

**Feminist Writings**  
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**Gender Trouble - Part 4**

So, hello and welcome to this NPTEL course entitled Feminist Writings. We are looking at Judith Butler's text 'Gender Trouble' and this would be the concluding lecture of that text. So in the previous lecture, we saw how Butler draws on Fredrick Jameson and maps the difference between parody and pastiche.

And we saw how the Butler seems to prefer 'pastiche' to a certain extent because pastiche reveals, according to Butler, that there is no ontological origin at any given point of time. Whereas 'parody' retains an idea of origin, parody retains a knowledge of origin or an acknowledgement of origin which is then divided and deconstructed.

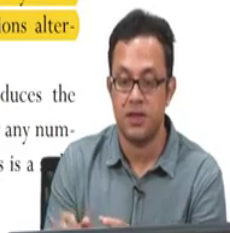
Pastiche does away with any acknowledgement of origin at any given point of time. So 'pastiche' reveals any origin to be inauthentic; every origin to be a mimetic act. So therein lays the hyper mimetic quality of pastiche which Butler finds more compellingly radical at any given point of time.

Now, we just take that argument, we take that analysis and see how that connects to her understanding of 'gender' and how gender becomes, preferably according to Butler, an act of pastiche especially when it comes to the drag or the production of identity through the drag. And this is what she says and this should be on the screen highlighted in yellow.

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Because there is neither an “essence” that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires, and because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions—and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them; the construction “compels” our belief in its necessity and naturalness. The historical possibilities materialized through various corporeal styles are nothing other than those punitively regulated cultural fictions alternately embodied and deflected under duress.

Consider that a sedimentation of gender norms produces the peculiar phenomenon of a “natural sex” or a “real woman” or any number of prevalent and compelling social fictions, and that this is a



Where she says, 'Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce and sustain discreet and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions and the punishments that attend not, you know, agreeing to believe in them.

The construction compels our belief in its necessity and naturalness. The historical possibilities materialize through various corporeal styles, nothing other than those punitively regulated cultural fictions alternately embodied and deflected under duress'. So, you know, very-very loaded terms over here which are being used.

What is being said is that, gender becomes, or at least mainstream gender or compulsory gender, becomes an active coercion, right? It becomes an act of conformity, you know, you conform to certain things under coercion, under duress as Butler is saying - that is - There are certain narratives which are grand in quality.

Certain narratives which are grand productive in quality, which a mainstream, which are hegemonic in quality and gender becomes an entire anxiety to conform to those categories of mainstream production or meaning. So its... And of course, Butler says that there are punishments that tend to not agreeing to believe in them.

So if you transgress those norms, if you transgress those gendered configurations of productions and meaning making process, then there are punishments, there are punitive

quality which are meted out to you at any given point of time. That punishment, obviously, is a punishment given for transgression.

Okay, so it becomes, obviously, a cultural process, it becomes a cultural mechanism of regulation, of control of coercion, of conformity, etc. And then of course, you know, the historical possibilities which are materialize to the various corporeal styles and those are nothing other than those punitively regulated cultural fictions alternately embodied out and deflected under duress.

So there are 'cultural fictions' – very-very important phrase, those are fictions which, you know, pass off as given, which pass off as universal categories, which pass off as, you know, aspirational categories - something which we want to aspire to, something which we want to conform to because that is how they are projected and internalized to repetitions.

And of course, you know, it is materialized for different corporeal styles. So again, corporeality is very much a discursive phenomenon according to Butler. So the line between corporeality and discursivity is almost non-existent for Butler. And they are more or less the same thing.

So your corporeal performance is discursive in quality, your discursive performance is corporeal in quality - there is an axiomatic relationship between corporeality and discursivity that Butler is obviously mapping on to. That is something which is so foregrounding and that is foregrounded throughout her work, throughout her overall work.

You know, not just 'Gender Trouble' but also later works that she has produced, which are equally compelling and equally complex and quality. Okay, so these are cultural fictions, alternatively embodied, alternately embodied and deflected under duress.

So they are sometimes embodied, sometimes deflected under coercion, under duress. So there are compulsory performances which regulate our meaning making mechanism through the body. So, how do you corporealise the meaning? How are meanings produced through corporeality - is something that Butler is constantly reminding us?

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and consolidate the subject.

Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. This formulation moves the conception of gender off the ground of a substantial model of identity to one that requires a conception of gender as a constituted social temporality. Significantly, if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief. Gender is also a norm that can never be fully internalized; "the internal" is a surface signification, and gender norms are finally phantasmatic, impossible to embody. If the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the spatial metaphor of a "ground" will be displaced and revealed as a stylized



Okay, now, if you take that into account and we continue defining 'gender' as a performative process, this is what we get according to Butler. So 'Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow.' So in other words, there is no centrifugal quality about gender.

So, I'm being a bit 'physics' over here, or mathematical over here, it is about movement etc. But, what Butler is saying is that there is no center from which gender performances emanate, right? It is not really centrifugal, rather it is centripetal. So that origin, that center, is created by the different activities around it, right? So that is what she is saying over here.

So 'Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow.' So there is no point from which various acts follow. Rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time. So it is a temporal identity, something which is produced at any given point of time. It is very local in quality, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts.

This is a very-very important phrase. So 'gender is a stylized performance' – it is a performance which is repeated. It is a stylized repetition of acts where certain repetitions take place through a very extensive process of stylization. So the effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self, right?

So, you know, different activities, gestures, movements - they constitute an illusion of the abiding gendered self. So the gendered self becomes a very important category. Then of course, the gendered self becomes the function of these activities. As long as the self predates or precedes the activities, the activities produce itself and rather, you know, it is the other way round, so it is more centripetal in quality.

Its movement towards the center which is created by the movement in the first place, right? So it is not really a point from which different formations emanate, the point itself is a function of those functions in a way. And therein lies the hyper mimetic quality of gender – so as a stylized repetition of acts. So every act is stylized and it is repeated over and over again.

Now, what Butler also says that that norm of gender, that ideal of gender, which is obviously desired and coveted and institutionalized by mainstream mechanisms or meanings, it can never really be fully appropriated, so there is always a gap between the ideal act of gender which is obviously discursively produced and maintained and promoted.

And what is really the case, what is really the embodied reality of gender - that gap is always there between the ideal condition and the real embodied condition. That gap sometimes it can be subversive in quality and sometimes it can produce anxiety, sometimes it can produce transgression.

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of identity to one that requires a conception of gender as a constituted *social temporality*. Significantly, if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the *appearance of substance* is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief. Gender is also a norm that can never be fully internalized; "the internal" is a surface signification, and gender norms are finally phantasmatic, impossible to embody. If the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the spatial metaphor of a "ground" will be displaced and revealed as a stylized configuration, indeed, a gendered corporealization of time. The abiding gendered self will then be shown to be structured by repeated acts that seek to approximate the ideal of a substantial ground of identity, but which, in their occasional *discontinuity*, reveal the temporal and contingent groundlessness of this "ground." The possibilities of gender transformation are to be found precisely in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a failure to repeat, a de-formity,



So that gap is important for us to understand and that is what Butler is saying over here - that 'Gender is also a norm that can never be fully internalized. 'The internal' is a surface signification, and gender norms are finally phantasmatic, impossible to embody.' So there is a phantasmatic quality about gender.

So gender norms are fantastic in quality in the sense that, you know, it is actually fantasy which cannot be internalized, which cannot be embodied in reality, right? So that fantasy of gender, the fantasy of ideal gender is something which can only be imagined but not embodied at any given point of time.

Now, 'if the ground of gender identity is a stylized repetition of acts through time and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the spatial metaphor of the 'ground' will be displaced and revealed as a stylized configuration'. Indeed, a gendered corporealization of time - this is a magnificent phrase that Butler is offering us.

A 'gendered corporealization of time' - so time becomes corporealized. So, gender becomes a spatiotemporal activity. Gender becomes a spatiotemporal act of production. It occupies, it inhabits one spatiotemporal frame, one spatiotemporal spot which is corporealized, right? So the corporealization of time is what Butler is offering us.

So, you know, you embody time. You embody a given point of time and that given point of time, that embodiment of that given point of time produces an identity for that normative time which is hardly universal, which is hardly extended or extendible to other points of time.

So every act of activity production, every act of identity production, sorry, is a spatiotemporal function and every act of identity production entails a corporealization of time. It entails a possession of time through the body and therein lies the corporealization metaphor that Butler is using. It is a magnificent metaphor, I think. It is something which is summing up what she is saying, quite compellingly.

So the abiding gendered self will then be shown to be structured or by repeated acts that seek to approximate the ideal of a substantial ground of identity, right? So that act of repetition is also an act of approximation. It will seek to approximate or aspire to approximate the ideal of a substantial ground of identity which in the occasional discontinuity revealed a temporal and contingent groundlessness of this ground, right?

So it is a very... About this time, you should be able to understand what Butler is saying quite clearly, that there are certain moments of discontinuity, there are certain moments of interruption, sometimes deliberate discontinuity, sometimes deliberate interruptions. Now, what those interruptions do, quite compellingly, what those discontinuities do quite compellingly is that they reveal the temporal and contingent groundlessness of the ground.

So there is no ground actually. So it is a very Derridan thing - the center is not in the center. So that is what Derrida says and Butler is drawing that post-structuralist rhetoric and vocabulary quite compellingly where she is saying that, "the whole idea of ground, the one ground from where gender is produced - that itself is a fantasy."

And how do you know what is a fantasy? We know it is a fantasy when certain interruptions take place in the activity of meaning production; when certain interruptions take place, either accidentally or deliberately, or serendipitously. If certain discontinuities take place, only then, we have a moment of pause, we have a moment of liminality through which we can look at and find that there is actually no ground.

It is complete groundlessness. And the whole idea of having a ground form which gender is produced, from which gendered identities are produced is actually a fantasy, is actually a phantasmatic quality. And that phantasmatic quality, that groundlessness of the ground is something that Butler is highlighting quite compellingly and obviously, as I mentioned, this is a complete drawing on the Derridan vocabulary, the post-structuralist vocabulary, the deconstructions vocabulary that Butler is using and weaving into her analysis of gender.

And that is what makes *Gender Trouble* such a complex and seminal book. It is one of those text which we keep going back to, to any study of gender. That post-structuralist take on gender as performance, performativity and you know, the whole idea of discontinuity, the occasional discontinuity - it is such a beautiful phrase - 'the occasional discontinuity' which again is very temporal in quality.

This occasion is temporary in quality. That discontinuity will come, stay and go away. But when it stays, when it is there, as a liminal presence, they have the inside epiphany into the fact that, you know, the whole idea of gender, the whole ground of gender is actually groundless in quality; it is actually a fantasy, a phantasmic production, right? There is actually no ground, there is actually no center.

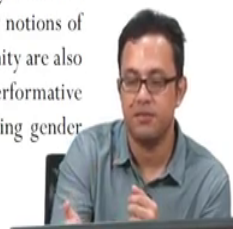
So the center is an illusion which is created by different activities. As soon as the activity stops or discontinues, or is interrupted, only then you realize that there is actually no center, right? That is something that Butler is telling you. And the point is, we need to take the, not just the message that Butler has given us, or the theory that Butler has given us, but also the attitude of Butler.

Butler wouldn't see it or any post-modernist wouldn't see it as necessarily a bad condition, necessarily a condition of lack or absence. That can actually be condition of possibilities of meaning, where you realize that there is no ground, where you realize that there is no center.

That can actually produce more meaning, that can produce alternative meanings or, you know, subversive meanings. Now, those acts of subversion can only be possible through these acts of interruptions and discontinuities that Butler is highlighting quite dramatically and compellingly.

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If gender attributes, however, are not expressive but performative, then these attributes effectively constitute the identity they are said to express or reveal. The distinction between expression and performativeness is crucial. If gender attributes and acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative, then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured; there would be no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender, and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction. That gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender's performative character and the performative possibilities for proliferating gender.



Okay, so we are almost done with Gender Trouble and so in the last bit that Butler is saying that, 'The distinction between expression and performativeness is crucial.' So there is a massive difference that Butler is trying to map out between expression and performativeness. So if gender attributes and acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces is culture signification, are performative, then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured.



There would be no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender, and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction. And that is a very important phrase, 'regulatory fiction' - it is the fiction which is meant to regulate certain gender activities or to allow or disallow certain gender activities - and that will be revealed.

So the regulatory quality will be revealed. How will that be revealed? Once we realize that, you know, the whole act of identity production, it is what produces the cause; so there is no preexisting identity by which an act is produced or measured or calibrated, right? So those activities itself produce the self, the activity itself produces the identity.

And once we realize that, once we acknowledge and articulate it, in cultural discourses, we realize that a true... any idea of gender, any postulation of a true gender identity or normative gender identity is actually a regulatory fiction. So that revelation would appear that it is actually a regulatory mechanism to which a certain kind of grand narrative is maintained and consolidated and protected and promoted.

It is actually a fiction; it is actually an illusion which is regulatory in quality. So once that realization happens, then obviously the next natural step is subversion and questioning the whole production of gender as a fiction, as a regulatory fiction.

So that concludes Gender Trouble. I am sure you would agree that it is a phenomenal work, not just in gender studies, not just in feminism but also as part of how we consume culture. And, you know, the whole idea of gender becomes, according to Butler, an act of consumption; we consume gender or gendered performances unquestioningly.

So those temporary disunities are very-very important because those temporary disunities reveal to us, or occasional discontinuities, it is a beautiful phrase, I can't get over it - the occasional discontinuity will reveal to us that the whole idea of gender production and gender consumption is actually an illusion, right?

So we are consuming something which is given to us through a reified process, reified, commodified process. A gender becomes a reified act, gender becomes a commodified quality, it is something of a commodity which is internalized and you know repeated at infinitum. But when we have the occasional discontinuity, only then we realize that this is actually a commodity and the whole act of gender becomes a construction.

And that liminal moment, that liminal spatiotemporal, a point, where you realize that gender, the space of gender - it doesn't exist, there is no ground, it is completely groundless. You also realize that the time of gender, the corporealization of gender is also a performative act. Once you realize that, you realize that the entire normative quality of gender is a regulatory fiction.

So normativity becomes a regulatory fiction. Normativity becomes a compulsory regulatory fiction according to Butler. So again, we see how post-modernists this is how, how post-structuralist this is in the idea of looking at gender through these lenses.

So with that we conclude Gender Trouble. I hope you enjoyed reading the text as much as I did talking about it. And from this point, we move on to the last two texts in this course which will be Geetha Hariharan's 'Remains of the Feast' and Jhumpa Lahiri's 'A Temporary Matter'. But with that we conclude Judith Butler's Gender Trouble. So, I will see you in the next lecture with a different text. Thank you for your attention