butler: on sex, gender, desire

this chapter of butler's book talks about the foundations of gender and identity. their arguments, while rather hard to read, can be summarized into a few key arguments.

their main critique, from how i read the text, is the idea that societal norms, labels, and regulatory practices shape our identities (subconsciously?). these societal forces influence not only how we see ourselves, but also how we are perceived and treated by others. they later goes on to challenge the notion of a stable and coherent identity even existing within the self

to extend on the previous point, they claim the binary categories of gender are not only insufficient, but also flawed. they suggests that our understanding of gender is constrained by the societal norms and expectations, which fail to capture the fluidity and diversity of individual experiences. this critique calls into question the very labels we use to define ourselves and others, urging a reevaluation of how identity is categorized and understood.

butler also discusses how power relations affect dialogue and communication. they point out that not all voices are given equal weight in conversations, highlighting the difference in who gets to speak and who is listened to. this analysis reveals the complexities of communication, showing how societal structures can silence or marginalize those whose experiences deviate from the norm.

to summarize, they don't really believe there is a common set of characteristics which we can use to define what a woman is; but they do very much believe in the oppression of this group. while it may sound contradictory, that's actually a good thing! it suggests that the framework for which we're working is only a construct, and we can thus work on improving things from both ends: the political oppresion, and the self-evaluation of who/what we/women are.

identity

as butler mentiones throughout the article, there is a need for re-evaluating the identity of one's gender, but they don't dig into exactly what a better framework would be.

i believe the first thing we should look at when attempting to define something is to break it apart, and look at individual atomic (unsplittable) attributes the components of the whole. as we've discussed in this and previous articles, the term "woman" is loaded with many ideas, and this inevitably shadows what we're actually talking about.

looking at universal laws, and comparing individuals by their relative oppression/privilege ratio to their peers seems to be more useful than attempting to discuss denotations. whether "woman" exists or not is not really important in politics if we get rid of the disparity between all individuals.

certainly, clustering groups together may be useful, to discuss different groups; but it makes more sense to speak about "people who are expected to stay home" and "people who are victims of rape" than to just say "the struggles of women". what i mean by this is that it's easier to address problems once they're tangible.

of course, there are natural causes which cause some of these problems to occur: people with autism have a harder time communicating with neurotypical people (but not between their neuro-peers, interestingly enough!), and looking at the causation of these things is certainly a topic of research and debate; but understanding why something happens and finding ammeliorations for it are two very different things (albeit often connected!)