivity over here and Butler is interested in examining and exposing the innate discursivity of this seemingly nondiscursive process. It manages to become nondiscursive, manages to remain nondiscursive by remaining outside the purview of a feminist critique of gender relation. So any true feminist critique of gender relations according to Butler must take into account local interventions must take into account local narratives which resist and which question the entire ontology of the grand narrative which appears to be metadiscursive construct metadiscursive given.

To enter into the repetitive practices of this terrain of signification is not a choice for the I that might enter is always already inside. So again the I is always already inside the discursive field, the field of discursivity. So there is no prediscursive I. there is no I which is not always already embedded in that kind of a discursive activity, okay. There is no possibility of agency or reality outside of the discursive practices that give those terms the intelligibility that they have.

So you know we are back again to the question of agency. So agency and identity can only be derived from engagement with discursivity with acknowledgment of discursivity. So you know true agency or true identity cannot be derived from any idea of a romantic nondiscursive self which is divorced from discursivity, which has interiority, integrity and a degree of you know depth which somehow manages to live outside of discursive field.

So then discursive field is like a magnetic field really where everyone is affected, every activity, every body, every self, every agencies sort of affected in some way in this peripheral magnetic discursive field. So nothing can escape the discursive field. Nothing can escape the textuality of this process of signification. So nothing is nontextural. Nothing is a given outside textuality, okay.

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feminist critique of gender relations. To enter into the repetitive practices of this terrain of signification is not a choice, for the "I" that might enter is always already inside: there is no possibility of agency or reality outside of the discursive practices that give those terms the intelligibility that they have. The task is not whether to repeat, but how to repeat or, indeed, to repeat and, through a radical proliferation of gender, to *displace* the very gender norms that enable the repetition itself. There is no ontology of gender on which we might construct a politics, for gender ontologies always operate within established political contexts as normative injunctions, determining what qualifies as intelligible sex, invoking and consolidating the reproductive constraints on sexuality, setting the prescriptive requirements whereby sexed or gendered bodies come into cultural intelligibility. Ontology is, thus, not a

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So gender ontologies always operate within established political context. So we cannot possibly take outside or take away the political context from gender activities or gender ontologies. So every gender ontology is determined by the contextuality and contextuality obviously is synonymous, is a form of discursivity, right. So the normative injunctions determining what qualifies intelligible sex which consolidates reproductive constraints all these activities, all these constraints you know sanctioning of intelligent identity etc. or intelligibility etc.

So intelligibility reproductibility you know agency identity are all contained as processes as you know permutations and combinations inside a particular discursive field. So you cannot take away the discursive field. You cannot take away that particular instrument, that particular apparatus which produces cultural intelligibility, right. So cultural intelligibility becomes a really discursive category over here and that is allied to identity, that is allied to agency etc.

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enter is always already inside: there is no possibility of agency or reality outside of the discursive practices that give those terms the intelligibility that they have. The task is not whether to repeat, but how to repeat or, indeed, to repeat and, through a radical proliferation of gender, to *displace* the very gender norms that enable the repetition itself. There is no ontology of gender on which we might construct a politics, for gender ontologies always operate within established political contexts as normative injunctions, determining what qualifies as intelligible sex, invoking and consolidating the reproductive constraints on sexuality, setting the prescriptive requirements whereby sexed or gendered bodies come into cultural intelligibility. Ontology is, thus, not a foundation, but a normative injunction that operates insidiously by installing itself into political discourse as its necessary ground.

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See ontology is thus not a foundation but a normative injunction that operates insidiously by installing itself into political discourse as its necessary ground. So insidiously becomes the key word, the operative over here and is something that I have been talking about before and that is it

must insidiously plant itself as a construct so as not to appear as a construct. So again this nonappearances, nonrevelation of this constructed quality is what makes an ontology a grand narrative. So ontology is not a foundation. There is nothing called a foundation.

It is actually a normative injunction which is constructed in quality. However, that normative injunction or that constructedness operates insidiously, surreptitiously, invisibly; why invisible, how invisible. It makes invisible its own constructed quality, right and by installing itself into political discourse. So you know it installs itself surreptitiously, insidiously into a political discourse as its necessary ground.

So by ground over here Butler obviously means that base which you know presupposed which is supposed to be nondiscursive in quality. That foundation, that basic structure which we assume to be are given. So obviously this assumption or this installation of the basic structure is an artificial process. However, the artificiality of the process must be concealed and therein lies the insidious quality of this installation. So ontology is an insidious installation.

Again, it is a beautiful description of ontology and you can go back and sort of recover what Butler had said and rehearse what Butler had said when she said that agency is not opposed to ontology. Agency arise from ontology. Agency arise from maneuvering from engagement with this insidious installments, right; its installations right. This installations which are insidious in quality.

If you engage with them, if you address them, if you maneuver with them only then will you derive and be able to articulate agency. So agency cannot be a prediscursive quality. Likewise, ontology is an insidious installation, right which passes off with a necessary basic ground for any structure to take place, to be operative in the first place.

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ligible sex, invoking and consolidating the reproductive constraints on sexuality, setting the prescriptive requirements whereby sexed or gendered bodies come into cultural intelligibility. Ontology is, thus, not a foundation, but a normative injunction that operates insidiously by installing itself into political discourse as its necessary ground.

The deconstruction of identity is not the deconstruction of politics; rather, it establishes as political the very terms through which identity is articulated. This kind of critique brings into question the foundationalist frame in which feminism as an identity politics has been articulated. The internal paradox of this foundationalism is that it presumes, fixes, and constrains the very “subjects” that it hopes to represent and liberate. The task here is not to celebrate each and every new possibility *qua* possibility, but to redescribe those possibilities that

So deconstruction of identity is not the deconstruction of politics. Rather it establishes as political the very terms through which identity is articulated. So you know by deconstruction again the very word deconstruction appears over here, deconstruction is not destruction according to Butler. It does not do away with the politics. It actually reinvokes the politics. It actually revives the politics. It makes the politics very visible.

It actually establishes the political and very terms through which identities are articulated what Butler means over here. So every articulation of identity is political in quality. So there can be no such thing as a political articulation of identity. So every identity is political in quality and if you do not take under consideration then obviously you know you are falling into the trap of a sort of seemingly prediscursive given, right. So the deconstruction of identity is essentially a highlighting of the political quality of identity. It is not doing away with the political quality.

It is actually highlighting an emphasis, an epistemic emphasis on the political quality of identity in the first place. So this kind of critique brings into question as Butler argues the foundationalist frame in which feminism as an identity politics has been articulated. So you know she talks about feminism and how feminism has been trapped in a foundationalist kind of a politics, in a foundationalist kind of a frame.

Where there is this romantic idea of the self, the romantic idea of the purely feminine self, the sort of very reified idea of the interiorized feminine self and that becomes a problem for Butler because that falls into a trap that sort of completely plays into the trap of the foundationalists frame which Butler sets out to deconstruct and she says quite clearly that feminist identity must set out to deconstruct this kind of a foundationalist frame but oftentimes it finds itself entrapped in that kind of a foundationalist frame.

So internal paradox of this foundationalism is that it presumes, fixes and constrains the very subjects that it hopes to represent and liberate and this is something that Butler had said before already that you know the entire claim of liberation, the entire you know challenge of liberation sometimes completely subverted, is sometimes completely frustrated by the entire foundationalist frame.

Because if you are retaining the foundationalist frame in your narrative of liberation then you are essentially playing back into and getting trapped back into the very foundationalist epistemology which is set out to deconstruct okay. So the liberal the liberation narratives, the emancipatory narratives will not work at all if you are retaining the foundationalist frame and that is the paradox, the internal paradox of this foundationalism.

So what Butler does among other things in this particular book is that she also offers a critique of feminism. She offers a sort of a possibility of how feminism can open up from this foundationalist frame and open up you know new possibilities by using local interventions, by using local narratives rather than aspiring for some kind of a universalizing, totalizing grand narrative which according to Butler will basically be an entrapment into the very foundationalist frame.

Which had historically informed patriarchy, imperialism, and always have disgusting things which feminism sort out to rebel against, okay. So there is a paradox that feminism must acknowledge and must move away from okay according to Butler.

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The task here is not to celebrate each and every new possibility as being a possibility or *qua* possibility but to redescribe those possibilities that culturally unintelligible and impossible. Sorry, to redescribe those possibilities that already exist, but which exist within cultural domains designated as culturally unintelligible and impossible. So you know what Butler says over here is intelligibility is intelligibility is obviously a discursive condition.

However, the challenge over here is to make something which is seemingly unintelligible and to make the transition from unintelligibility to intelligibility. Therein lies the subversive possibility. If you can make something which is unintelligible, something which lies outside the domain and meaningful discursive field or meaningful discursivity. If you can bring something from the outside of this domain into it right and make something meaningful ontologize something which does not exist as in ontology therein lies a true possibility.

Therein lies a true celebration of identity politics, right. So true identity politics can be celebrated only through processes of redescription. So it can redescribe the possibilities, those that already exist but which are designated as culturally unintelligible. In other words, if you can use this model to talk about gender identity, gender politics we can talk about those marginalized gender politics which are inside the discursive field because there is nothing outside the discursive field but which exist as marginalized unintelligible constructs.

If you can bring those into the and make them intelligible and make them give them voices you know and make them articulatable therein lies the true possibility of subversion and the celebration of subversion.

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tics; rather, it establishes as political the very terms through which identity is articulated. This kind of critique brings into question the foundationalist frame in which feminism as an identity politics has been articulated. The internal paradox of this foundationalism is that it presumes, fixes, and constrains the very “subjects” that it hopes to represent and liberate. The task here is not to celebrate each and every new possibility *qua* possibility, but to redescribe those possibilities that *already* exist, but which exist within cultural domains designated as culturally unintelligible and impossible. If identities were no longer fixed as the premises of a political syllogism, and politics no longer understood as a set of practices derived from the alleged interests that belong to a set of ready-made subjects, a new configuration of politics

If identities were no longer fixed as the premises of a political syllogism and politics no longer understood as a set of practices derived from the alleged interests that belong to a set of ready-made subjects, a new configuration of politics would surely emerge from the ruins of the old. And this is a new kind of politics that Butler is welcoming whereby seemingly marginalized unintelligible constructs can be brought into the fold, can be given voices, can become dominant can become visible, can become intelligible.

So intelligibility and unintelligibility become very discursive categories over here. So what constitutes intelligibility is obviously is alliance or approximation to the dominant discourses. So the closer you are to the dominant discourse the more intelligible you are as a category, as a gender category, as a racial category, as a sexual category etc. as an ontological category etc.

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would surely emerge from the ruins of the old. Cultural configurations of sex and gender might then proliferate or, rather, their present proliferation might then become articulable within the discourses that establish intelligible cultural life, confounding the very binarism of sex, and exposing its fundamental unnaturalness. What other local strategies for engaging the “unnatural” might lead to the denaturalization of gender as such?

However, the key to Butler over here is how to sort of permute and combine the different discursive constructs so as to offer more agency, so as to create and generate or produce more agency to the seemingly unintelligible categories. Therein lies true subversion according to Butler. So cultural configurations of sex and gender might then proliferate or rather their present proliferation might then become articulable.

So again the entire idea of being articulable, you know something which has not been articulated now will become articulable through this process of transition, through this process of cultural configurations and that can only happen according to Butler if we acknowledge discursivity and then we handle and maneuver discursivity and within the discursive field we recover what is unintelligible and make them intelligible through certain discursive practices, through certain you know intelligent practices, okay.

Will become articulable within the discourses that establish intelligible cultural life confounding the very binarism of sex and exposing its fundamental unnaturalness. So you know that is the whole point where it is unnatural. So you know the entire unnaturalness or what is assumed to be natural if that can be exposed, if we can expose the fundamental unnaturalness then obviously therein lies the true triumph of gender identity and gender politics okay.

And obviously Butler concludes by asking a question it is more of a rhetorical question what other local strategies for engaging the unnatural might lead to the denaturalization of gender as such, right. So gender becomes you know the true aspiration that Butler is sort of seeking over here is to denaturalize any idea of gender, right. So to expose gender as a unnatural construct an unnatural rule book, an unnatural discursive field with nothing natural about it.

So obviously what that will do is it will take away the naturalness from compulsive heterosexuality. It will take away the naturalness from the privilege positions in the gender field in a sexual field etc. and it will offer more distributive discourse of gender, a more distributive discursive field rather than a more hierarchical discursive field. So the challenge for Butler to conclude is to not to escape discursivity but rather to embrace discursivity.

And to look at a more distributive model of discursivity to attain a more distributive model of discursivity rather than rating a hierarchical model of discursivity. So ontology you know discursivity these are not enemies of agency and that is a very radical thing to say. So Butler is not saying let us escape this course. Let us get ourselves free from this course because that (()) (22:14) does not exist, Butler is very clear about this.

So Butler wants to sort of acknowledge this course, acknowledge discursivity. However she wants to make discursivity more distributive in quality and that is the biggest challenge for Butler. Therein lies true radical possibility according to Butler. So with that we conclude Gender Trouble. I hope you enjoyed reading this particular text. It is a very important text and not least for people who are interested in cultural studies.

Because you know as I say it is a book which ticks lots of boxes, it is obviously a really radical book gender politics and you know feminism and subversion and feminist identity politics. But equally it is also something which keeps drawing on poststructuralism and keeps connecting to postmodernism in a very sort of attitudinal kind of a way and this attitudinal alliance that Butler has with postmodernism is something which is really radical in quality.

Is something that makes Butler one of the key figures, one of the key intellectual in academia today, in critical theory today. So thank you for your attention. With that we conclude Gender Trouble and we will move on with the next text in the next lecture. Thank you.