

Class 5

I have very strong memories of my days in Gender Theory class, back when I was an undergraduate. I remember feeling very turned off and alienated from the academic verbiage. I failed to understand why it was necessary to publish in such exclusionary and enigmatic language.

I hoped that with ten years of distance and experience, revisiting these texts would provide some clarity into their complexity.

Focault

Pages 17-49

In the Middle Ages, the discussion of sexuality was frank. People went to the confessional and the priests asked for very specific details of the churchgoers' sins. It perhaps was a way to more specifically hand out atonement. They had to "own their sin" in order to confess it. In the 16th century, there was a cultural shift, and talking about sex and sexuality became verboten.

This changed a bit in the 1800's because of the advent of psychology. Psychologists zoomed in close and broke sexuality into categories and labels. Sexuality was not examined holistically. The church and state used discourse around sex to maintain power over their people. They made it forbidden, but discussed it enough to make it desired. By forbidding particular sex acts, institutions were able to manipulate and control people. For example, in (same-sex) boarding schools, there were specific rules about the interaction of its students, such as placing boards between beds, having monitors walk the halls, and keeping the lights on. Starting around 1900, if someone had same sex desire, it wasn't a spiritual issue, but rather a medical/psychological one.

Academic Language

The class had a lengthy conversation about the word "discourse." What exactly does it mean? We defined it as a framework that society/culture uses to talk about an issue. It's a set of perspectives.

When scholars look at writing like this, they aren't immediately scared off by the difficult language; rather they see that the work is referencing certain texts and authors.

Derrick Bell Text

This began a lengthy discussion about the use of personal narrative as a valid scholarly tool. Scientists like to have a clear cut scientific grounding. This stands in contrast to feminism which states that the "personal is political" and places a positive value on personal experience.

W.E.B. DuBois wrote about a double consciousness. “It is a peculiar sensation, this *double consciousness*, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others...of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels the twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two *warring* ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.” (Page. 148).

Judith Butler

We only talked about Judith Butler’s work briefly. Her work begged such questions as “Is gender identity innate?” Do we perform gender?”

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ES.269 Passing: Flexibility in Race and Gender
Spring 2009

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