

**Literary and Cultural Disability Studies: An Exploration**  
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**Lecture – 43**

**Making Paper Pumpkins Work for DS Towards a Moral Politics of Vulnerability**

Good evening all of you. I am so glad that I could reach this stage of recording and today is the conclusion talk. I am going to call it making paper pumpkins work for DS towards the moral politics of vulnerability. Paper pumpkins, well I am inspired by this Tamil Proverb (FL: 00:45) they say FL means paper pumpkin. Paper can you cook food with a nice curry with paper pumpkin? No that is not possible.

At the outset it looks irreverent to the world of knowledge well how dare you say that knowledge books journal articles great literatures and all that is paper pumpkin. Well, there is a reason, knowledge that is not grounded with your feet on the ground. Knowledge that remains indifferent to everyday life and everyday phenomenon such as vulnerability. Knowledge that remains purely cerebral purely within quotes ought to be a paper pumpkin that is it. So, some amount of irreverence some amount of iconoclasm is actually good for the world of knowledge because it helps us to be humble to begin with and to interrogate our own assumptions about what we do with knowledge, right.

So, making paper pumpkins work for DS towards a moral politics of vulnerability. Well, you know disability studies ought to be a transformative learning experience or transformative pedagogy. Why because it has so much resources for it to be transformative and what is transformative? One that which does not say my boundary ends here and I am more than what I am. The scope of DS especially its insights on being becoming social organization, political standpoints, embodiment ought to give a lesson or two to other fields of knowledge and because it deals with fundamental human conditions such as embodiment. It also needs to have an open hearted or open-minded approach to other fields of knowledge and learn from that and that is how it has been and that is how it has to be kept and that is how we need to keep pushing the discipline.

So, moral politics of vulnerability I thought a conclusion lecture can be either you know can bring on board this idea. So, that you know this course makes its own feat into

opening up the field or we all together in some way open up the field for a much wider engagement such as a notion such as vulnerability.

Well, when it came to vulnerability, I am not going to define it straight away. Now let us see how it defines itself in the following ways I see vulnerability operating uh in many million ways. But for the purpose of achieving some clarity, let us say that it emerges at the realms of intimate or pre-contractual level contractual environments and narrative environments. These are the three strands I am going to talk about. So, that you know I can think loudly with you about how LCDS or DS can incorporate vulnerability across the board.

Intimate or pre-contractual vulnerabilities well intimacy can happen pre-contractually or engage contractually too. Such as marriage but what happens between two people you know it is hard for other knowledge system any knowledge system to catch up fully such as law for example.

To begin with, in a pre-contractual or intimate setting vulnerability can happen in the following ways. One I would say volatility in judgment. For example, one can get in for example a space like domesticity. Domesticity is not a calculus one cannot I say I will say it again one cannot get into it as an adult for example with full analysis of it. No way so a simple volatility you know this and that either into the back-and-forth in judgment can make one vulnerable. And when does one become volatile, well volatility is a human phenomenon it can happen anytime all the time any space to anyone no matter how neurotypical one is.

Second kind of intimate spaces, it can happen what I call deficient belongingness. Well to illustrate this point, vulnerability that comes with deficient belongingness one can seek recourse to a concept like such as access intimacy. Mia Mingus defines access intimacy as a sort of chemistry a sort of comfort between two people between a and b. So that there is on the basis of access for example, suppose I go with my friend to say an art gallery and I take that friend every time I go to an art gallery. Well then you know it is quite possible that we develop some kind of intuitive understanding she will exactly say how much. She will exactly say what needs to be said about an art piece there not profuse description and not very sketchy as well. Just sufficient amount of description just some sufficient amount of care just sufficient amount of emphasis on a particular thing and so on. Well, this is ideal sometimes access intimacies can be compulsive meaning somebody who gives care or somebody in a care relationship both the disabled and non-disabled you know due to power dynamic; the intimacy can become compulsive

meaning it can become routine it can become overwhelming. It can become toxic and for outside people, people who look at that companionship based on access or based on you know private domestic setting they may look ideal oh wow what companions great yeah that kind of thing. But you know it can be deficient belongingness because it is no more based on two adults willingly cohabiting in an axis connect. But it becomes compulsive you know routine and kind of what to do kind of relationship that can happen.

And third kind of intimacy intimate or pre-contractual vulnerability can happen when there is an inner resource crunch. Look, we do not have to be healthy all the time. We do not have to be and we are not robust cerebrally acute strong toxic masculinity for example suffers from such notions that we can be strong shoulder and mind and body and sound mind and sound body and so on. But the reality is that can be inner resources crunch one can burnout, break down there can be a paucity of well-being from inside, paucity of moral being from inside and so on that can make people vulnerable. Because inner resources crunch people do not have a radar or a scanning machine to watch you may look simply cheerful but you know burnouts would be happening there may be a seismic activity inside but they will not be able to notice it for sure.

So, this is one way of assessing intimate or pre-contractual vulnerabilities well for a discipline like DS what does that mean could mean or LCDS well there is an opinion that you know for example there is a disciplinary binary such as Marxism and psychoanalysis people talk about it quite a lot. Traditional Marxist hate psychoanalysis because they consider it ahistorical acontextual amaterial and so on. But that is not true if we do not well let me come to the other way psychoanalysis can do the same to Marxist for example. Psychoanalysis would say yeah well you know you are resisting such an insight because you have an inner unconscious resistance. So, psychoanalysis can be deterministic universal behave universally and for sure people who can give therapy in a private setting can behave the god. And therefore, undermining the real material conditions that shape people's sense of vulnerability all right both can do to each other. The good thing we can do is in some interesting proportion in some interesting chemistry we can fuse both the fields. So, that you know we have the fields working for us to understand intimate or pre-contractual vulnerabilities. So, that is one way to look at the knowledge field to serve us without necessarily getting into binary arguments.

Let us move on contractual vulnerabilities, just one or two ways of strands here. When it comes what is the contract, contract can be legal contract, it can be an agreement. My relationship between me and the state is a contract I am a citizen I have some duties and responsibilities and state also has certain duties and responsibilities with me. That is simply contract and contracts could be friendships, companionships, classmates, teacher and students lots and lots of millions of contracts do exist. But the thing is they are tangible they can be verified and it is governed by cultural conventions, legal conventions, moral conventions and other conventions that rule determine and influence relationship between people and communities and so on that is contract in a nutshell.

But well contract contractually speaking vulnerability can happen in the following two ways, well this is not an exhaustive list just a kind of tentative list at the end of this course. A threat to sovereignty, sovereignty is used by state people who talk about it. But you know individuals communities and collectivities do also have sovereignty. For example, I have a right for my sovereignty of my physical space. I have a right not to be violated but you know the fact is the boundaries the limits the autonomy the sense of completeness all individuals have a right over their completeness and their personhood and their well and their being and becoming all can come under sovereignty idea individuals communities and collectivities are vulnerable because once their sovereignty of these individuals communities and collectivities are violated that some way or are intruded some way, they become vulnerable. Nearness to structural impingement, well in literary culture LCDS and the DS course we did before, we had lots of conversation about uh social model argument and so on but the fact is in a society like ours and beyond structural impingements are multiple for example if I am not protected say by my family by my friends or my institution affiliation and so on, I can be vulnerable my favorite stories about this Panchatantra story of crow and the snake. Well, there lived a crow on a banyan tree she was bringing up her young ones she used to lay eggs and go for food for her young ones the snake at the bottom of the banyan tree comes up eats up the young ones and goes away and crow was so unhappy with it. What did she do? she consulted a fox uncle and he said come come come near me come near me and he gave her a beautiful idea you know then he the crow did something remarkable she went all the way crowing away to a queen's bath took away her valuable jewels and you know all her servants and others were chasing the crow and crow dropped the expensive jewel in the snake pit and everyone with this crowbar and all killed the snake and they took over

the Jewel. So, what is the moral of the story well to our purpose crow was on the right side you know she took. she was trying to negotiate and one way people negotiate a competing power structures that can be destructive they seek political patronage maybe people become member of parties academicians take this or that stand people you know in some ways secure their well-being personhood collectivity by either joining a party or becoming a membership of an institution and so on get some covering patronage and so on and therefore trying to over this kind of vulnerabilities those who don't affiliate themselves to any party or any institutional setting and so on remain vulnerable all their life okay.

So, that's contractual narrative the third category of vulnerability I was going to say was narrative vulnerability well narrative is not just poetry a line a statement that I am uttering now or even as an assertion narrative is a performance narrative is a way of living, we are immersed and surrounded by narrative universes and all these narrative universes are made up of cultural codes registers idioms and possibilities of thinking and feeling that said well one kind of narrative vulnerability is what I call rhetorical Incommensurability.

Well, the Incommensurability thesis is maybe a fancy word but the point is speaking right things at the wrong place saying wrong things in the right place things like that. You know you don't get the game of narrative enunciation then one becomes vulnerable for example students going from university settings young people are used to certain kind of thinking and reacting and they go to regular job settings marketing setting and adapt the same habits they become vulnerable because university settings are very forgiving and you have your own people your own variety as it were or type as it were but when you go to the town but that's not how it works. So, some kind of incommensurability or incompatibility or non-continuity between you and others can make you more vulnerable than others.

The second variety, I call aesthetic and habitual anachronism well aesthetic and habitual anachronism what the hell that means. Looking, feeling, and performing differently amidst rigid normative cosmology or if you like let me give just an example, a veggie dominated place a person who is a non-vegetarian who looks different who is dressed like a foreigner can face stigma and you know Goffman calls it stigma that's true stigma is there but you know even if people don't stigmatize you explicitly, you feel that you are vulnerable you feel that you are susceptible to stigma and that point one can call

vulnerability meaning it is its habitual anachronism being someone for example thinking ahead of your time can be anachronistic, it can be dangerous because lots of poets were killed metaphorically and literally too because they were thinking ahead of their time. Finally, a breakage from status quo walking the talk being a feminist and talking feminism and walking feminism can be different but if you want to walk the talk, then you do it with vulnerabilities and it is time that we talk about vulnerabilities that come with walking the talk breakage of status quo. Status quo is fine but if someone breaks it through or wants to break it through, they become vulnerable and each context of breakage comes with a different vulnerability point okay.

My dear friends, we have done this short course well 12 weeks 30 hours of engagement. We did the canon question and we did the multilingual problem. DS must grow beyond English anglicized thinking and sign language most definitely is a good entry point in that area thinking about sign language and thinking ecumenically about sign language is the need of the hour and then we got into interdisciplinarity and then so on and so on. The point is this, at this conclusion hour it looks as though I said something new but that's not new all I said was from this point let's make DS work in a way it is not forced to look inward in look into itself look out and look in simultaneously and one of the ways to do is think very proactively about different contexts anatomies and modalities in which vulnerability transpires. Well, a literary way of looking at disability studies or ethnographic way of looking at DS which is better that argument is old nonsensical and useless we need to borrow tools from everywhere more the tools better it is and more we expand better we will do and one way to do it is vulnerability there are I am sure many other million ways to do it. Take care and be safe we are still in the pandemic time hope when I meet you during exams and conversation things will become easier. Be safe and take good care thank you.