

BODIES

Introductions to Queer Theory

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Video still (Engel/Filmfetch 2021)

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<https://e.feu.de/queer-theory-videos>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V5Ago3RloT8&t=1s>

BODIES – Introductions to Queer Theory

Voiceover

Queer theory sees bodies as products of power. Heteronormativity is power which turns identity and binarity into norms. Bodies are shaped. Desire is channelled. But the power of desire also brings forth the critique of power.

Scene 1: Heteronormativity

u-m/m-u

Queer theory emerges as a critical perspective on society. And as a self-critical perspective on lesbian and gay identity politics.

// FN: de Lauretis 1991

u-m/m-u

For this critical purpose, queer theory coined the term “heteronormativity”. In heteronormative societies, heterosexuality and the gender binary are regarded as natural and self-evident. They are normality.

// FN: Warner 1993; Wagenknecht 2007; Çetin 2012

(ROUND BRACKET)

The ideal, rather than the compulsion.

The norm which we internalise, with which we identify.

// FN: Hark 1996

u-m/m-u

The norm of heterosexuality needs clearly recognisable, stable genders. This means that it is allied with the two-gender norm, which only knows either male or female.

// FN: Butler 1991; Klöppel 2002; Eugenides 2004

(ROUND BRACKET)

But “homosexuality” also only recognises two genders!

When we say that someone is “gay” or “a lesbian”, we think we know which genders are attracted to which.

Scene 2: doing gender, doing sex

ki-wi

What's required — in sex and in our everyday lives — are recognisable bodies: bodies, identities and gender expressions are supposed to complement each other perfectly.

[SQUARE BRACKET]

This demand for a perfect fit is also called “the norm of coherence”.

// FN: Butler 1991

AB*

Here QT learns from the feminist concept of “doing gender” : Gender emerges in social interactions. Self images and expectations are cemented through repetition.

//FN: West/Zimmermann 1997

[SQUARE BRACKET]

The norm becomes reality performatively. We follow interpellations.

//FN: Butler 1995; 2001

u-m/m-u

Feminism had originally only applied “doing gender” to social gender, as opposed to sex. Queer theory recognises that even bodies are not defined by nature. Sex also develops socially. Doing gender is also doing sex.

Ki-wi, AB* and u-m/m-u look at the right-hand wall, where the CURLY BRACKET appears.

{CURLY BRACKET}

And both involve doing diversity. For example, gender is always embodied with a skin colour. And that brings both racism and class history with it.

//FN: Perko/Czollek 2004; Feinberg 2013; Khan-Cullers 2018

ki-wi

Imagine that your body is born here, like this, and received into a particular society. Your body can do particular things, it has to fulfil certain expectations, it is able or allowed to eat certain fruits but not others, to wear certain clothes, it is gendered in a certain way, sexualised in a certain way, abled or differently abled.

//FN: Raab 2013; McRuer 2006, Gregor 2015

u-m/m-u

This takes place through seduction or compulsion, promise or threat. That is the power of gender norms. Identity is required. Not doubts. But still, Gender Trouble comes along. And discomfort.

//FN: Butler 1991

AB*

We are not only subject to interpellations. We also answer them. And not always according to the rules.

//FN: Butler 2009

Scene 3: Gender Vertigo

//FN: Connell 2015

Spoken Word Performance (Jayrôme Robinet)

*One way streets
No through way
Stop —*

Gender is controlled like traffic

Accidents are pre-programmed.

Anyone who drives through a red light — e.g. anyone who wears lipstick when it's not allowed for this body — is punished, ridiculed, bullied, or killed.

Gender vertigo sets in.

Anyone who can't or won't keep to the rules: they get dizzy. And the ground disappears from beneath their feet.

Still, we feel like being a cheater, an imposter, like sham.

But I can turn that gender vertigo into something positive.

Dissidence.

Sexual and gender dissidence.

Taking pride in dissidence

Gender vertigo.

Scene 4: Queer as a critique of identity

u-m/m-u

Queer politics are different from identity politics or minority politics. It's not about recognition or integration, but about calling the norms into question. The violence of normality is revealed. The majority are shown to be the problem.

//FN: Jagose 2005; Haberler et al. 2012; Mesquita 2011

[SQUARE BRACKET]

A political answer to the state discrimination of gay people in the context of the AIDS crisis in the 1980s and 90s.

//FN: Schulman 1994; 1997; Brunnett/Jagow 2001

AB*

Identity is a problem in itself: there are no identities without drawing boundaries.

AB*

Identity leads to inclusions and exclusions. It invites stereotypical images. And when the boundaries have been drawn, identities can also be placed in a hierarchy. At least if they are stable.

//FN: Probyn 1995, Hark 1999, Jagose 2005

ki-wi

But has anyone ever seen a stable identity? They're always multi-dimensional and changeable! For example, the term "woman" is subject to historical change and refers to so many different identities across the world!

//FN: Anzaldúa 2007; Czollek 2004

Scene 5: intersectional-queer

u-m/m-u

Gender and sexuality never appear out of context. Age, social background and religion all have an influence. The cultural image of disability makes bodies seem sexless.

[SQUARE BRACKET/LIPS]

And racism projects hypersexuality onto some people and chastity onto others.

AB*

Many markers of difference come together to create an impression of normality. A deviation at one point or another can make the whole structure start to unravel.

ki-wi

Intersectional differences are reminiscent of street traffic. Those taking part are not all equally strong, or equally in danger; they have unequal resources: which mode of transport, which level of health, which level of wealth?

u-m/m-u

Dynamic processes of power. Cemented systems of domination: Racism, sexism, capitalism, eugenics. Queer intersectionality theory explores heteronormativity in the interplay between these forms of power.

//FN: Gutiérrez Rodriguez 2011

ki-wi

That means: black lesbians are subject to different rules than white sex-workers. And which rules apply to a black lesbian sex-worker?

AB, kiwi, u-m/m-u look at the righthand wall, where the CURLY BRACKET appears.

{CURLY BRACKET}

And why do most people only know the capitalist success story of the hula hoop, but not the indigenous tradition of the hoop dance? Cultural appropriation?

//FN: <https://nativeamericanhoopdance.blogspot.com/>

ki-wi

We need to pay attention to power differences! The “i for indigenous” should not be forgotten or thoughtlessly added to a row of letters, and nor should the “i for intersex”!

Scene 6: inter*/trans*/queer*

AB*

But should the list keep getting longer: QTINBIPoC?

//FN: Queer_Trans_Inter_Nonbinary_Black_Indigenous_Person-of-Color

ki-wi

Couldn't Q express all of this diversity?*

*The *asterisk signals: this is something ambiguous and constructed!*

[SQUARE BRACKET/LIPS]

After trans, inter*, man*, but also after white* or state*!*

u-m/m-u

Queer politics accepts the dilemma of identity politics: it wants to name discrimination, but not codify identities.

AB*

In trans and inter* activism there is both: The fight for self-determination, for rights and the recognition of past injuries. But also the endeavour to live gender as fluid and to create nonbinary spaces.*

//FN: Hechler 2016; Baumgartinger 2017

ki-wi

And the wish to take the cis-unambiguousness from the categories of male and female. When I say "female", it is not clear whether I'm referring to a trans, inter* or cis* person!*

//FN: cis = o.k. with the gender assigned at birth

AB, kiwi, u-m/m-u look at the righthand wall, where the CURLY BRACKET appears.

{CURLY BRACKET}

So much ambiguity! Can we desire ambiguity?

Scene 7: Desire

ki-wi

The western world has long defined desire by its object. The object, which is imagined as passive, gives the so-called "subject of desire" an "active" status. But since feminism and the gay/lesbian movement have questioned the devaluation of femininity and passivity, this heterosexual perspective has become more difficult to uphold.

//FN: Grosz 1994; hooks 1994; Adamczak 2016

AB*

Bisexual desire also disrupts the scheme. Is that why bisexuality meets with even more hostility than homosexuality?

//FN: Fritsche 2007

{CURLY BRACKET}

*Are you hoping that bisexuality is just a phase?
Are you a phase tester?*

ki-wi

When trans, inter* or a*sexual people are involved, desire cannot be labelled as hetero-, homo- or bi. Is a lesbian who desires a trans man heterosexual?*

//FN: Profus 2016

{the left CURLY BRACKET}

Are you trans or gay?*

{the right CURLY BRACKET}

And you, would you rather go by train or to Barcelona?

AB*

Queer theory departs from the subject-desires-object scheme. Instead, desire is a movement which draws unexpected lines of connection.

//FN: Probyn 1995

ki-wi

In complex scenarios of desire, norms buzz around everywhere, cultural images, old rituals and stories of violence. But so do our own wayward ideas, resistance, experiments, and secrets. Reality is fantasy and fantasy inspires realities.

//FN: Lauretis 1995 (orig. script; *Fantasy is reality and reality inspires fantasies.*)

AB*

Starting from the scenario, desire orientates itself in one direction or in many. These orientations reinforce or change the scenario.

//FN: Ahmed 2006

Scene 8: Bodies and sexuality

ki-wi

Instead of the usual sex organs, anything can be eroticised. Feminism already knew that the penis/phallus is not the centre of desire!

//FN: Tuider 2013

{CURLY BRACKET}

Hands, legs, the anus, the ears – all of these are sex organs. Can we please forget the gender binary when we think about sex?!

AB*

All sorts of objects can also be added to the body. Not just sex toys. Mobile phones, wheelchairs and syringes can all be part of sexual lust or reproductive procreation.

[SQUARE BRACKET/LIPS]

Contra-sexual : contrary to masculine/feminine, hetero/homo, natural/artificial.

//FN: Preciado 2003

u-m/m-u

So my body is important. What I feel, how I feel, how I express myself.

//FN: Gregor 2015

{CURLY BRACKET}

Which body? I have several. I have a body which digests, a body with a migraine, a Parisian body (excited, exhausted), a countryside body (rested, heavy). An orthodox body.

//FN: Barthes 2010

ki-wi

And why do we think it's natural to divide the body into two, and only two genders?

[SQUARE BRACKET/LIPS]

Even if there really were only two genders, each one would be simultaneously a hormonal gender and a gonadal gender, as well as a genital, chromosomal, social and psychological gender. How can that ever become homogenous?

//FN: Schmitz 2006

AB*

But claiming that diversity is natural can easily mean overlooking the fact that nature is always experienced through culture. There is no natural body. Any body is culturally formed. Gender is not sex&gender, but sex_gender.

//FN: Palm 2005 (orig. script: *There is no natural body which is then shaped by culture retrospectively.*)

ki-wi

That means: no body is queer from the start. It is just a body. A body is always bodily subjectivity and bodily sociality – socially formed and divided and at the same time unique.

{CURLY BRACKETS}

Hairy legs! Why should they only be a feminist statement for cis women? Who is allowed to have hairy legs: cis men, cis women, trans men, trans women? Me!*

AB*

So there are queer bodies. Not by nature, but because they become queer under particular circumstances.

ki-wi

Under circumstances of power and domination!

u-m/m-u

So I wonder: do I experience the queerness which emerges as discriminating and hurtful? Or as joyful and empowering? Or both?

Voiceover

Pleasure in complexity, confusion and conflict – that's queer.

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