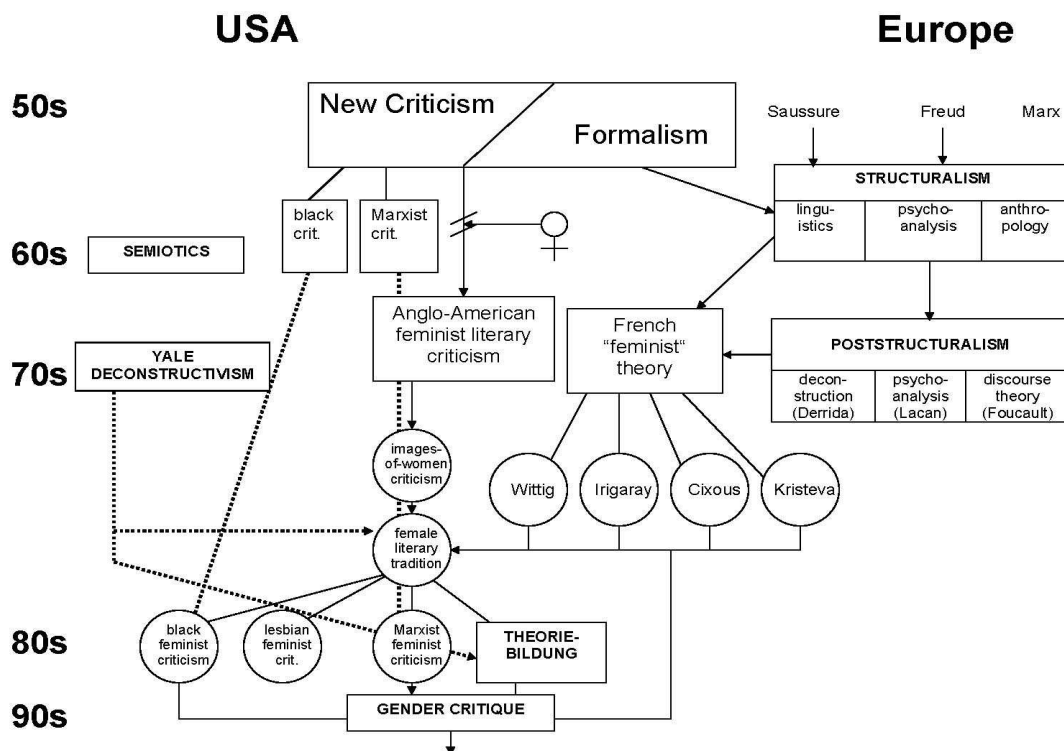


“Gender Studies – Where Are We Going, Where Have We Been?”

Lecture Series *genderproject* – Universität Gießen – 7 June 2011

THIS IS ONE WAY TO RELATE THE STORY



How the Term Gender Transformed ...

- from a classificatory distinction in grammar and biology →
- into a privileged perspective of feminist criticism and women studies: gender as sexual and social difference, often used as if being identical with women, sexual difference, or sex roles; focus on the analysis of a female (literary) history, aesthetics, women’s writing etc.; this approach risks to reinscribe and reaffirm gender differences →
- into a category of analysis in gender studies: redefinition of gender as a socio-cultural construction, as a discourse that produces images|conceptions|fictions of femininity and masculinity; as a cultural (as opposed to natural) term; as relational category which can be circumscribed as gender identities and gender relations; gender analyses consequently focus on the cultural construction of gender differences (of womanhood and femininity as well as masculinities) and the ways in which these constructions relate to status, cultural values, and power and assign subjects different positions within social, political, and economic systems (process of engendering) →
- into a concept under de-/reconstruction; deconstructing the dichotomy between sex and gender, Judith Butler insist that both nature and culture can be known as representations only.

... AND THIS IS ANOTHER ...

Gender matters – and by that I mean gender studies as well as gender politics and, yes, feminism – have been dominated by serial processes of repetition with variation or “insistence” (Gertrude Stein), “repetition and difference” (Gilles Deleuze), by memory and forgetting, that is by processes which work not so much by way of linear progression, but on the basis of emergence and recursion. The seriality with which we keep addressing almost the same, yet not quite the same gender matters over and over again is one reason why, doing gender studies today, we cannot help but readdress feminist issues. To put it simply (and more polemically): the future of gender studies is (a variation of) feminism.

Citations

"[...] gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather it is tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts" (Butler, "Performative Acts" 270).

"As a public action and performative act, gender is not a radical choice or project that reflects a merely individual choice, but neither is it imposed or inscribed upon the individual, as some post-structuralist displacements of the subject would contend. The body is not passively scripted with cultural codes, as if it were a lifeless recipient of wholly pre-given cultural conventions which essentially signify bodies. But neither do embodied selves pre-exist the cultural conventions which essentially signify the body. Actors are always already on the stage, within the terms of the performance" (Butler, "Performative Acts" 277).

- gender parody (e. g. *drag performances*) as subversive act, aiming at the deconstruction of gender binarisms; performance of multiple forms of gender and sexuality; term: third sex; queer studies

"*In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency.* [...] gender parody reveals that the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without an origin. To be more precise, it is a production which, in effect – that is, in its effect – postures as an imitation. This perpetual displacement constitutes a fluidity of identities that suggests an openness to resignation and recontextualization; parodic proliferation deprives hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim to naturalized or essentialist gender identities" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 137-38).

Joyce Carroll Oates, "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" (1966)

"Arnold Friend said, in a gentle-loud voice that was like a stage voice, 'The place where you came from ain't there any more, and where you had in mind to go is cancelled out. This place you are now—inside your daddy's house—is nothing but a cardboard box I can knock down any time. You know that and always did know it. You hear me?' She thought, I have got to think. I have got to know what to do. 'We'll go out to a nice field, out in the country here where it smells so nice and it's sunny,' Arnold Friend said. 'I'll have my arms tight around you so you won't need to try to get away and I'll show you what love is like, what it does. The hell with this house! It looks solid all right,' he said. [...]
She watched herself push the door slowly open as if she were back safe somewhere in the other doorway, watching this body and this head of long hair moving out into the sunlight where Arnold Friend waited. 'My sweet little blue-eyed girl,' he said in a half-sung sigh that had nothing to do with her brown eyes but was taken up just the same by the vast sunlit reaches of the land behind him and on all sides of him—so much land that Connie had never seen before and did not recognize except to know that she was going to it."

Raymond Carver, "Tell the Women We're Going" (1977)

[Bill] looked and saw the girls. He saw them crouches behind an outcrop. Maybe they were smiling. Bill took out a cigarette. But he could not get it lit. Then Jerry showed up. It did not matter after that. Bill had just wanted to fuck. Or even see them naked. On the other hand, it was okay with him if it didn't work out.

He never knew what Jerry wanted. But it started and ended with a rock. Jerry used the same rock on both girls, first on the girl called Sharon and then on the one that was supposed to be Bill's.

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