Judith Butler (b. 1955)

*Gender Trouble and the Subversion of Identity (1989)*
*Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex (1993)*

Dr Lilian Alweiss
Simone de Beauvoir (1908-86)

• 'to be a woman is to become a woman’
Sex versus Gender

- Sex innate – necessity
- Gender artificial – femininity masculinity possibility
- Gender is liberating socially and politically –
- Anatomy is *not* Destiny
Is Sex Natural?

- sex is produced or the effect of the apparatus of cultural construction designated by gender. I.e. gender makes sexual difference visible not sex.
- Beauvoir: citing Merleau Ponty: It is only through existence that the facts are manifested
- Gender itself can change our notion of sex. by liberating gender from sex we also come to liberate sex from its own dimorphic rigidity.
Problem with the Sex Gender Distinction

- Gender works on a heterosexual matrix - There are only two genders one being feminine the other being male.
- Freud: our sexual identity becomes determined through the Oedipus complex
Michel Foucault (1926-84)

• Herculine Barbine – Hermaphrodite
• In the Middle Ages – identity floating “she herself is without a definite sex in the happy limbo of a non-identity”
• Juridical conceptions of the individual led to the rejection of mixture and consequently limited the free choice of indeterminate individuals. It is by law that you have to be either male or female.
• the category of sex is constructed in the service of a system of regulatory and reproductive sexuality (Freud)
Is there anything natural

• Hermaphrodites do not point to a state of nature rather depicts how our sexual identity has been constructed through discursive practices.

• Power does not only restrict and repress, far beyond this limited juridical notion of power power creates, generates and produces that which it comes to repress. (Foucault)

• The category of sex does not exist a priori, before all society
• It is a political category serving procreation
• For the is no sex. There is but sex that is oppressed and sex that oppresses. It is oppression that creates sex and not the contrary
• The belief that sex is natural allows us to believe that injustice itself is natural
"There are no two genders, there is only one: the feminine, the masculine not being a gender"

Being sexed according to Wittig is already a moment of inferiority, the male is universal he needs no sexual attributes eg universal He in writing

Only escape not to be defined by men – i.e. to become lesbian: . The lesbian will be to some extent the third gender she has to be something else, a not-woman, a not-man

A lesbian is not a woman. A woman, she argues only exists as a term that stabilizes and consolidates a binary and oppositional relation to a man. (Butler 114)
Problem with Wittig

• As radically outside the heterosexual matrix homosexuality is conceived as radically unconditioned by heterosexual norms. She is an idealist.

• But there is no outside. Whereas Wittig clearly envisions lesbianism to be a full scale refusal of heterosexuality I would argue that even that refusal constitutes an engagement and ultimately a radical dependence on the very terms that lesbians purport to transcend.

• the lesbian strategy would consolidate compulsory heterosexuality in its oppressive form.
Gender as Performance

- 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...that ‘there is no ‘being’ behind doing, effecting, becoming; ‘the doer’ is merely a fiction added to the deed – the deed is everything.’ 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” (Gender Trouble 1999: 33).
Drag Queens

• Subversive
• Parody reveals the inner truth of gender
• The drag queen is not a woman but becomes one and remains one only as long as s/he performs
• This is how all gender works – it is a performative
• The self comes about through the performance itself
Some Reading

• The Sex/Gender Distinction discussed by Butler and mentioned in the lecture
• * Judith Butler: 'Sex and Gender in Beauvoir's Second Sex' in Yale French Studies, No. 72, Winter 1986 (in offprints.
• * Monique Wittig: 'The Mark of Gender' in Feminist Issues, Vol. 5, No. 2, Fall 1985
• * Monique Wittig: 'The Point of View: Universal and Particular?' in Feminist Issues, Vol,3, No. 2, Fall 1983, p. 64. (in offprints)

• Gender as Performance
• * Michel Foucault: The History of Sexuality esp Vol 1.