

**Feminist Writings**  
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**Gender Trouble - Part 2**

So, hello and welcome to NPTEL course entitled Feminist Writings. We were looking at Judith Butler's Gender Trouble. So, we are looking at the first chapter in some details. And there should be on your screen highlighted in yellow, the sections that we are studying specifically.

So, we saw how Butler talks about the whole problem of a binaristic understanding of gender and how that becomes a sense of totalitarian narrative which constricts and represses identity production, which represses agency production etc. and how it should try to move beyond that and looking in a more fluid understanding of gender as performance, something which is performative reproduced and not with something of a biological ascent.

So, the movement away as from essentialism to perform (( ))(0:57) and that is the movement the Butler is advocating and sort of calibrating and examining in this work. Now, if you look at Butler's definition of gender we find how it is do Derredian in quality. There is a degree of, there is a lot of post-structurism which is getting into this definition with a lot of post-structurist, deconstructionist, discourse and vocabulary the butler is appropriating.

(Refer Slide Time: 1:23)

accomplish whatever aims are in view. Coalitional politics requires neither an expanded category of "women" nor an internally multiplicitous self that offers its complexity at once.

Gender is a complexity whose totality is permanently deferred, never fully what it is at any given juncture in time. An open coalition, then, will affirm identities that are alternately instituted and relinquished according to the purposes at hand; it will be an open assemblage that permits of multiple convergences and divergences without obedience to a normative telos of definitional closure.

#### V. IDENTITY, SEX, AND THE METAPHYSICS OF SUBSTANCE

What can be meant by "identity," then, and what grounds the presumption that identities are self-identical, persisting through time as the same, unified and internally coherent? More importantly, how do these assumptions inform the discourses on "gender identity"? It would be wrong to think that the discussion of "identity" ought to proceed prior to a discussion of gender identity for the simple reason that "persons" only become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility. Sociological discussions have conventionally sought to understand the notion of the person in terms of an agency that claims ontological priority to the various roles and functions through which it assumes social visibility and meaning. Within philosophical discourse itself, the notion of "the



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So you know the vocabulary is so derredian. The whole idea of being permanently deferred is you know, this is a (( ))( 1:54) idea of deconstruction, deferring and differing and that is the process you come up with this compound word, deferance which is a combination deferring and differing and it is never really full at any given juncture in time.

So any given juncture in time is obviously moving, is obviously mutable in quality and this mutability is something which is a marker of gender. So the totality of any gender identity is mutable at any given point of time and that always moves ahead, forward, backwards and all kinds of uncertain, unpredictable patterns.

And then Butler is summoning, Butler is inviting in open coalition whereas all opened up and opened up and it invites coalition, invites participation of all kinds of identity productions and then that open coalition will affirm identities that alternatively instituted and relinquished.

According to the purpose of the hand; it will be an open assemblage, the word assemblage is very important because it almost gives the sense of machinery assemblage, you assemble machines, you assemble together things and give it a sense of metonymic quality. An open assemblage that permits of multiple convergences and divergences, the whole idea of converging and diverging all the time gives the whole process of gender a centripetal and centrifugal identity.

So it is always moving ahead, moving outside of the center and moving towards the center because there is no stable center. So we move away from our centered idea of gender into more decentered idea of gender, more distribute, fluid understanding of gender. And that is something the Butler is advocating and summoning.

So, it permits of multiple convergences and divergences without obedience to any normative telos of definitional closure. So there is no definitional closure. There is a closure killing mechanism that categorizes the whole idea of gender, is closure, is a closure killer, is

something which is subversive to gender, a subversive to any idea of gendered closure of normativity in that sense.

So, normativity, closure, all these are done away with in this kind of model, a complex model of deferring and differing, a complex model of open coalition, a complex model of an open assemblage. So these adjectives, these words are very important, coalition, assemblage, deferred, because these are markers of gender according to Butler and you can see clearly how the vocabulary is so post structuralism in quality.

And this is very derredian in equality and Butler obviously becomes, she crystallizes in a way in her work, the theory is post structuralism with experience agenda together and that is what makes the work so foundational and quality in terms of gender studies as we study today.

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Okay, so and then she goes on to say the whole idea of personhood, so personhood is a productive process. So there is no innate quality of personhood. Personhood is something which is always productive. It has produced in all the time and if something is produced that can also be deproduce and reproduce.

So there is a textual quality about personhood, there is a textual quality about producing personhood which Butler is advocating over here. And this textual quality something that she is very clearly highlighting and her understanding of gender. She says over here, that should be on your screen, highlighted in yellow where she is saying "persons only become

intelligible through gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility.

So, you know there are certain recognizable parameters, certain permitted parameters of gender and you can only become a person, recognized by society if you are subscribing and conforming to that kind of predictable pattern of gender. If you are not then, you become a transgressor.

Then you become a deviant something which is, it can potentially be subversive and quality but then you don't have personhood in a normative sense of the word unless you're conforming to certain set models of gender intelligibility, gender understanding.

Okay. So that's something which Butler is obviously moving away from, the whole idea of stable, gendered understanding and then obviously what she wants essentially is more subversive distributive, more fluid understanding of gender in the world we live in today.

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heterosexual hegemony.

The various explanatory models offered here suggest the very different ways in which the category of sex is understood depending on how the field of power is articulated. Is it possible to maintain the complexity of these fields of power and think through their productive capacities together? On the one hand, Irigaray's theory of sexual difference suggests that women can never be understood on the model of a "subject" within the conventional representational systems of Western culture precisely because they constitute the fetish of representation and, hence, the unrepresentable as such. Women can never "be," according to this ontology of substances, precisely because they are the relation of difference, the excluded, by which that domain marks itself off. Women are also a "difference" that cannot be understood as the simple negation or "Other" of the always-already-masculine subject. As discussed earlier, they are neither the subject nor its Other, but a difference from the economy of binary opposition, itself a ruse for a monologic elaboration of the masculine.

Central to each of these views, however, is the notion that sex appears within hegemonic language as a *substance*, as, metaphysically speaking, a self-identical being. This appearance is achieved through a performative twist of language and/or discourse that conceals the fact that "being" a sex or a gender is fundamentally impossible. For Irigaray, grammar can never be a true index of gender relations precisely



Okay! So then she is talking about, and this should be on your screen, how women become an impossible category in this kind of a discursive situation because women can never be in complete conformity to that certain parameter because that parameter is very phallogocentric in quality, is very male quality, is very patriarchal obviously it is a patriarchal production.

So women will always come fall short of that category, will always fall short of that kind of a permitted qualities and that is what she says and this should be on the screen highlighted in

yellow where she is saying “Women can never be according this ontology of substance precisely because they are, the relation of difference.”

So, you know, women are not really substance, they are different because they do differ from the normative model, they differ from the normative angle and that difference makes them potentially subversive but at the same time the difference makes them other and quality.

So, ‘they are the relations of difference, the excluded by which that domain marks itself off.’ So women are always excluded, they are different, they are excluded from the domain and that domain of course is very phallogocentric in quality.

Woman are also a difference that cannot be understood as a simple negation or other of the always already masculine subject. So, it is not really a simple negation, is not really a straightforward negation of the always very masculine subject. If we look at the adjective ‘always already’. So ‘always’ has a temporal quality, ‘already’ again it is a temporal quality and the whole idea of ‘always already’ compounded together makes it a prominent thing.

So man as the permanent subject, as a permanently available, the permanently recognizable subject and that permanent recognizability and the permanent visibility of the male obviously makes the woman the other, but then you know what Butler is saying that “Women cannot be seen as a simple other, a simple negation of that permanent visibility of male.”

As discussed earlier there neither is subject nor its Other, but a difference from the economy of binary opposition itself reuse for a monologic elaboration of the masculine. So the binary opposition of male versus female is a reuse as a trick, is something, you know, created by the elaboration, the monologic elaboration of the masculine, and that monologic quality is something which produces the binary, etc.

But then what is also important to understand is that women are not really the other in the binary. Women are the difference in the binary and differences of process. The other is more or less an identity. The other has a degree of stability to it but difference is a process of producing, you know, otherness. And so that is something Butler is more interested in, difference rather than other, right?

So Other with a capital O is something the Butler is not quite comfortable with because she thinks there is an inadequate understanding of the woman but a more adequate and more

fuller, more complex understanding of woman should be through the model of difference over here, difference from the economy if binary opposition, right, and that binary opposition self is a reuse for the monologic elaboration of the masculine and that is something that she is saying quite clearly over here.

So, we see how deeply post-structuralist Butler's idea of gender is, how deeply post-structuralist Butler's idea of the woman is and the whole idea of woman becoming the difference, and is a derredian quality to it differing as well as deferring. So is a difference that we are talking about.

It is always different, it is always deferred, never really arrives at a fuller understanding, at a fuller appropriation of the corrected identity but rather is always an incomplete, liminal and fluid understanding of identity that is processed to woman. Now having said all that how does Butler define gender?

So, what is the definition of gender and then the linguistic definition of gender and used the word linguistic while literally because Butler is about to give us on what part-of-speech gender is, you know, what kind of, whether it is a verb or you know, noun or adjective or what. How does gender fit into the scheme of things linguistically speaking.

And this is a very good example of how textuality and experientiality emerge and that is something which we talked about throughout this course already and that is one of the key things that we are keen on elaborating and examining and calibrating this course, the relationship, the entanglement of textuality and experientiality.

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are said to modify and, hence, to expand the substantive categories of gender to include possibilities that they previously excluded. But if these substances are nothing other than the coherences contingently created through the regulation of attributes, it would seem that the ontology of substances itself is not only an artificial effect, but essentially superfluous.

In this sense, *gender* is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. Hence, within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, *gender* proves to be performative—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed. The challenge for rethinking gender categories outside of the metaphysics of substance will have to consider the relevance of Nietzsche's claim in *On the Genealogy of Morals* that "there is no 'being' behind doing, effecting, becoming; 'the doer' is merely a fiction added to the deed—the deed is everything."<sup>99</sup> In an application that Nietzsche himself would not have anticipated or condoned, we might state as a corollary: **There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results.**



And this is what Butler says about gender and this should be on a screen. What she is saying, “In this sense, gender is not a noun but neither is it a sort of free floating attributes, for we have seen that is substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence.

Hence, within the artificial, within inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to do preexist the deed.” Right?

So, gender is always a verb, it is doing something which is performative in quality and now performativity is a very loaded in Butler and more often or not performativity is (( ))(11:11) to producing an effect. Now, effect could be any kind of it, could be all, could be fear it, could be adoration, could be celebration, it could be hero worship, it could be anything.

But performativity is something which is affects producing, it is an affect producing mechanism. Right? So gender is not a noun, gender is a process of becoming, a process of doing as a verb, as an activity and that activity is an affective activity. So, gender has an affective activity is something Butler is interested in, as a theory in a philosopher of gender.

And then she goes on to say, “There is no gender identity behind expression of gender, that identity is performatively constituted by the very expression that is said to be its results.”

Right? So, there is no gender identity behind expression of genders, because there is no one, a palpable, tangible gender identity, you know expression of gender, behind expression of gender.

But what we have that identity is constantly and performatively produce and constituted by expressions, right? So, expressions, activities, utterances, (( ))(12:13), so these are things which produce gender identities and their production becomes a very important category for Butler.

Rather than looking at any innate understanding, any innate idea of gender as some kind of a substance, right? So the movement away is from a metaphysics of substance to a performative model of production. And again this is very-very postmodernist in quality. It is moving away from and it stable, centered understanding, ontological understanding of gender into a more distributive, fluid and performative understanding of gender that Butler is talking about, and advocating in this book which is what makes it such an important seminal book for gender studies today.

So, it is not just about feminism or masculinity but it connects the whole idea of gender studies very-very compellingly and complexly. As we move on and study these two different lenses where there is a lens of anthropology, but it is the lens of literary studies, critical theory of philosophy you can't really ignore Butler and she is one of the really foundational figures in this discipline.

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The following chapter investigates some aspects of the psychoanalytic structuralist account of sexual difference and the construction of sexuality with respect to its power to contest the regulatory regimes outlined here as well as its role in uncritically reproducing those regimes. The univocity of sex, the internal coherence of gender, and the binary framework for both sex and gender are considered throughout as regulatory fictions that consolidate and naturalize the convergent power regimes of masculine and heterosexist oppression. The final chapter considers the very notion of "the body," not as a ready surface awaiting signification, but as a set of boundaries, individual and social, politically signified and maintained. No longer believable as an interior "truth" of dispositions and identity, sex will be shown to be a performatively enacted signification (and hence not "to be"), one that, released from its naturalized interiority and surface, can occasion the parodic proliferation and subversive play of gendered meanings. This text continues, then, as an effort to think through the possibility of subverting and displacing those naturalized and reified notions of gender that support masculine hegemony and heterosexist power, to make gender trouble, not through the strategies that figure a utopian beyond, but through the mobilization, subversive confusion, and proliferation of precisely those constitutive categories that seek to keep gender in its place by posturing as the foundational illusions of identity.



Now this chapter ends with what is sort of setting out to define what this text does, and so what is gender trouble about. So she is saying quite clearly that, “This text continues then as an effort to think through the possibility of subverting and displacing those naturalized and reified notions of gender that support masculine hegemony and heterosexist power, to make gender trouble, not through the strategies and the figure a utopian beyond, but precisely the mobilization, subversive confusion, and proliferation of precisely those constitutive categories that seek to help keep gender in its place by posturing as a foundational illusions of identity.”

So it is a very loaded sentence with which the first chapter ends. I am just going to unpack this little bit and then wind up. So what is this text about? This text is about the effort to think of the possibility of subverting and displacing. The text offers an example, offers an examination of how to subvert the possibility, this naturalizing reified notions.

And what do I mean by... What does Butler mean by naturalizing reified notions and naturalization happens through repetition, you can naturalize something by repeating something, by internalizing something, ad infinitum. You keep repeating something, you keep internalizing and before you know it becomes a natural seamless process and naturalized seamless process.

And now that naturalization is also a process of reification. What is reification, reification is a process in which thing becomes a commodity. Something which is, which becomes internalized and consumed as a commodity. Now that reification, or that naturalization of course is completely in bed with completely, collusive with masculine hegemony and heterosexual powers, since very hetero-normative in quality, it is very heterosexist in quality.

It discriminates against anything which is non-heteronormative and that discrimination, that hegemony, that totalitarian control and coercion is very much part of the process of reification where everything is reified, everything is made into a commodity, a thing that is done through a process of naturalization which is iteration over again.

Okay! So, but this book wants to make Gender Trouble. Now what, trouble becomes very important over here because trouble again is a verb as used by Butler. It wants to open up. It wants the trouble; it wants to unsettle the normative reified understandings of gender. It wants to unsettle and open up and crack open the possibility of gender as a production process.

And this is of course, the whole idea, the whole scheme of deconstruction. So, deconstruction as we know is not the destruction of meaning. Deconstruction is a possibility of producing more meanings or the possibility of possibility rather. It is a process to which more meanings may be produced, alternative meanings may be accommodated, articulate them, ambivalence may be acknowledged and articulated, right?

So, that is the whole idea of deconstruction. It opens up to more possibilities in textual productions and reproductions. And that is exactly what Butler wants. Butler say that, "I am not really looking for a utopian beyond. There is a utopia that I am looking for, but what I am looking for, what I am wanting is mobilization, subversive confusion.

So again a very important term, subversive confusion, a subversive quality, it is rebellious and quality. It is something which is supposed to interrogate, reified notions of gender and this confusion is healthy. This is critical confusion. This is the confusion which can produce more meaning. It can produce more possibilities and Butler is obviously very interested in possibilities over here.

So, it is about subversive confusion and without subversion it comes to proliferation or precisely those constitutive categories that seek to keep gender in its place by posturing as the foundational illusions or identity. Right? So, Butler is setting herself against those categories.

Those constitutive categories that keep gender in its place by posturing as a foundational illusions of identity. Now, the word posturing very important over here. Because what she is saying essentially is true for any kind of a grand narrative.

So any grand narrative will give you or would pretend to be the foundational narrative of universal identity. Right? And that is the whole point of becoming a grand narrative, that is the whole idea, there is a whole process to which something becomes a grand narrative, that it can only become a grander narrative if he can give the illusion about identity, illusion about foundational identity.

This is where it starts from. Whereas, what is effaced very-very conveniently and very-very quickly, is a constructed quality of grand narrative. So, constructed quality of any narrative before it becomes a grand narrative, right? So, any act of grand narrative is a process which the constructed quality is concealed, so it conceal the constructed process, then you appear as a foundational narrative, as a foundational illusion of identity.

So, it is something which is illusion of identity, is something which opens up to more identity productions. And that is something the Butler is obviously advocating against. Just she saying that this is a whole point of troubling gender. I want to make gender trouble because through the process of troubling, I can critique interrogate and deconstruction, and unpack all those norms which reify gender and which appear to be totalizing illusions of identity identities.

So, it appears to be foundational. It appears to totalizing. It appears to be universal in equality but of course we know that any act, any claim to universality is a false claim because nothing can be universal, it leaves a human discourses. So, you know the whole idea of topicality, locality, textuality, constructed quality, all these things become very important in Butler's analysis.

And she says that only way in which we can unpack this quality, it is the only way in which we can calibrate these qualities is by making gender trouble and by trouble she means textualize gender, treat gender as a text. Open up gender as textual mode of production and reproduction, deproduction and analyze gender, interpret gender as a text.

Once you know interpreted, then obviously this pool of possibilities will become possible. And the point is, it is not really a utopian beyond that we are looking at. It is not that, we were looking at local narratives which can potentially subvert and mobilize and create confusion, critical held confusion which will then obviously lead on to more subversive narratives in the times to come.

Trouble which is obviously very loaded very provocative and brilliant, I am sure you agree. And if you think about it, it is one of the really, really important works in gender studies which open up to many different discourses of gender and among the many things which Butler does is that she combines very interestingly, this theoretical lend post-structuralism, with the experience gender.

Gender as an experience of liminality, gender as an experience of mutability. And how do you calibrate that experience. How do you analyze experience? You analyze experience using the post-structuralist perspective, right? See a map the post-structuralist perspective onto the experience of gender and this mapping becomes an act of rebellion because you use post-structuralist lens, they use the post-structuralist

performance, but only in as much that is used to map the experience of gender in very-very cogent and compelling way and a very complex way.

That makes a gender trouble, that makes a gender a complex phenomenon, that makes gender a very important set of attributes which are performative in quality. So with that we conclude the first chapter of general trouble. We will move on to the next chapters in the times to come and will hopefully wind up this text very-very soon. Thank you for your attention.