

GENDER STUDIES: WHAT?

- The academic study of sexual difference/gender (Women's Studies) began in the late 1960s
- Initially the focus was on producing and correcting knowledge about women in the various disciplines, mainly literature, history, sociology
- Soon it developed as an independent area of production of knowledge and theory

WHAT?

- Since the 1980s, Women's Studies has developed into Gender Studies to include in its body of knowledge also studies on men and masculinity, in addition to studies on women, femininity and on sexuality
- Soon the need to regard gender as “gender and its others” brought to include ethnicity and race, age, religion, dis/ability, nationality, ideology, and citizenship

WHAT?

- Feminism remains a central perspective for the study of gender; critical thinking remains its force, together with the production of knowledge
- Multi- and inter-disciplinarity defines its inquiry
- The emphasis on gender and its others weaves together the discourses of gender, postcolonial, and cultural studies

WHY?

- **Jacques Derrida (“Women” 1984): Do the women who manage these programs, do they not become, in turn, the guardians of the Law and do they not risk constructing an institution similar to the institution against which they are fighting? ... So a problem arises: if you keep the philosophical axiomatics, implying that women are subjects, considering women as subjects, then you keep the whole framework on which the traditional university is built. If someone tries to deconstruct the notion of subjectivity within women’s studies ... this would have two consequences, one radically revolutionary or deconstructive, and the other dangerously reactive.**
- **THE EVER PRECARIOUS BALANCE BETWEEN REVOLUTION AND REACTION**

HOW?

- THE NECESSITY OF CRITIQUE = FEMINIST STUDIES OF GENDER
- Critique = exposure of contradictions and inadequacies of any system of thought. Feminists have always interrogated the premises of their own beliefs (from Simone de Beauvoir's "one is not born a woman" to Judith Butler's "undoing gender", feminist thought has developed a self-critical discourse)
- If feminist studies of gender are to remain vital in the organization of knowledge and learning, they must question where Thought appears to unsettle the dogma and remain engaged in the risk of the political. Where, when, under what conditions does the demand for excellence and visibility give way to an effort to interact and build the intellectual connections, with all their pleasures, that women's studies once promised, and at times, has even delivered? Feminist studies of gender must keep its edge, its place of indeterminacy, at once exciting and precarious. To be on the edge is to be on the verge of discovering new possibilities for a field that may only seem to be exhausted, precarious because in the quest for an as-yet-unimagined future, there are never any guarantees (Joan Scott).

FEMINISM?

- To retain its critical edge, gender studies must be feminist study of gender. WHY?
- Feminism is an *ism* without a Bible: there are many feminisms and many truths about feminism
- Feminism has only one goal: to end. When sexism stops in our societies and cultures, feminism will happily declare its own demise (bell hooks)

The need for feminism

- The problem is VIOLENCE. Violence is always racist and sexist. The victims of violence are sexually and racially connoted.
- Racism and sexism are a pair; indeed sexism is one of the many forms of racism.
- *Race* and *sex* are concepts we use to identify people, along with *class*, *nationality*, *religion*, *ideology*, *etc.*: one is black or white, male or female, rich or poor, European or Extra-communitarian, Christian or Muslim, reactionary or progressive, etc.

IDENTITIES

- Identities are defined through concepts: gender, sex, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, age, religion, nationality, ideology, citizenship, dis/ability, education, etc.
- Commonly these **concepts** identify, group, and divide people
- Which concepts are natural or cultural, true or fictional, fundamental (essential) or constructed (nominal)?

Cultural or natural?

- *The following appear to be clearly cultural:*
- *Ideology* : I can choose to be fascist, communist, republican, monarchic, democratic, dictatorial, and so on.
- *Religion*: I can convert to any or no credo, as I wish.
- *Nationality*: nations are born and die, their boundaries and definitions change and people can change nationality; many people have dual or multiple nationalities.

Cultural or natural?

- **Class** only today is clearly meant to be a construction rather than a natural given—people in democratic societies are no longer born slaves and absolute rulers: everybody desires to be upwardly mobile and become richer in the course of one's life; everybody wants to be ruled by elected representatives, not by someone who is born as their absolute monarch; nobody should legally be declared a slave, declared to be born and to have to die as a slave, as during the times of colonial modernity.

Cultural or natural?

Sex and **race** appear to be natural: one *is*—does not become—female or male, one *is*—does not become—black or white.

Gender and **ethnicity**, on the contrary, appear to be cultural.

Gender is the business facts of sex, so to speak (Myra Jehlen). **Ethnicity** is the cultural expression of a race (Werner Sollors).

Really, either cultural ... or natural?

- But is this truly so? Is it really true that one does not rather, at least in part, also *become* female or male, black or white?
- Simone de Beauvoir in 1949 declared that one is not born a woman, rather becomes a woman. For example, I know that Vladimir Luxuria has become female, and that Michael Jackson has become white. Or should I say “more female” and “whiter,” instead?

Rather, both cultural ... and natural?

- Racial and sexual identities are more complex than the assumed separation of nature from culture may lead us to believe. Race and sex are not *only* natural; they are natural *and* cultural; biologically given *and* intellectually constructed. They are “truth and truly fiction” (Merle Collins “Crick Crack”)—both identity and identification.

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Feminist Studies of Gender: Interdisciplinary and Intercultural

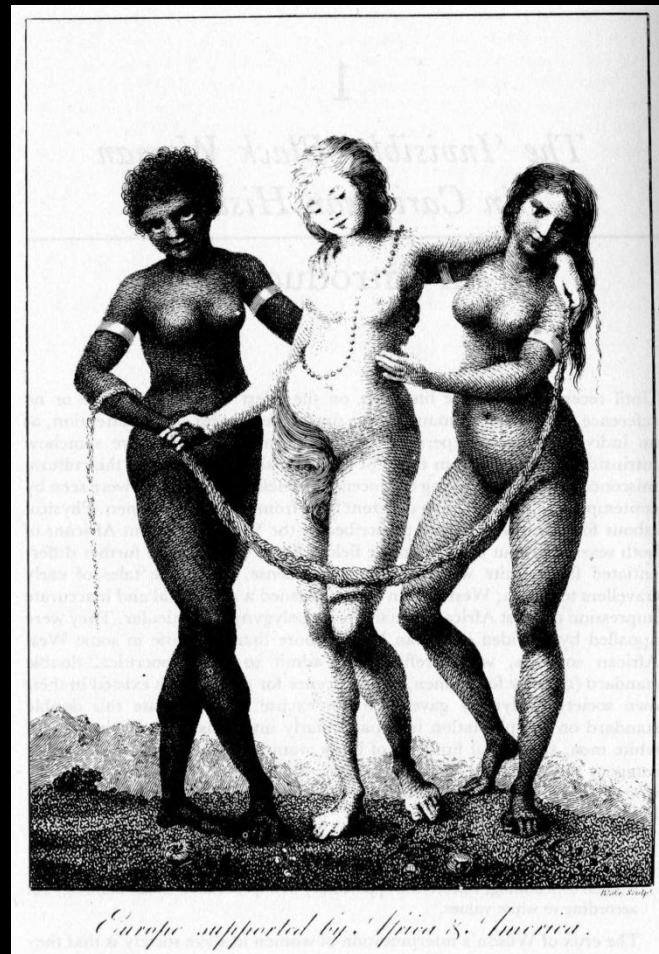
- *Multiple approaches and tools are required to retain the richness and plurality of lived lives. To engage the question: Who we are as humans, with our individual and collective diversities?*
- *The interdisciplinary, intercultural approach to feminist studies of gender engages cultural and postcolonial studies as well.*

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Decolonization of language and thought

- Feminist production of knowledge participates in the decolonization of language and thought
- The fight against sexism and racism is the fight against colonialism
- Colonial empires were grounded on racism and patriarchy

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William Blake, Europe Supported by Africa and America, 1772



RACE SEX EMPIRE

- William Blake's allegory captures the function played by race and sex in the representation of empire
- The rhetoric of the Virgin Land / Virginia is equally exemplary
- William Blake makes clear that the Center and the Peripheries are interconnected and that the racialized and sexualized body—colored and female—carries the meaning of the relationships

INTERCONNECTIONS

- The Colonial, the Postcolonial and the Global are a network. There is no Europe without Africa and the Americas, no Europe that we can understand as we do understand it. Issues of colonialism, anticolonialism, postcoloniality are issues of globalization. Globalization can be good or bad according to how we define and represent it and how we make it work
- Critical inquiry must make clear how these interconnections work within the Global; it must question how racial and gender politics function within the power networks

POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES

- There is no colonial, no postcolonial, no global without the Transatlantic, the Black Atlantic. At the center of European and Western history are the slave trade and the institution of slavery, afterwards segregation and apartheid. The heritage of centuries of racism must be constantly questioned and a postcolonial frame must be developed. Gender inquiry is part of this process—racialized bodies are always also gendered bodies.

Gender Studies

- *Gender studies* insists that all human culture is gendered and must be acknowledged as such to counter the patriarchal universalism of traditional representations instrumental to male supremacy and female discrimination; gender being a cultural construction can be changed, thus gender studies participates in the feminist political project to make the world more just by demanding equal opportunities between men and women in society and representations of male and female in culture that liberate humans into imagining a future that is more plural and hospitable.

Cultural Studies

- The *culture* produced by critical thinking is thinking that enables us to rethink the present in terms that deconstruct the colonial and patriarchal frame to decolonize language and thought, so that the sexist and racist violence instrumental to colonial imperialisms can no longer be repeated. This is why such thinking must be *gendered*.

Culture as Cultures

- All these critical approaches together go hand in hand to help us represent the complexity we actually inhabit and to enable us to think through categories that are more democratic. We might say that these inter-disciplines (“studies”) take “The Culture” out of the natural history museum (where it was frozen into the dead body of the now-extinct stuffed animal) and bring it back to life into our lived relational experiences to be re-presented as shared cultures—in the plural. Culture as cultures is defined as negotiation; no culture can exist but in contact with another culture (Jean Loup Amselle) . The border is where cultures come alive (Gloria Anzaldúa).

REPRESENTATION-ACTION

- Change through the creation of figures capable of becoming actions (figurations= figure/action, Donna Haraway)
- POETRY IS NOT A LUXURY (Audre Lorde)
- THE WORDS ARE PURPOSES / THE WORDS ARE MAPS (Adrienne Rich)
- Decolonialization of language and thought (Angela Carter)

Liberating Words and Images

- If we understand the need for culture to be useful for us (rather than merely decorative and entertaining), then we understand why writers like Rushdie and Saviano are perceived as being so threatening. They liberate words and images that might enable people to change the world. If the postcolonial is not simply a chronological descriptor (after the colonies) but an epistemological frame, then thinking postcolonial-ly may bring to develop theoretical concepts to communicate the complex relation between *nature and culture* and to account for representations of the world that negotiate between essentialism/fundamentalism (belief in natural origin) and nominalism/constructivism (belief in relative discursive practices). It is in tune with the project inaugurated by feminist studies of gender.

Naturculture

- Feminist theorist Donna Haraway has coined the term *naturculture*, a single word to emphasize the necessary relation and impossible separation between the two: I cannot possibly conceive nature other than within my own cultural paradigm; my understanding of the world I inhabit is cultural; my definition of nature is culturally determined.

Ethnicity and Gender

- With reference to racial and sexual differences, we use the terms *ethnicity*, related—*not* equal—to *race*, and *gender*, related—*not* equal—to *sex*. *Ethnicity* indicates race and culture (Stuart Hall and Werner Sollors): biological features joined with national, religious, ideological affiliations. *Gender* refers to the business facts of sex (Myra Jehlen): the significance and currency in culture and society of sexual difference.

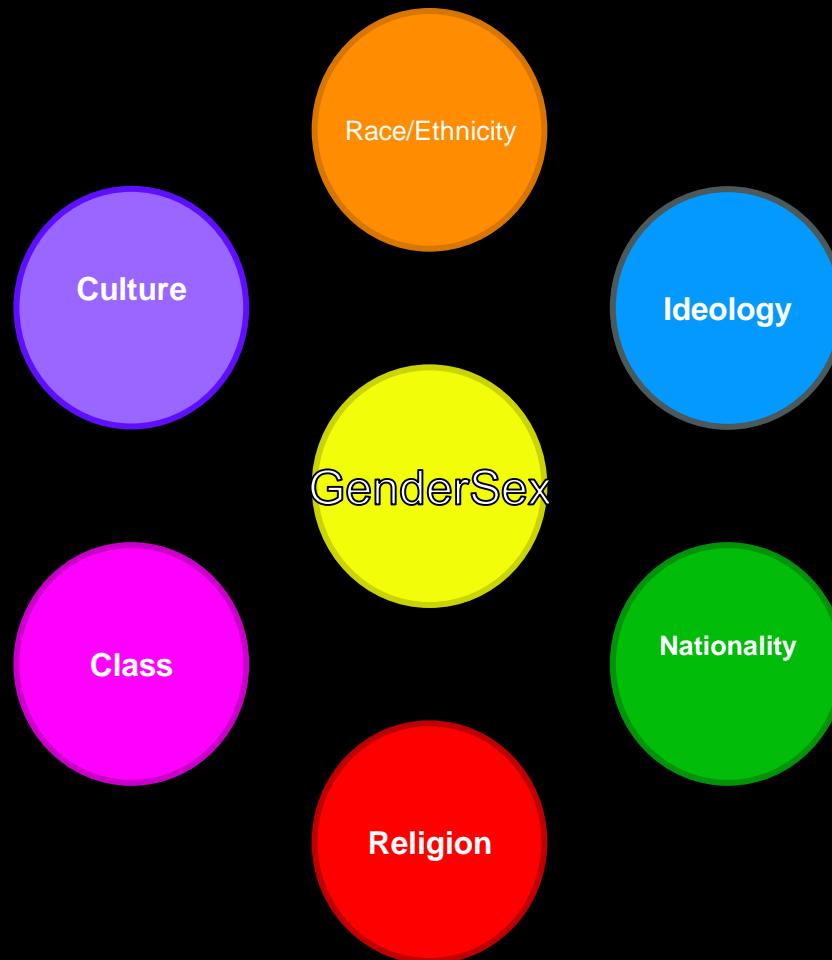
The Risk of Aseptic Concepts

- After the colonial and nazi-fascist abuses of *race*, and the patriarchal abuses of *sex*, the articulation of racial and sexual identities has emphasized cultural construction over biological origin, and critical discourse has privileged the examination of ethnic and gender difference. However, critical theories of race and of sexuality warn us against facile simplifications that tend to reduce *naturculture* to culture only, leaving race and sex in the shade of ethnicity and gender. The task is to retain the complexities, tensions, and unrepresentability of sex and race as we struggle to account for gender and ethnicity.

Give Back the Body

- Divorcing Gender and Ethnicity from the unsayable of the biological risks leaving in the dark the lived lives that feed racisms and sexism. It risks leaving anti-racist and anti-sexist thinking without the words and the images to think them through—without the cultural means to counter racist and sexist violence.
- Discourse must play in the dark (Toni Morrison)—re-memory, give back a body to the dis-membered, the forgotten, erased and censored by centuries of discrimination and exclusion.
- Race and sex must remain visibly present *within* ethnicity and gender, so that thought inhabits the encounter, the cross-roads, the borderland where no essentialist identity, no “pure race” (nor pure ethnicity) and no pure masculinity or femininity (nor dual gender) may exist.

GenderSex Difference & INTERSECTIONALITY



Teresa de Lauretis, Excentric Subjects (1999)

- Between gender and the body ... there is no simple and linear cause-and-effect or origin and telos relationship, but rather a network of passages, translations, nuances and mutual influences.

Teresa de Lauretis,
Technologies of Gender (1987)

- The female subject of feminism is one constructed across a multiplicity of discourses, positions, and meanings, which are often in conflict with one another and inherently (historically) contradictory
- she identifies a gendered subject position within the sex/gender system

Audre Lorde, *Zami* 1982

- Being women together was not enough. We were different. Being gay-girls together was not enough. We were different. Being Black together was not enough. We were different. Being Black women together was not enough. We were different. Being Black dykes together was not enough. We were different ... it was a while before we came to realize that our place was the very house of difference rather than the security of any one particular difference

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Rosi Braidotti, *In metamorfosi* (2004)

Uno degli effetti più significativi della tarda postmodernità in Europa è il fenomeno della transculturalità o dello scontro di culture nello spazio sociale plurietnico o multiculturale europeo... I paradossi, le dissimmetrie di potere e le frammentazioni del contenuto storico attuale richiedono ... che spostiamo il dibattito politico dalla questione delle differenze fra culture a quella delle differenze all'interno di una stessa cultura. (...)

Il soggetto del femminismo è ... sessuato; lui o lei è motivato/a dalla coscienza politica delle disuguaglianze ed è impegnato/a a sostenere la diversità e la differenza come valori positivi e alternativi

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Gayatri C. Spivak, *In Other Worlds* (1987)

By focusing my attention on feminist marginality, I am not trying to conquer the center, but to reach for the irreducibility of the margin in all its aspects

Luce Irigaray, *Etique de la différence sexuelle* (1985)

- sexual difference represents one of the problems, rather the problem about which our age must think
- everything must be reinterpreted: relationships between subject and discourse, subject and the world, subject and cosmos, micro- and macrocosmos. Everything. Beginning with the subject that has always been written as masculine, although it pretended to be universal and neutral: Man. Man is not neutral but sexed...

Luce Irigaray

- Any epochal change requires a change in the perception of space and time, how we live in places and how we shape identities
- desire occupies the space of the gap. If you give desire a permanent definition, you suppress it as desire. Desire requires an attraction; the shifting of subject and object in their relation of proximity or distance. Any epochal change requires a change in the economics of desire. A new epoch means a different relation between:
 - man and god
 - man and man
 - man and the world
 - man and woman

Luce Irigaray

- We must interrogate our history through and through to understand why sexual difference has played no part in it—neither empirical nor transcendental. Why has it missed its ethics, its aesthetics, its logic, its religion, the micro- and macrocosmic realization of its own destiny.
- A reason is certainly to be found in the dissociation of body and soul, sexuality and spirituality. Everything has been conceived in order to keep them separate, even opposite, to prevent them from being united.
- For the ethics of sexual difference to be possible, a place for the dwelling of each sex, each body, each flesh must be constructed.
- This requires a memory of the past and a hope for the future.

Luce Irigaray

- A SINGLE CREATION?
- Sexual difference has always served procreation, never the creation of culture.
- This has produced a pathological subjectivity, places on either end of sexual difference
- Language regarded as an ideal situated outside the body that produces it

Donna Haraway, A Manifesto for Cyborgs (1990)

- So my cyborg myth is about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities which progressive people might explore as one part of needed political work.
- **FRACTURED IDENTITIES**

Donna Haraway

- There is not even such a state as 'being' female, itself a highly complex category constructed in contested sexual scientific discourses and other social practices. Gender, race, or class consciousness is an achievement forced on us by the terrible historical experience of the contradictory social realities of patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism.

Donna Haraway

- I do not know of any other time in history when there was greater need for political unity to confront effectively the dominations of 'race', 'gender', 'sexuality', and 'class'. .. White women discovered the non-innocence of the category 'woman'. Cyborg feminists have to argue that 'we' do not want any more natural matrix of unity and that no construction is whole.

Donna Haraway

- Monsters have always defined the limits of community in Western imaginations. The Centaurs and Amazons of ancient Greece established the limits of the centred polls of the Greek male human by their disruption of marriage and boundary pollutions of the warrior with animality and woman.

Donna Haraway

- Cyborg monsters in feminist science fiction define quite different political possibilities and limits from those proposed by the mundane fiction of Man and Woman

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**Susan Moller Okin, Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?
(1997)**

- What should be done when the claims of minority cultures or religions clash with the norm of gender equality that is at least formally endorsed by liberal states (however much they continue to violate it in their practice)?

Susan Moller Okin

- FRANCE 1980s:
- Traditional Muslim headscarves: feminists and far-right nationalists against the practice vs multiculturalists demanding respect for diversity
- Silence about polygamy (an estimated 200,000 families in Paris are now polygamous)

Susan Moller Okin

- a deep and growing tension between feminism and multiculturalist concerns to protect cultural diversity
- We have been too quick to assume that feminism and multiculturalism are both good things which are easily reconciled
- Women's rights and cultural group rights

Susan Moller Okin

But *cultural groups are always gendered*:

- the sphere of personal, sexual, and reproductive life provides a central focus of most cultures; home is where much of culture is practiced, preserved, and transmitted to the young
- most cultures have as one of their principal aims the control of women by men

Susan Moller Okin

- Those who practice some of the most controversial such customs--
clitoridectomy, the marriage of children or marriages that are otherwise coerced, or polygamy--sometimes explicitly defend them as necessary for controlling women, the servitude of women is presented as virtually synonymous with "our traditions."
- Most culture clashes are gender related

Susan Moller Okin

- Western majority cultures, largely at the urging of feminists, have recently made substantial efforts to avoid or limit excuses for brutalizing women.
- none of the defenders of multicultural group rights has adequately addressed the troubling connections between gender and culture, or the conflicts between multiculturalism and feminism.

Susan Moller Okin

- a consistently liberal justification for group rights fails to account for the fact that, especially in the private sphere, many cultures fail to respect the basic civil and political liberties of women and girls
- Those who defend group rights on liberal
- grounds need to address private, culturally reinforced kinds of discrimination; inequalities between the sexes is likely to be less public and discernible.

Susan Moller Okin

- Unless women—and, more specifically, young women, since older women often become co-opted into reinforcing gender inequality—are fully represented in negotiations about group rights, their interests may be harmed rather than promoted by the granting of such rights

COMPLEXITY

- Watch/read in the following images of faces and bodies:
- What concepts do you apply to your reading of these images?
- What colonial, postcolonial, global, racial, gender politics is at stake in the construction and deconstruction of these images?

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MY
CARD



MY
LIFE



MY CARD MY LIFE BEHIND THE SCENES



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THE IMAGES

- Images 1 & 2: Florence Nightingale and Mary Seacole, both heroic nurses on the war camps in Europe in the 19th century. The historical silence about Seacole as opposed to the glorification of Nightingale is linked to their racial and national difference: Seacole was a Jamaican nurse of African and Scottish descent—her face/body did not easily find a place in the existing representation of the human and the feminine.
- Image 3: American Express Card “RED” 2006 campaign to fight AIDS in Africa uses colonial racial and gendered images
- Image 4: A Black Woman and a White Man: Rosa Parks, a symbol of the Black Liberation Movement in the 1960s USA, defying racial segregation during the sit-in on the bus in Alabama.

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JUDITH BUTLER, *Prekarious Life* 2004

- If the humanities has a future as cultural criticism, and cultural criticism has a task at the present moment, it is no doubt to return us to the human where we do not expect to find it, in its frailty and at the limits of its capacity to make sense. We would have to interrogate the emergence and vanishing of the human at the limits of what we can know, what we can hear, what we can see, what we can sense.

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JUDITH BUTLER, *Precarious Life* 2004

- This might prompt us, affectively, to reinvigorate the intellectual projects of critique, of questioning, of coming to understand the difficulties and demands of cultural translation and dissent, and to create a sense of the public in which oppositional voices are not feared, degraded or dismissed, but valued for the instigation to a sensate democracy they occasionally perform.

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JUDITH BUTLER, *Undoing Gender* 2004

- Sometimes a normative conception of gender can undo one's personhood, undermining the capacity to persevere a livable life. Other times, the experience of a normative restriction becoming undone can undo a prior conception of who one is only to inaugurate a relatively newer one that has greater livability in its aim.

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JUDITH BUTLER, *Undoing Gender* 2004

- If gender is a kind of a doing, an incessant activity performed ... not for that reason automatic or mechanical ... one does not “do” one’s gender alone. One is always “doing” with or for another, even if the other is only imaginary

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JUDITH BUTLER, *Undoing Gender* 2004

- Irigaray poses the question of sexual difference as a question of modernity—not to argue for or against sexual difference but rather to question that sexual difference *is*; its presence remains unsettled and unresolved
- The notion of the subject is no longer given; it has become rather an object of theoretical attention, something for which we are compelled to give an account

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JUDITH BUTLER, *Undoing Gender* 2004

- The status of terms such as *gender*, *sexuality*, *sexual orientation*, *sexual difference* in contemporary political discourse is confusing because of the permanent difficulty of determining where the biological, the psychic, the discursive, the social begin and end.
- Is what we mean by gender that part of sexual difference that does appear as the social, as the negotiable, as the constructed—precisely what the Vatican seeks to restore to “sex”—to the site of the natural, where the natural itself is figured as fixed and non-negotiable?

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JUDITH BUTLER, *Undoing Gender* 2004

- In my view, performativity is not just about speech acts. It is also about bodily acts. The relation between the two is complicated and I called it a chiasmus in *Bodies that Matter*. There is always a dimension of bodily life that cannot be fully represented, even as it works as the condition and activating condition of language.

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JUDITH BUTLER, *Undoing Gender* 2004

- The most important task is to think through the debates on the body, since it may or may not be true that cultural construction effaces both sexual difference and bodily process
- If technologies of the body generate new forms of gender, is this precisely in the service of inhabiting a body more fully or doesw it constitute a perilious effacement?

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JUDITH BUTLER, *Undoing Gender* 2004

- It seems crucial to keep these questions open so that we might work theoretically and politically in broad coalitions. The lines we draw are invitations to cross over and that crossing over, as any nomadic subject knows, constitutes who we are.

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JUDITH BUTLER, *Undoing Gender* 2004

- Butler's book concludes with a discussion on whether feminist theory is philosophy, titled "Can the 'Other' of Philosophy Speak?"
- Feminist theory is philosophy pursued in an interdisciplinary way, engaging unexpected conversations across knowledges

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BUTLER vs. ZIZEK: The Human in Post-Humanism

- The question of alternative visions of universality, Butler claims, should be tackled by establishing practices of translation among competing notions of universality
- How can we disassociate the truth from the rhetoricity that makes it possible, from the rhetoric that builds the truth? We depend on language, Butler claims, to understand what is true. She embraces a sort of affirmative deconstruction (Derrida, Spivak, Agamben) and asks: what can the human be within post-humanism? We must keep asking the question of truth, although the truth depends on the question by which it appears. Language is not an empty vessel, rather it is the means that contaminates the appearance of truth.

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BUTLER vs. ZIZEK: The Human in Post-Humanism

- The assertion of universality by those who have conventionally been excluded by the norm of the universal often produces performative contradictions. Butler claims that the universal has not yet been articulated in order to insist that the “not yet” is proper to an understanding of the universal itself. Universality is not speakable outside a given cultural language; yet although we cannot escape our language, we must push its limits.