LANGUAGE, GENDER & SEXUALITY

Day 3: Performativity
July 13, 2017
TODAY: PERFORMATIVITY & QUEER CRITIQUES

- Performativity
  - Austin
  - Butler
- Questions about drag and subversion
  - Barrett
- Article report on Koller’s “Butch camp”
- Speer & Potter on Butler vs. discursive psychology in accounting for hate speech & heterosexist talk
- Don’t forget about reading responses! (need to be posted before class on the day the reading’s due)
- Note: Per our syllabus, this is the beginning of “week 2”, not the end
- Other note: if the noise happens again, we’ll move upstairs to 347
LINGUISTIC PERFORMATIVITY

• Performativity in the philosophy of language
  • JL Austin’s *How to Do Things with Words*

• A progression of ideas
  • Philosophers’ obsession with truth values
  • Constatives vs. performatives
    • Examples?
  • Truth values vs. felicity conditions
  • Austin’s catch: even constatives are performative
    • Some performatives are more explicit than others

• Speech act theory, practice theory
  • Culture-specificity (Rosaldo 1982, “The things we do with words”)
AN INFELICITOUS PERFORMATIVATIVE
SOCIAL PERFORMATIVITY

• Butler’s basic idea?
  • Gender (along with all other forms of subjectivity) is performative because it is brought into being through doing ← iterability

• Butler wasn’t the first to conceptualize gender as practice
  • West & Zimmerman’s “doing gender” vs. Butler’s performativity
  • Epistemological vs. signification-based models of identity

• Austin’s felicity conditions → Butler’s cultural intelligibility
  • “the resulting effect of a rule-bound discourse that inserts itself in the pervasive mundane signifying acts of linguistic life” (p. 184)

• The example of drag
  • Denaturalizing femininity by pairing it with a body understood to be male
  • In this way, drag reveals that all gender is performative
  • Performance vs. performativity
THE CRITIQUE OF FEMINISM

What is the problem with feminism, as Butler conceives it in “From parody to politics”?
PARIS IS BURNING & AGENCY

- Jennie Livingston’s 1991 documentary about drag balls in NYC, lauded as the ultimate example of gender subversion
- hooks’ argument:
  - What’s subversive in queer POC aspiring to “a sexist ideal of white womanhood”? 
  - I.e. drag is more hegemonic than it is subversive, does not reflect agency
- Butler’s response
  - If subjects are constituted by discourse, are they determined by it?
  - Can we have agency w/o a prediscursive self? Can subversion happen without agency?
    - Agency is not about internal states (i.e. intentionality) that precede action
    - Agentive change thru iterability & the possibility (necessity?) of change in reiteration
    - Subversion is that which exposes “the rift between the phantasmatic and the real whereby the real admits itself as phatasmatic” (p. 186)
    - Drag as an overtly “failed copy” that exposes the fact that the original is a failed copy too
      - (why poststructuralists don’t treat the body as natural object on which gender is inscribed)
  - Livia & Hall on internality, trans women vs. drag queens
PARIS IS BURNING

17:20-20:18
21:45-22:52
33:38-36:23
HOW IDENTITIES ARE PRODUCED

As sociocultural linguists, we might challenge the idea that *Paris is Burning* represents the “truth” of its subjects’ lives and desires. What kinds of factors might influence the kind of image participants in the film produced for themselves?
SOME DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

• Table 1: What is parody and what is its role in subversion? What makes drag parody, at least as Butler sees it?

• Table 2: What are the features of “white woman’s language”? Which of these are shared with Lakoff’s “women’s language”?

• Table 3: Based on Barrett’s argument, do drag queens of color want to be [straight, cis] white women? What evidence does he offer for/against this conclusion?

• Table 4: According to Barrett, are drag performances misogynistic or subversive?

• Table 5: What strategies do AADQs in Barrett’s study use to denaturalize gender?
“WHITE WOMEN’S LANGUAGE”

- Barrett’s “white woman’s language” mostly the same as Lakoff’s “women’s language”:
  - Gendered lexicon
  - Uptalk & tag questions
  - Hedges
  - Intensifiers like so
  - Hypercorrect grammar/phonology
  - Super politeness, euphemisms
  - Women don’t tell jokes
  - Speaking “in italics” (prosody?)

- Some overlap w/ gay men via indirect indexicality
  - Gay-specific lexicon like *fierce, flawless*
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Ladylike speech norms flouted

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SOME NOTES ABOUT TERMINOLOGY

• Did Barrett’s definitions match your understanding of those terms?
• How do they compare to the queens from Paris is Burning?
• (Strategic essentialism)
• Using intent to distinguish groups (female impersonators vs. drag queens, drag queens vs. trans women)
  • How might Butler respond?

RuPaul vs. Milton Berle
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nYy1h4J0eOY
ARTICLE REPORT: MADELEINE & MEG
NEXT TIME

• Wednesday, 12-2pm office hours
• Readings:
  • Valentine on the line between gender and sexuality
  • One of 3 pieces on identity construction
  • Kulick on language and desire
• Optional readings:
  • Mitchell, “Unintelligible subjects” ← how to reconceptualize identity after Butler
  • Barrett / Levon ← more examples of identity work
• Article report on the tactics of intersubjectivity: Katka & Alex B.