

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

MOYA LLOYD, *Judith Butler: From Norms to Politics*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2007, x + 196 p., index.

Moya Lloyd's text is a compelling journey through some of Judith Butler's most complex cultural analyses including, but not limited to, gender and sexuality performance theory, psychoanalysis, and linguistics. Lloyd explores Butler's expansive theoretical musings in a manner that is extensive and steeped in detail. Furthermore, Lloyd establishes a rich contextual framework within which she extrapolates Butler's work with great profundity. Written poignantly, the substance is complex requiring a detailed reading in order to fully grasp the richness of Lloyd's arguments and themes. Simply skimming this book would not do justice to the obviously laborious research Lloyd has conducted. Lloyd's book is an invaluable asset to anyone interested in developing a more sophisticated understanding of Butler's renowned theories on gender politics and performance, as well as gaining an understanding of her emerging work on radical democracy and the complexity of language in a context of social justice.

Lloyd's contribution to the Key Contemporary Thinkers series clearly establishes the significance of Butler's cultural critiques and theoretical analyses to sociological discourse. Structured in six thematic sections, Lloyd examines twenty-six of Butler's popular and less renowned works. The chapter content is supplemented by thirty-four pages of extensive notes to stimulate the reader further with suggested readings and detailed explanations.

The introductory chapter provides an invaluable framework for examining Butler's theories. Tracing the historical evolution of identity politics and movements, as well as the newer developments of postmodern and poststructuralist insights, Lloyd draws on various influences including the work of Jacques Derrida and Michele Foucault. Moreover, a great deal of G.W.F. Hegel's philosophical influence is explored to help the reader obtain a more substantive understanding of Butler's paradigmatic influences. Significance is paid to linking Hegel's work on desire and the dialectic to Butler's contemporary theories.

Lloyd's thesis is well articulated. She first seeks to elucidate and evaluate Butler's key arguments; secondly, to situate these arguments in the critical responses of feminist thinkers; and lastly, to establish the importance of Butler's political theory of activity and transformation (3-4). Lloyd accomplishes her goals and ultimately surpasses these aspirations by pushing the reader to engage not only with Butler's work, but also with the insightful and critical analysis Lloyd herself provides. Lloyd's work ultimately transforms this text from a descriptive analysis of a complex body of work, to a genuinely beguiling read.

While the writing is precise, perhaps the most prominent critique of Lloyd's text is the potential for inaccessibility. The sophistication of the writing limits the potential audience of the book to at least a graduate level. Another potential limitation of the text is the way in which Lloyd undertakes Butler's theories. Lloyd succinctly weaves an expansive yet not exhaustive theoretical framework of Butler's theories which proves to be extremely insightful. However, in order to become submersed in all of the references, a familiarity with Butler's original writing is obligatory.

The text is organised in a manner that dedicates a large portion to engaging with the various critiques of Butler's theories. The first critique Lloyd explores is the overwhelming consensus that Butler's work is difficult to read (21). While many sociologists, myself included, have attributed this simply to "bad writing," Lloyd suggests instead that for Butler, language is a much more complex issue. Lloyd cites *Gender Trouble* to reiterate the notion that language is not politically neutral. Instead, Lloyd states that failure to conform to linguistic norms "...means that one's speech risks being unintelligible to others" (21). The way in which Lloyd engages with this popular critique, by revisiting Butler's original theories, exemplifies how Lloyd assesses many of the prominent critiques of Butler's work.

Lloyd also confronts what she perceives to be "misreads" of Butler. To illustrate this, Lloyd discusses Butler's use of drag. In the popular book *Gender Trouble*, Butler discusses the idea of gender and sexuality as performance. Since the release of *Gender Trouble*, the example of drag as evidence of fluidity has been discussed, debated, evoked, and disputed widely in contemporary drag discourse. Perhaps one of the most prominent critiques of Butler's writing on drag is that it is simplistic. Lloyd challenges this contention alluding to a misreading of Butler's work. Lloyd defends the use of the drag example by citing theoretical writing in *Bodies That Matter* which states that "...drag as a practice divulges a series of discordant elements that ultimately undermine both the assumption of heterosexual coherence and the idea that heterosexuality is original" (43). Thus, the importance lies in the juxtaposition of drag with heterosexual identities as a way in which to illuminate the notion that both are performances.

The example of drag highlights one of the strengths of the book insofar as Lloyd traverses a vast range of Butler's work. Lloyd connects concepts and theories throughout the book, ultimately producing a more holistic and organised account of Butler's theories. These connections not only establish the relevance of her work within feminist discourse, but also within broader human rights frameworks such as critical race theory and the notion of personhood.

Judith Butler: From Norms to Politics is an essential book for anyone who is interested in developing a more comprehensive interpretation of Butler's postmodern insights. By revisiting Butler's more prominent theories as well as exploring her more contemporary postulations, Lloyd presents Butler's work in a way that appeals to cultural critics and sociologists alike. Overall, Lloyd's book is lucidly written, leaving this reader not only with a renewed interest in Butler's work, but also a longing for more of the critical analyses and captivating writings of Lloyd herself.

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